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OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY  
CRITICAL THINKING COMPETENCY

**Definition of Competency:**

The [mission](#) of Old Dominion University states that “Every Old Dominion undergraduate student follows a general education program that is designed to develop the intellectual skills of critical thinking and problem solving and to encompass the breadth of understanding needed for personal growth and achievement and for responsible citizenship.”

All undergraduate students, who are completing baccalaureate degree programs at Old Dominion University, are required to demonstrate that they can write competently in an academic/professional setting prior to the conferral of the degrees. Passing the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency (EERP) is a University graduation requirement that has been in place since 1980. To complete the requirement, students write an essay that reflects critical thinking on a complex topic and a maturity of expression, including a varied syntax and vocabulary appropriate to the task. The essay will be reasonably free from mechanical errors.

“Critical thinking is defined herein as all forms of thinking that are more *complex, deeper, and require a greater degree of reflection* than that associated with mere acquisition of knowledge via *memorization* and *rote* recall of *factual* information. This broad definition subsumes a wide variety of specific cognitive processes or mental activities that have often been loosely referred to as ‘critical thinking’” (Cuseo, 2004)<sup>1</sup>. Old Dominion University designed a rubric which evaluates students writing based on three measurable areas, 1. ability to clearly state an objective, 2. ability to present supporting evidence, and 3. logical consistency. The rubric (attached) outlines the level of performance in each of the three areas which requires minimum performance beyond basic knowledge and comprehension of material to analysis and synthesis of the topic.

**Standards for Competency:**

Among the specific competencies that define good writing, three also can be used to measure critical thinking using a different rubric to measure competence:

1. **A clearly stated objective.** The writer’s purpose or position (thesis statement) is clear and is the primary controlling force throughout the paper. The essay addresses the question directly.

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<sup>1</sup> Cuseo, J. (2004). *Critical Thinking: Definition, Justification, Classification, & Facilitation*, Retrieved October 2004, from FYE-LISTSERV (<http://www.sc.edu/fye>).

2. **Ability to present supporting evidence.** The writer satisfactorily develops the ideas presented in support of the purpose of the essay. Generalizations are supported by details or specific explanation.
3. **Logical consistency.** The ability to develop an argument that is internally consistent and logically arranged. The writer avoids sweeping or hasty generalizations, false dichotomies (either/or fallacies), personal attack, and appeals to fear or ignorance.

Overall competency in critical thinking is based on a holistic scoring approach and is demonstrated by an overall score for the three areas of at least two (2) – Meets the standard. The scoring values used for these criteria are 3 = Exceeds the standard for critical thinking; 2 = Meets the standard for critical thinking; and 1 = Fails to meet the standard for critical thinking.

#### **Description of Methodology Used to Gather Evidence of Competency:**

The EEWP is a three-hour proctored essay examination. When students register for the EEWP, they are provided with a list of topics for the examination. They choose two topics from this list. Different sets of topics are used for different examination dates. There are three general topics and two topics from a list for the colleges. Students choose their two broad topics two to four weeks in advance of their scheduled test date. Students are encouraged to read and research these two topics. The day of the exam the student receives two questions based upon the broad topics and chooses which question to address in the essay. Topics will be reviewed to insure that the prompts will stimulate critical thinking. After the EEWP are scored for writing competence and students are either cleared for graduation or required to seek remediation and retake the exam, a random sample of 300 essays will be drawn from among those that passed the EEWP to be assessed for critical thinking using a rubric.

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
N, % high	28	9%
N, % satisfactory	228	76%
N, % unacceptable	44	15%

#### **Summary:** *(75 words) (Provide brief analysis of results)*

Competence in critical thinking is reflected in the passing scores on the EEWP by undergraduate students, who are completing their baccalaureate degrees at Old Dominion University. Overall, 85% of the students in the sample were graded as at least satisfactory. In addition, 9% of the students exceeded the standard and qualified as “high” scores. These results suggest that our graduates are equipped to be critical thinkers. The results of this assessment will be used in Old Dominion University’s upcoming review of the general education curriculum.

CRITICAL THINKING COMPETENCY RUBRIC

	<i>Fails to Achieve the Standard (1)</i>	<i>Meets the Standard (2)</i>	<i>Exceeds the Standard (3)</i>
<b>Clearly stated objective</b>	<p>The writer's <b>purpose or position</b> is not clear, and there is little to indicate the writer's comprehension of the issue(s) to be addressed.</p> <p>The text fails to address the <b>question/problem</b>.</p> <p>A <b>plan of development</b> is not present.</p>	<p>The writer's <b>purpose or position</b> is clear and is the primary controlling force throughout the paper.</p> <p>The <b>question/problem</b> is addressed.</p> <p>A clear <b>plan of development</b> is implied or stated.</p>	<p>The writer's <b>purpose or position</b> is clear and is the primary controlling force throughout the paper.</p> <p>The <b>question/problem</b> is addressed creatively.</p> <p>A creative <b>plan of development</b> is implied or stated.</p>
<b>Ability to present supporting evidence</b>	<p>The writer fails to <b>develop ideas</b> in support of the essay's purpose and presents little <b>applicable evidence</b>.</p> <p>The writer shows a poor <b>sense of context</b> and fails to distinguish between <b>fact, opinion and value judgment</b>.</p>	<p>The writer <b>develops ideas</b> in support of the essay's purpose, providing <b>applicable evidence</b> from sources, including personal knowledge and experience.</p> <p>The writer demonstrates a <b>sense of context</b> and recognizes the difference between <b>fact, opinion, and value judgment</b>.</p>	<p>The writer fully <b>develops clear ideas</b> presented in support of the essay's purpose, presents <b>applicable evidence</b>, and recognizes the nuances in that evidence.</p> <p>The writer shows a clear <b>sense of context</b> and consistently distinguishes between <b>fact, opinion, and value judgment</b>.</p>
<b>Logical consistency</b>	<p>The writer fails to use an <b>order of development</b> appropriate for the topic and purpose of the essay.</p> <p>The writer fails to come to <b>reasoned conclusions</b> or reaches conclusions that may not be relevant to the major claim and may rest on unfounded, unstated assumptions.</p>	<p>The writer uses an <b>order of development</b> appropriate for the topic and purpose of the essay and does not contradict her/his major claim or use mutually exclusive statements.</p> <p>The writer comes to <b>reasoned conclusions</b> that are relevant to the writer's major claim.</p>	<p>Using an <b>order of development</b> appropriate for the topic and purpose of the essay, the writer considers different perspectives on the issue and/or identifies strong points and gaps in those perspectives.</p> <p>The writer comes to <b>well-reasoned conclusions</b>. The writer may identify and discuss the implications and consequences of her/his position but does so without contradicting the thesis.</p>