

“It is doubtful whether a man [or woman] ever brings his faculties to bear their full force on a subject until he writes upon it.” —Cicero

THE ASSIGNMENT:

Effective critical thinkers and writers work rigorously toward understanding their ideas and assumptions, and “toward the evidence *they themselves* tentatively offer, as well as toward the assumptions and evidence offered by others” (Barnett and Bedau 4). They may not always reject their inherited worldview, but they work hard to make sure it is informed. How do you move (or begin to move) from an exclusively (or partially) *inherited* worldview to an *informed* worldview? One way is to attempt to articulate your current worldview and the path you’ve traveled to get to it. Critical thinking usually begins with an assessment of the self—not simply a list of your beliefs and opinions, but an authentic exploration of why you hold them. As E.M. Forrester writes: “How do I know what I think until I see what I say?” This essay assignment is designed to help you begin (or continue) this critical and vital endeavor.

For an interesting discussion of worldview, check out Ken Funk’s essay “What is a Worldview”:
<http://web.engr.oregonstate.edu/~funkk/Personal/worldview.html>

In your essay, you should do each of the following (in whatever order you find most effective):

- a) **identify** and **explain** the essential beliefs of your worldview;
- b) **describe** and **analyze** the major influences to your worldview (past and present), **distinguishing** between inherited and/or informed beliefs;
- c) **exemplify** and **evaluate** the “type” of critical thinker you are as a result of the elements of your worldview. For a checklist on attitudes and skills of the critical thinker, review your notes and writing from this week’s lecture/discussion and “A Checklist for Critical Thinking” in your textbook (19), as well as the the information on he last page of this handout. Additionally, consider how the set of assumptions you hold about the world influence your ability to think critically. How does your worldview influence decisions you have made on private and public issues? Provide specific examples.

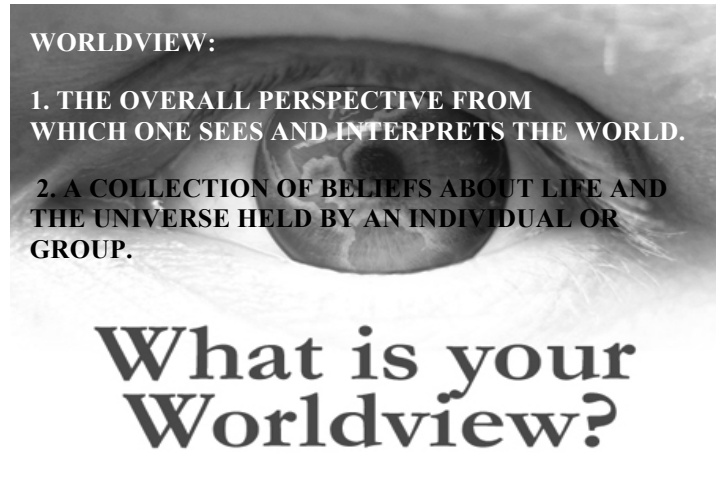
THE DEADLINES:

READ FOR MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6: Sample Student Worldview Essay: “Shedding Skins: A Worldview” (handout). Come to class having evaluated and graded the paper according to the “Evaluative Criteria” on the third page of this assignment.

DUE WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8: 3 copies of your Worldview Essay for Peer Workshop #1 (25 points). Essay must be in MLA format and style and *at least* three pages long. Drafts under three pages will lose points. Some pesky rules: You must have all 3 copies at the beginning of class in order to participate in the Peer Workshop. You cannot make copies during class time. There is no make-up for Peer Workshop; you must be present for entire class to receive credit.

DUE WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15: Final copy of Worldview Essay. Please staple your work BEFORE coming to class in the following order (from top to bottom):

- 1) Final, polished essay (no cover pages, please). Essay should be 5-8 pages long in MLA format and style;
- 2) Reflection (see bottom of page three of your syllabus—you must turn this in **with** your paper);
- 3) Draft from Peer Workshop. If you miss the Peer Workshop, a draft is still required.



APPROACHING YOUR WORLDVIEW ESSAY (SOME SUGGESTIONS):

The form this essay takes will be determined by how **you choose** to cover the content outlined in a, b, and c. You may want to start by simply brainstorming on each of the points below. I've included them not to restrict the possibilities or even suggest the order of your paper, but to generate ideas.

