

Critical Skills and How to Improve Them

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Critical Skills

- ◆ What are they?
- ◆ Why are professional faculties interested?

Critical Skills – What are they?

- ◆ Reading comprehension – being able to read critically - to gather information from written material, and select relevant info from the gathered information,
- ◆ Thinking – being able to think about, or process, the information that has been gathered, including any proposition or question that you are trying to answer,
- ◆ Writing – being able to manage the information and formulate a response in writing regarding the proposition/question, supporting your response with information gathered from the reading

Critical Skills – Why do we emphasize them?

- ◆ We need to educate practitioners who will be able to care for the public and this includes the need to be part of a health care team and to communicate with members of that team, including a patient
- ◆ Practitioners are also expected to be able to access, retrieve, evaluate and disseminate information – for use by health professionals, patients and the public

Communication Skills

- ◆ Communication skills are important in the process of 'caring' for others.
- ◆ They can be defined and measured.
- ◆ So what do we do when we engage in any communication task?
 - Gather information
 - Select from the information gathered
 - Process (think about) the information selected
 - Manage (organize) the information processed
 - Present (communicate) the results of the above steps

Where do problems occur?

- ◆ We find that many problems occur around the "gathering and selecting" of information.
- ◆ This impacts the results in any measure of critical skills.
- ◆ The biggest problem is that individuals get only an "impression" of the tasks they are asked to perform.

Tasks in the Test of Critical Skills

- ◆ Reading Task: Read the passage and then read the proposition drawn from the passage. Do this CRITICALLY, not superficially.
- ◆ Writing Task: Respond to the proposition by writing a formal, persuasive academic essay of 300-500 words arguing for or against it.
- ◆ What do most people have trouble with?

Criteria for Assessment

- ◆ Precision of the response to the task
- ◆ Focus, organization and development of the argument
- ◆ Technical proficiency with language

Criteria for Assessment

- ◆ Precision of the response (did you do the task as outlined?)
 - We are testing critical skills – not an “information-dump”.
 - We are not measuring your knowledge of a topic – we are measuring what you can do with the information you have read.
 - Everything you need is in the materials you are given – but you have to find it.

Criteria for Assessment

- ◆ Focus, organization and development of the argument
 - To do well here, you need to gather and select all the information you can.
 - Therefore, you should spend a significant amount of your time on reading and understanding the passage and proposition BEFORE writing your essay.

Criteria for Assessment

- Focus, organization and development of the argument (cont'd)
 - Think about the difference between an argument and an opinion.
 - Your argument should be supported with good reasons and should have a beginning, a middle and an end. These should have clear and coherent relationships to each other, and should be based on the reading and proposition.

Criteria for Assessment

- ◆ Technical proficiency with language
 - This includes command of expression, grammar, punctuation and mechanics demonstrated in the response
 - We are looking for the ability to use language well enough to create a coherent well-developed argument – it need not be “perfect” or “fancy”, but it must be understandable.

Questions on these criteria?

- ◆ What is meant by “coherent”?
 - This means it “hangs together” or that the pieces fit.
- ◆ Is there a rating within each criterion?
 - Yes – there are five levels within each one (for precision of the response these range from precise, to comprehensive, to general, to incomplete to inappropriate or tangential)

Questions on these criteria?

- ◆ What exactly is being measured on each criterion?
 - Gathering and selecting of information
 - Processing of information
 - Organization of the information
 - Command of the language you use to communicate all of that

Details about the writing task

- ◆ Formal, persuasive academic argument
 - Formal – has a distinct beginning, middle, end (introduction, body, conclusion)
 - Persuasive – you have taken a side and must convince the reader you are right
 - Academic – it should have a “tone” appropriate for a piece of academic writing (not “chatty” or casual)

Details about the writing task

- ◆ 300-500 words (do the sample to see how long 300-500 words is in your handwriting)
- ◆ Can be in “first person”
- ◆ Can (Should) refer to the reading

Details about the writing task

- ◆ What about bad hand-writing?
 - If it's illegible we cannot read it, but otherwise it doesn't have any impact on the assessment.
- ◆ Can I add info that I know but that is not in the reading passage?
 - Certainly, if it's relevant, but you don't have to – everything you need is there. All topics are about things you would talk about or read in a newspaper.

