

# Faculty Manual

FOR THE TELECOURSE

## *Mastering the College Experience*

Second Edition

Produced by

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For assistance or additional information, you are invited to contact

**Coast Learning Systems**  
Coastline Community College  
11460 Warner Avenue  
Fountain Valley, California 92708-2597  
800-547-4748                      fax: 714-241-6286  
e-mail: [CoastLearning@ccd.edu](mailto:CoastLearning@ccd.edu)  
web site: [www.CoastLearning.org](http://www.CoastLearning.org)

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# Contents

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<b>How to Use This Manual</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>To My Fellow Educators</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>The Telecourse Story</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>About the Course</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction	<b>1</b>
A Brief Description of <i>Mastering the College Experience</i>	<b>1</b>
Assessing Your Institution's Needs	<b>2</b>
Course Goals	<b>3</b>
Design and Production of the Telecourse	<b>3</b>
Components of the Telecourse	<b>6</b>
<b>The Lessons</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Teaching the Course</b>	<b>42</b>
Introduction	<b>42</b>
The Faculty Role	<b>42</b>
Basic Guidelines for Shaping Your Course	<b>44</b>
Sample Introductory Letter	<b>48</b>
Sample Syllabus	<b>49</b>
Sample Lesson/Assignment Schedule	<b>51</b>
Suggested Checklist for Instructors	<b>53</b>
Student Support Services	<b>54</b>
Assessing Performance at a Distance	<b>56</b>
Suggestions for Enriching the Course	<b>60</b>
<b>Error Correction for Updates</b>	<b>63</b>
<i>Telecourse Student Guide for Mastering the College Experience</i> Errata Sheet	<b>63</b>
<b>Testing</b>	<b>64</b>
Introduction	<b>64</b>
<b>Test Items</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Answer Key</b>	<b>153</b>

# Lesson 15      Thinking Critically

## Video Program Notes

“Thinking Critically” takes the position that critical thinkers are not born, but develop by learning certain skills. Thus, the lesson helps students search for a deeper truth as they develop the ability to distinguish between opinion and fact. The relationship between critical thinking and creative thinking is emphasized with a look back to Lesson Fourteen. The hosts review the four steps of problem solving: define the problem, generate possibilities, create a plan, and perform your plan. The role of critical thinking in narrowing the possibilities is presented, as the docustudents continue to discuss the problem of campus overcrowding.

As the lesson continues, applications of critical thinking to life are examined. The docustudents critique various persuasive materials, including advertising. The hosts offer steps to developing critical thinking skills, including seek the truth, keep an open mind, and analyze. The importance of questioning is also emphasized. Several problems with logic are examined, including attacking the person, appealing to authority, and pointing to a false cause.

## Reading Assignment

Students are encouraged to read pages **202–210, 220, 310, and 345**, and review pages **195–196 and 211** in the *Becoming a Master Student* textbook. Students should also read the Learning Objectives, Overview, and Summary for Lesson 15 in the telecourse student guide. Additionally, you may wish your students to complete any or all of the exercises, activities in the online component, and quiz questions associated with this lesson. *We particularly call your attention to exercises 1, 2, and 5 in the student guide on page 142.*

## Learning Objectives

After successfully completing the reading assignment in the textbook, doing the exercises in the telecourse student guide, and viewing the video for this lesson, students will be able to:

1. List and discuss the strategies they can use to think critically, and how they might use them in the future.
2. Define what “assumptions” are, discuss how they can uncover these assumptions, and describe the role of assumptions in critical thinking.
3. Identify common fallacies in logic, and discuss how they can discover these fallacies in their thinking or in the thoughts of others.
4. Discuss some techniques that will lead them to more effective decision making, and apply these to a current decision in their lives.
5. Summarize the effects of inaccurate and manipulative advertising, describe how they can avoid these effects using critical thinking, and discuss their critique of a current advertisement or commercial.
6. Discuss the role critical thinking plays in problem solving.
7. Discuss some strategies to follow in thinking critically about information on the Internet.
8. Discuss what Isabel Allende’s story taught them about critical thinking and solving life problems.

## Lesson 15      Thinking Critically

### Test Items

1.      When making a tough decision, it's usually helpful to
  - a.      clarify your values.
  - b.      avoid procrastination.
  - c.      put your plan into action.
  - d.      keep idea files.
  
