

with no assumptions. On the other hand, there is a wide variety of intellectual standards from which to choose—such as credibility, predictability, feasibility, and completeness—that we don't use routinely in assessing reasoning.

As critical thinkers, then, we think about our thinking with these kinds of questions in mind: *Am I being clear? Accurate? Precise? Relevant? Am I thinking logically? Am I dealing with a matter of significance? Is my thinking justifiable in context?* Typically, we apply these standards to one or more elements.

5.1 Think for Yourself

IDENTIFYING INAPPROPRIATE STANDARDS

Can you identify a class you took in the past, either in high school or in college, in which you think your work was graded, at least in part, by one or more inappropriate standards? If so, what was the class? What was the standard? What was the result? Can you see the importance in education of basing all grades on appropriate intellectual standards? Write out or orally explain your answer.

TAKE A DEEPER LOOK AT UNIVERSAL INTELLECTUAL STANDARDS

Thinking critically requires command of fundamental intellectual standards. Critical thinkers routinely ask questions that apply intellectual standards to thinking. The ultimate goal is for these questions to become so spontaneous in thinking that they form a natural part of our inner voice, guiding us to better and better reasoning. In this section, we focus on the standards and questions that apply across the various facets of your life.

Clarity

Questions that focus on clarity include:

- Could you elaborate on that point?
- Could you express that point in another way?
- Could you give me an illustration?
- Could you give me an example?
- Let me state in my own words what I think you just said. Tell me if I am clear about your meaning.

Clarity is a gateway standard. If a statement is unclear, we cannot determine whether it is accurate or relevant. In fact, we cannot tell anything about it because

we do not yet know what it is saying. For example, the question, "What can be done about the education system in America?" is unclear. To address the question adequately, we need a clearer understanding of what the person asking the question is considering the "problem" to be. A clearer question might be, "What can educators do to ensure that students learn the skills and abilities that help them function successfully on the job and in their daily decision making?" This question, because of its increased clarity, provides a better guide to thinking. It lays out the intellectual task in a more definitive way.

5.2 Think for Yourself

CONVERTING UNCLEAR THOUGHTS TO CLEAR THOUGHTS

Can you convert an unclear thought to a thought that is clear? Suppose you are engaged in a discussion about welfare, and one person says, "Let's face it—welfare is corrupt!" What does this mean? What could it mean?

It could mean some very different things. It could mean, "The very idea of giving people goods and services they have not personally earned is equivalent to stealing money from those who have earned it" (an ethical claim). It could mean, "The welfare laws have so many loopholes that people are receiving money and services that were not envisioned when the laws were initially formulated" (a legal claim). It could mean, "The people who receive welfare so often lie and cheat to falsify the documents they submit that they should be thrown in jail" (a claim about the ethical character of the recipients).

Now, for practice in making thoughts clear, consider this statement: "She is a good person." This statement is unclear. Because we don't know the context within which this statement is being made, we aren't sure in what way she is "good." Formulate three possible meanings of this statement.

Now consider the statement: "He is a jerk." Again, formulate three possible meanings of this statement.

When you become skilled in differentiating what is clear and what is unclear, you will find that much of the time we are unclear both about what we are thinking and about what we are saying.

Accuracy

Questions focusing on making thinking more accurate include:

- Is that really true?
- How could we check to see whether that is accurate?
- How could we find out whether that is true?

A statement may be clear but not accurate, as in, "Most dogs weigh more than 200 pounds." To be accurate is to represent something in accordance with the way

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