

## 5.5 *Think for Yourself*

### RECOGNIZING IMPRECISE STATEMENTS

**C**an you think of a recent situation in which you needed more details to figure out something and, because you didn't have the details, you experienced some negative consequences? For example, have you ever been given directions to someone's house, directions that seemed precise enough at the time, but when you tried to find the person's house, you got lost because of lack of details in the directions?

First, identify a situation in which the details and specifics were important (for example, in buying a computer, a car, or a stereo system). Then identify the negative consequences that resulted because you didn't get the details you needed to think well in the situation. Write out or orally explain your answer.

## Relevance

Questions focusing on relevance include:

- How is this idea connected to the question?
- How does that bear on the issue?
- How does this idea relate to this other idea?
- How does your question relate to the issue we are dealing with?

A statement can be clear, accurate, and precise but not relevant to the question at issue. For example, students often think the amount of effort they put into a course should contribute to raising their grade in the course. Often, however, effort does not measure the quality of student learning and, therefore, is irrelevant to the grade. Something is relevant when it is directly connected with and bears upon the issue at hand. Something is relevant when it is pertinent or applicable to a problem we are trying to solve. Irrelevant thinking encourages us to consider what we should set aside. Relevant thinking stays on track. Thinking often is irrelevant because people lack discipline in thinking; they don't know how to analyze an issue for what truly bears on it. Therefore, they aren't able to think their way effectively through the problems and issues they face.

## 5.6 *Think for Yourself*

### RECOGNIZING IRRELEVANT STATEMENTS

**C**an you identify a statement you heard recently that was clear, accurate, and sufficiently precise but irrelevant to the circumstance, problem, or issue? Although we all sometimes stray from a question or task, we need to be sensitive to when failure to stay on task may have a significant negative implication.

Identify, first, circumstances in which people tend to introduce irrelevant considerations into a discussion (for example, in meetings, in response to questions in class, in everyday dialogue when they have a hidden agenda or simply want to take control of the conversation for some reason). Write out or orally explain your answer.

## Depth

Questions focusing on depth of thought include:

- How does your answer address the complexities in the question?
- How are you taking into account the problems in the question?
- How are you dealing with the most significant factors in the problem?

We think deeply when we get beneath the surface of an issue or problem, identify the complexities inherent in it, and then deal with those complexities in an intellectually responsible way. Even when we think deeply, even when we deal well with the complexities in a question, we might find the question difficult to address. Still, our thinking will work better for us when we can recognize complicated questions and address each area of complexity in the question.

A statement can be clear, accurate, precise, and relevant, but superficial—lacking in depth. Let's say you are asked what should be done about the problem of drug use in America, and you answer by saying, "Just say no." This slogan, which for several years was supposed to discourage children and teens from using drugs, is clear, accurate, precise, and relevant. Nevertheless, it lacks depth because it treats an extremely complex issue—the pervasive problem of drug use among people in our culture—superficially. It does not address the history, politics, economics, psychology, or other important aspects of addiction.

## 5.7 Think for Yourself

### RECOGNIZING SUPERFICIAL APPROACHES

Identify a newspaper article containing a statement that is clear, accurate, precise, and relevant but superficial with respect to a complex issue. For example, a number of laws take a Band-Aid® approach to systemic problems such as drugs and crime.

1. State the problem.
2. State how the article deals with the problem and why the approach taken is superficial.
3. Focus on the complexity of the issue and state how the problem might be dealt with

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