

Sample Assignments

Directions

This assignment is designed to assess your critical thinking problem solving, and communication skills. Your answer will be judged for its clarity, relevance, coherence, logic, depth, consistency, and fairness. More specifically, the reader will be asking the following questions:

1. Is the question at issue well stated? Is it clear and unbiased? Does the expression of the question do justice to the complexity of the matter at issue?
2. Does the writer cite relevant evidence, experiences, and/or information essential to the issue?
3. Does the writer clarify key concepts when necessary?
4. Does the writer show a sensitivity to what he or she is assuming or taking for granted? (Insofar as those assumptions might reasonably be questioned)?
5. Does the writer develop a definite line of reasoning, explaining well how he or she is arriving at his or her conclusions?
6. Is the writer's reasoning well-supported?
7. Does the writer show a sensitivity to alternative points of view or lines of reasoning? Does he or she consider and respond to objections framed from other points of view?
8. Does the writer show a sensitivity to the implications and consequences of the position he or she has taken?

Issue #1: Ecology

The nation is facing a variety of ecological problems that have the following general form: an established practice, whether on the part of business and industry or on the part of the public, is contributing to serious health problems for a large number of people. At the same time it would be costly to modify the practice so as to reduce the health problem.

People often say that the answer is one of achieving a "balance" between the amount of money we spend to correct the problem and the number of lives we would save by that expenditure.

Develop a point of view and some plausible criteria for telling how one would determine this "balance." Make sure you address any dilemmas inherent in your strategy for solving such problems.

Issue #2: Political Science

There is a growing number of Americans who do not vote in national and local elections. Many of them explain their non-participation by saying that their vote would not make a difference.

Some go on to argue that this is true because ³money plays such a large role in elections that the candidate with the highest paid, and the highest quality, media campaign wins.² Most people agree that money sometimes plays an inappropriate role in determining the outcome of elections.

Develop a proposed solution to this problem that takes into account the view that people and organizations with money have a right to use that money to advance political causes they believe in. If you like, you may decide to develop a position to the effect that there is no solution to the problem and that we have no choice but to accept the status quo.

Issue #3: Morality

Sociologist Erving Goffman has pointed out that all social groups, including professions, develop a protective attitude toward members of their group, even when what some of the members do is seen as morally wrong. A sense of loyalty to the group often overrides what they would otherwise deem immoral. Consider the arguments for and against exposing people with whom you are personally close or with whom you have close professional ties. Develop a position on this issue that could serve as a guide for anyone in such a position.

Source: Foundation for Critical Thinking, available at www.criticalthinking.org