'Teach them to think': critical reading skills for international students through the use of evaluation checklists

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Internationalisation

- A mutually beneficial meeting of cultures?
- A business opportunity?
- Cultural and economic imperialism?

Different views held, often in same institution
Internationalisation at the University of Nottingham
Should an internationalised curriculum have criticality at its core?
Quotes (1)

Since Western Anglo-Saxon countries ... are instrumental in the internationalisation of education, there is a trend towards the universalisation of the education practices of Western Anglo-Saxon countries (Vandermensbrugghe, 2004).
Quotes (2)

Critical thinking can take different forms in different cultures. Critical and creative thinking have long been characteristics of education and intellectual traditions in China, for example, but may manifest in different ways (Higher Education Academy TIS Project, 2011).
Quotes (3)

They (international students) showed how they recolonize the West ... by using English language to empower themselves so that they can question and negotiate the Western practices critically and reflexively (Welikala, 2010).
Quotes (4)

We started with a bald dichotomy between: asking non-UK students to accommodate whatever they find in British education; and UK education shifting to become an international environment. [However] By placing teaching and learning ... at the centre of definition of internationalisation, it is possible to see ways in which distinctive UK education characteristics could be sustained within an international education environment (Luxon and Peelo, 2011).
When it comes out, and of insuring reactors against possible accidents and terrorist attacks - building nuclear plants in a competitive electricity market is simply not economical.’ (Brown, 2009).

Criticality has an important place in the foundation curriculum
Our students:

International
IELTS 5.5 and above
Mixed nationalities
Arts & Social Sciences
Our Brief

• No specific content required

• Analytical thinking skills to prepare students for UG study - 'Teach them to think'
Task based

Centre for English Language Education (CELE)

Foundation Certificate: WCS Coursework Writing semester 1

Course Assessment (25% of the total mark for the module)

Answer one of the following questions:

1. What are the main causes and effects of air pollution in developing countries?

2. Explain three ways in which changing our habits and lifestyles could help to reduce pollution.

3. What is the connection between urbanisation and pollution?

Essay length: 1000 words

Deadline for submission: Monday 10/1/11, 2 p.m.

See course handbook about where and how to submit your essay.

You are expected to use a minimum of 5 sources, 1 only of which may be a website. More websites may be used if the list is longer than 5 items but the tutor will be mainly interested in how you deal with academic sources. NB books or academic articles from online collections do not count as websites.

Tasks graded in difficulty through the year
Content based

GLOBAL ISSUES
AN INTRODUCTION
THIRD EDITION

A core academic text
Text based

A reading list to process
Rationales
• Direct and explicit teaching of thinking skills (Granville & Dison, 2005; Fisher, 2001)
• Encourage students to use more top-down reading skills: utilising their own cultural and educational background knowledge (Unrau, 1997) and practising reading that is ‘resisting’ (Spolsky, 1989) or ‘active’ (Grabe, 2009)
• Providing authentic academic reading purposes: reading for assignments and to integrate and evaluate information from different sources (Unrau, 1997; Grabe, 2009; Green et al, 2008)
Reading using the tutor’s checklist: humanitarian intervention
An evaluation checklist

Evaluation Checklist:

Purpose:
- Identify why you want to read the text
- Identify the type of information you want to find
- My questions or comments:

Organisation of Text:
- How is the text organised?
- Is the organisation easy to follow?
- Why or why not?
- Is there a logical progression or central theme?
- Is the information presented in paragraphs?
- Are there enough details and examples?
- My questions or comments:

Questions:
- Comprehension Questions:

Unknowns Questions:

Fact & Opinion:
- Identify the key ideas presented by the writer
- Identify the evidence for the writer’s claims
- How reliable are the facts presented?
- How does the writer present their opinions?
- My questions or comments:

Discussion:
- Explain to your partner what you think the text is about
- Consider the text’s relevance to your reading purpose
- Are the key ideas clearly stated?
- Are the important details and examples included?
- My questions or comments:

Author & Audience:
- Who is the audience?
- Who is the author?
- Who is the intended audience?
- How are the words used?
- Which words are used?
- My questions or comments:

Conclusion:
- Did you learn what you expected?
- Was the text relevant to your essay?
- Did the author make a point?
- Is the information important to the essay?
- My comments:

Now complete with other books that cover this topic.
A more complex task: reading contrasting sources for a purpose using a self-produced checklist
Sample of a student produced checklist

What part is nuclear energy likely to play in the move to a non-fossil fuel economy?

