

## The Holistic Critical Thinking Scoring Rubric - HCTSR A Tool for Developing and Evaluating Critical Thinking

The **Holistic Critical Thinking Scoring Rubric (HCTSR)** is an internationally known rating tool used to assess the quality of thinking displayed in verbal presentations or written reports. The HCTSR can be used in any training program or assessment process. Its greatest value is obtained when used by trainees to assess the quality of their own or another's reasoning. The exercise of applying this holistic evaluation leads trainees to internalize descriptions of strong (and weak) thinking.

### **Strong 4: Consistently does all or almost all of the following:**

- Accurately interprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.
- Identifies the most important arguments (reasons and claims) pro and con.
- Thoughtfully analyzes and evaluates major alternative points of view.
- Draws warranted, judicious, non-fallacious conclusions.
- Justifies key results and procedures, explains assumptions and reasons.
- Fair-mindedly follows where evidence and reasons lead.

### **Acceptable 3: Does most or many of the following:**

- Accurately interprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.
- Identifies relevant arguments (reasons and claims) pro and con.
- Offers analyses and evaluations of obvious alternative points of view.
- Draws warranted, non-fallacious conclusions.
- Justifies some results or procedures, explains reasons.
- Fair-mindedly follows where evidence and reasons lead.

### **Unacceptable 2: Does most or many of the following:**

- Misinterprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.
- Fails to identify strong, relevant counter-arguments.
- Ignores or superficially evaluates obvious alternative points of view.
- Draws unwarranted or fallacious conclusions.
- Justifies few results or procedures, seldom explains reasons.
- Regardless of the evidence or reasons, maintains or defends views based on self-interest or preconceptions.

### **Significantly Weak 1: Consistently does all or almost all of the following:**

- Offers biased interpretations of evidence, statements, graphics, questions, information, or the points of view of others.
- Fails to identify or hastily dismisses strong, relevant counter-arguments.
- Ignores or superficially evaluates obvious alternative points of view.
- Argues using fallacious or irrelevant reasons, and unwarranted claims.
- Does not justify results or procedures, nor explain reasons.
- Regardless of the evidence or reasons, maintains or defends views based on self-interest or preconceptions.
- Exhibits close-mindedness or hostility to reason.

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If you plan to use this instrument to assess critical thinking for any high stakes purposes, you must remember that your ratings will only be as valid as the strength of your raters. You will need to train the raters well to assure that they are making accurate ratings (judgments) about the evidence of critical thinking that they are observing and evaluating. It would be important to select a task, presentation, or written product where the trainee has been asked to explain their thinking and not just to provide the conclusions they have reached in regard to a particular dilemma. The validity and reliability of all such rubrics (rating forms) is judged by the Kappa Statistic. Rating tools are generally considered weaker measures of critical thinking than the other validated standardized instruments.

## Using the HCTSR

### 1. Understand what this Rubric is Intended to address.

Critical thinking is the process of making purposeful, reflective and fair-minded judgments about what to believe or what to do. Individuals and groups use critical thinking in problem solving and decision making. This four level rubric treats this process as a set of cognitive skills supported by a certain mindset (habits of mind). To reach a judicious, purposeful judgment a good critical thinker engages in analysis, interpretation, evaluation, inference, explanation, and reflection to monitor and, if needed, correct his or her thinking. The disposition to pursue open-mindedly and with intellectual integrity the reasons and evidence wherever they lead is crucial to reaching sound, objective decisions and resolutions to complex, high-stakes, ill-structured problems. So are the other critical thinking habits of mind, such as being inquisitive, systematic, confident in reasoning, anticipatory of possible consequences, prudent in making judgments. [For a deeper understanding of critical thinking, download a free copy of [Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts](#) and a discussion of the research which grounds this concept: [“The Delphi Report” - Critical Thinking: An Expert Consensus](#) from [www.insightassessment.com](http://www.insightassessment.com).

### 2. Differentiate and focus.

Holistic scoring requires focus. Whatever one is evaluating, be it an written report or essay, a presentation, a group decision making process, or the thinking a person displays in a professional practice setting, many elements must come together for overall success: critical thinking, content knowledge, and technical skill (craftsmanship). Deficits or strengths in any of these can draw the attention of the rater. However, in scoring for any one of the three, one must attempt to focus the evaluation on that element to the exclusion of the other two. To use this rubric correctly, one must apply it with focus *only* on the critical thinking – that is, the reasoning process used by the trainee.

### 3. When training raters, practice, coordinate and reconcile.

Ideally, in a training session with other raters, one will examine samples (documents, videotaped examples, etc.) which are paradigmatic representations of each of the four levels. Without being given prior knowledge of the rating assigned to each example, novice raters should be asked to evaluate and assign ratings to these samples. After comparing these preliminary ratings, collaborative analysis with the other raters and the experienced trainer is used to achieve consistency of expectations among those who will be involved in rating the actual cases. Training, practice, and inter-rater reliability are the keys to a high quality assessment. This gives operational agreement, which is very important.

This rubric is a four level scale, forced choice scale. Half point and “middle of the two” scoring is not possible. The only variation which would be consistent with this tool is to combine #1 and #2 so that this became a three level scale: Strong, Acceptable, Weak.

When working alone, or without paradigm samples, one can achieve a greater level of internal consistency by not assigning final ratings until a number of essays, projects, assignments, or presentations have been given preliminary ratings. Frequently natural clusters or groupings of similar quality soon come to be discernible. At that point one can be more confident in assigning a firmer critical thinking score using this four level rubric. After assigning preliminary ratings, a review of the entire set assures greater internal consistency and fairness in the final ratings.

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