Details about the writing task

- ◆ Often we could argue for or against – should we do both?
 - No, you won't have enough time. Just pick a position and develop an effective argument, based on what you have read.
- ◆ What if the passage is short – will there be enough information?
 - Yes, if you read critically and understand what you have read.

Sample Test(s) of Critical Skills

- ◆ Several 'samples' are provided. You should (give yourself one hour):
 - read the "task" and proposition
 - outline your response – what position would you take? Using what evidence?
 - Write a practice essay
 - Use the evaluation form to assess it or ask a colleague etc to do so

Sample 1

- ◆ The next few slides indicate how you might go about extracting information from your reading of the Sample Test #1

SAMPLE

- ◆ **STOP HERE and READ the SAMPLE (#1)**

Sample – STEP 1 (A)

- ◆ What does the PROPOSITION say?
- ◆ If you had ONLY the proposition, what "evidence" would support it – i.e. what would you need to find (if you researched it) to SUPPORT it
- ◆ What evidence would mean you could NOT SUPPORT it?
- ◆ Now move back to the reading and see what evidence is there....

Sample – step 1 (A)

- ◆ Gather info from the proposition:
 - It's talking about individual rights
 - Right to choose treatment(s)
 - Right to have public health insurance pay for whatever is chosen by the individual

Sample – STEP 1 (B)

- ◆ Gather info from the reading
 - About "alternative medical practices"
 - Pressure to have public health insurance pay for them
 - Why? - proponents say "more natural" and "holistic" than drugs
 - Why not? – physicians say they are "scams" – poisons or placebos

Sample – step 1 (B)

- ◆ Gather info from reading (cont'd)
 - Each side claims the other side is not living up to Hippocratic Oath: “Do no harm”
 - 20% of Canadians ‘currently’ (2008) use some form of alternative medicine

Sample – step 2

- ◆ Process info from reading
 - What type of info is present?
 - What does it mean? (e.g. Hippocratic imperative “Do no harm” means what?)
 - When did it occur?
 - Where?
 - Says who?

Sample - step 2

- ◆ Process (think about) info gathered
 - What does the reading say?
 - What does the proposition say?
 - Does the reading support the proposition?
Part of the proposition?
 - Do the parts of the proposition explain each other or “hang together”?

Sample - step 3

- ◆ Communicate your response to the PROPOSITION
 - TAKE A POSITION FOR or AGAINST the proposition (based on your reading and thinking)
 - SELECT from the info gathered, ORGANIZE it (PLAN what you will write about)
 - WRITE your 300-500 word essay using appropriate language, format and grammar

Evaluating your essay...

- ◆ Is your support or nonsupport for the proposition clearly stated? (NOTE: it should not be your ‘opinion’ about the topic)
- ◆ Are good reasons for the stated position made and clearly outlined?
- ◆ Do the reasons make sense?
- ◆ Is there a sound thesis to guide the discussion in the body of the essay?
- ◆ Is the essay written in clear standard English?

Summary

- ◆ This is a critical skills test – you are expected to read critically, think effectively and then respond appropriately (in writing) to show that you have done the reading and thinking.
- ◆ More information is on our website at www.usask.ca/pharmacy-nutrition

What about the Personal Profile?

- ◆ Think of it as a written "interview"
- ◆ Approach the questions in the same manner as the TCS – THINK about what is being asked and PLAN your answers (i.e., gather and select information, process the information and organize your responses)
- ◆ Bring something of "yourself" to the responses! Give the best "I" message you can – describe 'transferable skills'

Personal Profile

- ◆ You should prepare for the PP just as much as the TCS – it's important!
- ◆ How can you show your commitment and interest in Pharmacy or Nutrition?
- ◆ How can you position yourself – your skills, attributes and experiences – so that your PP "shines" out from the rest?

Personal Profile

- ◆ What skills and attributes are expected of health professionals?
- ◆ Do you have them?
- ◆ How can you illustrate them to us?
- ◆ Example: "Camp Counselor" experience....

Additional Information & Advice

- ◆ Our admission decisions will be communicated to you, June 15-30, 2011.
- ◆ Develop a personal plan that includes alternatives for your future (competition for admission is high, and space is limited – we will take the best-qualified)
- ◆ Seek advice from appropriate knowledgeable sources (academic advisors in Pharmacy & Nutrition or other Colleges)