1. How convincing is each writer in answering this? Produce a checklist of key questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>( \text{V}/\text{N} ) and comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the information academically reliable?</td>
<td>( \text{V}/\text{N} ) and comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are statistics, names etc. accurate?</td>
<td>( \text{V}/\text{N} ) and comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is it?</td>
<td>( \text{V}/\text{N} ) and comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are sources authentically supported?</td>
<td>( \text{V}/\text{N} ) and comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are examples and details given?</td>
<td>( \text{V}/\text{N} ) and comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the author cover the topic sufficiently or are there gaps?</td>
<td>( \text{V}/\text{N} ) and comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the view on the author's stance?</td>
<td>( \text{V}/\text{N} ) and comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does this information and views compare with other texts?</td>
<td>( \text{V}/\text{N} ) and comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well is it integrated in my essay?</td>
<td>( \text{V}/\text{N} ) and comment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. In order to answer the questions marked *, what issues will each writer need to address to convince you that the specific question has been adequately covered?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>safety</td>
<td>( \text{V}/\text{N} ) and comment</td>
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<tr>
<td>cost</td>
<td>( \text{V}/\text{N} ) and comment</td>
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<tr>
<td>technology</td>
<td>( \text{V}/\text{N} ) and comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political issues</td>
<td>( \text{V}/\text{N} ) and comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strengths of competing energy sources</td>
<td>( \text{V}/\text{N} ) and comment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
'In the electrification of the economy, we do not count on a buildup in nuclear power...if we use full-cost pricing - requiring utilities to absorb the costs of disposing of nuclear waste, of decommissioning a plant when it wears out, and of insuring reactors against possible accidents and terrorist attacks - building nuclear plants in a competitive electricity market is simply not economical.' (Brown, 2009).
'When all factors are considered, the long-term prognosis for nuclear power is likely to depend most heavily on the cumulative safety record of nuclear power plants, as this will be the key determinant of public confidence in nuclear power. As of present, the record is excellent.' (Hollander, 2003).
Follow up

Students make notes then write a paragraph comparing and evaluating the info from the books.

They also incorporate what they have learnt about paragraph development and referencing via analysis of models.
Did this help?

Tracking the writing development of 2 students

• 1 Chinese
• 1 Turkish
### 5. CONTENT OF THE PROJECT: LITERATURE, KNOWLEDGE AND SOPHISTICATION OF ARGUMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Marks</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
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</table>
| A (7.5+) | 18 - 20 | - Clear, fulfilled purpose and strong awareness of reader; answers question fully  
- Evidence indicates excellent reading skills and topic knowledge  
- Ability to incorporate ideas from relevant reading with a promising level of sophistication:  
  - Converting degree of argumentation, detail, and examples  
  - Developing ability to synthesize, compare, contrast, and evaluate alternative ideas/viewpoints from different sources where required  
  - Ability to carefully illustrate cause and effect relationships  
- Logical and well-argued conclusions are drawn |
| B (6.5-7) | 14 - 17.5 (distinction) | - Fulfill purpose and awareness of reader; answers question  
- Evidence indicates good reading skills and topic knowledge  
- Ability to incorporate ideas from relevant reading with a degree of sophistication (see above)  
- Mostly logical and well-argued conclusions are drawn  
- A purpose is given, but there are occasional weaknesses in its formulation; occasional lack of clarity in answering the question |
| C (6) | 12 - 13.5 (merit) | - Fulfill purpose and awareness of reader; answers question  
- Evidence indicates adequate reading skills and topic knowledge  
- Adequate ability to incorporate ideas from some relevant reading, though there is some dependence on one or two key texts, and the argument is not particularly sophisticated; however:  
  - Cause and effect relationships are made sufficiently clear  
  - Some argumentation, detail, and examples are provided  
  - At the higher end there may be an attempt to compare and evaluate evidence; at the lower end a more superficial approach (e.g. some repetition or disjointed evaluation) is more in evidence  
- Conclusions are drawn but not always logical or well argued |

### Description

- **A (7.5+) Grade:** This grade indicates a clear, fulfilled purpose with strong awareness of the reader. The essay answers the question fully, showing excellent reading skills and topic knowledge. The ability to incorporate ideas from relevant reading with a promising level of sophistication is demonstrated, including converting degree of argumentation, detail, and examples. The essay effectively illustrates cause and effect relationships and draws logical and well-argued conclusions.

- **B (6.5-7) Grade:** This grade highlights fulfillment of purpose and awareness of the reader. The essay shows good reading skills and topic knowledge. The ability to incorporate ideas from relevant reading is adequate with a degree of sophistication. Mostly logical and well-argued conclusions are drawn. A purpose is given, but there are occasional weaknesses in its formulation and occasional lack of clarity in answering the question.

- **C (6) Grade:** This grade indicates fulfillment of purpose and awareness of the reader. The essay shows adequate reading skills and topic knowledge. The ability to incorporate ideas from relevant reading is adequate, though there is some dependence on one or two key texts. The argument is not particularly sophisticated, with cause and effect relationships made sufficiently clear. Some argumentation, detail, and examples are provided. At a higher end, there may be an attempt to compare and evaluate evidence; at a lower end, a more superficial approach (e.g., some repetition or disjointed evaluation) is more in evidence. Conclusions are drawn, but not always logical or well argued.
What do you notice about the writing development of the two students? Better? If so, how?

Do you see any influence from the evaluation checklists coming through?
Improvements:

Evidence of greater writer engagement with the texts/issues to establish own voice/stance ('the results indicate' (student A), 'these findings imply' (student B).

Sources marshalled with a stance in mind. Not quite so linear and mechanical. More sophistication.

Influence of evaluation checklists evident – clearer identification of 1) purpose/message of source authors ('believe', 'assume', 'claim'), and 2) evaluation criteria, e.g. cost to poorer nations (student A), technology costs in long vs short term (student B)
In addition

By showing students how to create their own evaluation criteria, we helped them utilise the 'textual space' (Hyland 2002) between writer and reader where embryonic cross-cultural interaction can take place (re a more inclusive definition of internationalisation):
Student reaction
Mainly positive
Future developments:

- Simplify checklists
- Integrate more comprehensively through the year
- Allow more for students' subject interests and cultural perspectives e.g. humanitarian intervention