2.      An advertisement that implies parties are a flop without alcohol is using a false assumption.  
True    or    False
  
3.      One way to practice the art of critical thinking is to say "I'm not sure yet" or \_\_\_\_\_.
  
4.      It can avoid a lot of misunderstandings in a discussion when abstract terms are \_\_\_\_\_ up front.
  
5.      Techniques that can help you becoming a better critical thinker include which of the following?
  - a.      Practice tolerance.
  - b.      Ask questions.
  - c.      Consider the source.
  - d.      All of the above.
  
6.      The first part of three-step method for testing the validity of any viewpoint includes looking for assumptions.  
True    or    False
  
7.      When a person assumes a product is good because a celebrity endorses it, the mistake in logic being made is best known as
  - a.      jumping to a conclusion.
  - b.      faulty cause and effect.
  - c.      attacking the person.
  - d.      appeal to authority.
  
8.      Just because one event follows another does not mean there is a \_\_\_\_\_ relationship between the two events.

9. You can trust in the accuracy of any information that has been obtained over the Internet.  
True or False

### Exercises

1. Have students find letters to the editor or articles from the “Opinion” section of their local newspapers. Have them comb these articles for assumptions or hidden assertions and share their findings with the class. This makes a good group exercise. In a variation, students could monitor an online chat room and make note of the assumptions that can be found in some of the conversations there. (Objective 2)
2. Choose a topic for your students to research via the Internet, such as censorship versus free speech or another topic that would yield a large variety of sites. Have your students evaluate between three and five sites, using the criteria on page 310 of the Ellis textbook to help them, which include the following (Objective 7):
  - How often is the site updated?
  - What are the links like? Are they to reliable sources?
  - Who is the host or author?
  - Does the hosting organization or author have a discernable bias?
  - How would you describe the fact-to-opinion ratio of the material? Are there more factual sentences (ones with verifiable data) than statements of opinion?
  - Is there a bibliography or a list of sources cited?
3. Have students recall some decisions that they have made that either turned out well and about which they felt “right” or that turned out uncomfortably or poorly in some way. Have them compare their choices with two things the author stresses about decision making: that decisions be made within the clarity of one’s values and based on one’s life plan (page 210 of the Ellis textbook). Does looking at their decisions with these ideas in mind provide any new understanding for the students? Would they make their decisions differently as a result of thinking about their values and life plans? (Objective 4)
4. Have students each find at least two advertisements. Either individually or in groups have them share their findings as to how the advertisements have been designed to manipulate consumers. (Objective 5)

## Essay Questions

1. Describe a situation in the past in which you have used critical thinking and indicate which strategies you have used. As an alternative, indicate a current situation you are facing and indicate which strategies might apply. (Objective 1)
2. Students have found multiple instances of problems in logic in the excerpt below from Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). You might have the students write about which errors in logic they find in the passage (Objective 3).

[Gulliver has arrived in the land of the Lilliput, where the inhabitants, the Lilliputians, are only six inches tall. The land is suffering from a long-running war or feud as is described here by one of its inhabitants.]

The animosities between these two parties run so high, that they will neither eat or drink, nor talk with each other. . . . [this disagreement] began upon the following occasion. It is allowed on all hands, that the primitive way of breaking eggs, before we eat them, was upon the larger end: but his present Majesty's grandfather, while he was a boy, going to eat an egg, and breaking it according to the ancient practice, happened to cut one of his fingers. Whereupon the Emperor his father published an edict [a law], commanding all his subjects, upon great penalties, to break the smaller end of their eggs. The people so highly resented this law, that our histories tell us there have been six rebellions raised on that account. . . .

3. Explain how problem solving involves critical thinking. (Objective 6)
4. Discuss what Isabel Allende's story taught you about critical thinking and solving problems.

## **Answer Key**

### **Lesson 15    Thinking Critically**

1. a (Objective 4; page 210)
2. True (Objectives 2 and 5; pages 207 and 345; video)
3. I don't know (Objective 1; page 202; telecourse student guide, page 138)
4. defined (Objective 1; page 202)
5. d (Objective 1; pages 202–204; video; telecourse student guide, page 138)
6. True (Objective 2; page 207; telecourse student guide, page 138)
7. d (Objective 3; page 209; video)
8. cause and effect (Objective 3; page 209; video)
9. False (Objective 7; page 310; telecourse student guide, page 138)