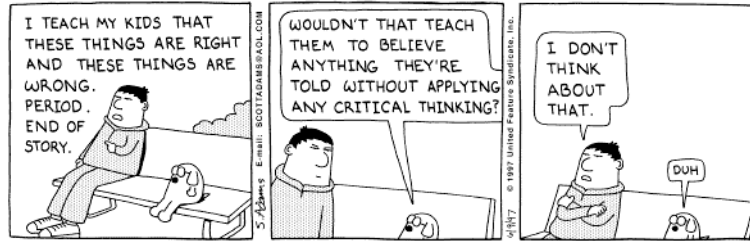
1. Begin by making sure you have a thorough understanding of each of the underlined words in the assignment (a, b, and c).
2. Go to <http://en.thinkexist.com/> and search the term "worldview" and the word "ignorance" to see if the famous thinkers stimulate and/or inspire you.
3. Check out the worldview sites and quizzes on this course's page on my website sydbrown.net
4. Define the concept of worldview using whatever information you consider important. What are some of the major assumptions and beliefs one might expect to find in a description of an individual's worldview?
5. Make a cluster of "you" like we did in class. What makes the most interesting, cohesive paper?
6. Apply your definition of worldview to yourself: what are the most important ingredients of your own worldview? How does your worldview matter in the way you live your life? How do you define "truth"? Obviously, you will not be able to thoroughly cover every aspect of your worldview, so after some general statements about it, you might choose to focus on a couple of beliefs/assumptions you hold and how they manifest themselves in your life. Remember that good writers make choices—you will want to provide solid examples and specific details in your description of your worldview, so selecting too much might make for a very general, generic essay. Is there an incident from your life that might illustrate an aspect of your worldview? As an advanced composition student, I hope to see a variety of rhetorical strategies in your essay.
7. Brainstorm different stories from your life. Which ones might help you in sections a, b, or c?
8. Time to play Freud. Analyze yourself: what led you to adopt this worldview? Did you consciously choose it? Did your family, or the place where you grew up, influence you? Consider the roles of birth order, ethnicity, religion, atheism, agnosticism, socioeconomic status, socialization, gender, sexual orientation, education, government, or the media might have played. In what way might your gender affect your perspective?
9. Consider your worldview in the context of others, say friends, classmates, or acquaintances. In what ways is your worldview similar to theirs? In what ways is it different? Does this imply that worldviews are primarily individual or social entities? This might make for an interesting conclusion.
10. Having explored your core belief system and what has primarily influenced it, **consider what kind of thinker you are as a result**. Critical thinking is often seen as discerning or discriminating thought characterized by fairness, open-mindedness. Furthermore, if we do not acknowledge the beliefs we have we may harbor prejudices about groups that cloud our thinking and restrict fair judgment. It should be noted that many of these attitudes grow from the contexts of our lives that we take for granted—opinions of parents and friends, our ethnic and religious backgrounds—so questioning and exploring our personal worldview can be one of the most challenging steps in our growth as critical thinkers.
11. Did you see any of yourself in Dick Allen's "The Narrow Mind"? How did you respond to the challenge of the poem?

EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

- An “A” paper meets and exudes **excellence** in regards to the following criteria.
 - A “B” paper meets and represents a **very good accomplishment** in regards to the following criteria.
 - A “C” paper represents a satisfactory—**certainly college level**—product in regards to the following criteria.
 - A “D” paper is **less than satisfactory** in one or more of the following criteria.
 - An “F” paper does not meet the requirements of one or more of the following criteria.
1. Is the paper clearly a well-focused and thorough response to the prompt (a, b, and c)?
 2. Does the author employ a variety of rhetorical strategies in addressing the prompt?
 3. Does the author use specific, vivid details and examples to illustrate his/her assertions?
 4. Does the paper guide the reader from one idea to the next? Does the author make smooth transitions?
 5. Are paragraphs focused and ideas developed logically? (Remember: it all starts with a great topic sentence.)
 6. Is the paper engaging, insightful and revealing—perhaps entertaining and/or poignant? Does the author take risks?
 7. Is there an awareness of audience?
 8. Does the paper have an original title (“Essay 1”—really? “My Worldview”—that sound is my snoring...) and a first sentence that GRABS its reader?
 9. Is the paper relatively free of errors in spelling, punctuation, mechanics, and grammar? (Read your work aloud as part of the final editing and proofreading stages.)
 10. Is the essay in proper MLA format & style?
 11. Is the paper clearly the “product” of an individual?
 12. Is there an apparent concern for *quality*?

CRITICAL THINKING: WHERE ARE YOU?

“Critical thinking is the careful and deliberate determination of whether to accept, reject, or suspend judgment.” —Peter Facione



Copyright © 1997 United Feature Syndicate, Inc.
Redistribution in whole or in part prohibited

Most Necessary Skills in the 21st Century

A few years back one of the schools at Harvard issued some advice to its students on planning a career in the new international economy it believed was arriving. It warned sharply that academic classes and professional credentials would count for less and less when measured against real world training. Ten qualities were offered as essential to successfully adapting to the rapidly changing world of work. See how many of those you think are regularly taught in the schools of your city or state:

- 1) The ability to define problems **without a guide**.
- 2) The ability to ask hard questions which challenge prevailing assumptions.
- 3) The ability to work in teams **without guidance**.
- 4) The ability to work absolutely alone.
- 5) The ability to persuade others that your course is the right one.
- 6) The ability to discuss issues and techniques in public with an eye to reaching decisions about policy.
- 7) The ability to conceptualize and reorganize information into new patterns.
- 8) The ability to pull what you need quickly from masses of irrelevant data.
- 9) The ability to think inductively, deductively, and dialectically.
- 10) The ability to attack problems heuristically.

College Student Intellectual Development: William Perry's Theory

In the 1960s and 70s William Perry developed a classic model for intellectual development among college students. In it, he asserts, among other things, that students progress through three major stages.

1. **Dualism** (either/or thinking): Students in this stage believe there is a single right answer to all questions. Knowledge is “received truth” delivered by professors. Dualistic thinkers resist thinking independently, drawing their own conclusions, stating their own points of view, and discussing ideas with peers; these are “senseless tasks” because they believe teachers should deliver the facts. They are especially uneasy when teachers (authorities) disagree. They believe that learning involves taking notes, memorizing facts, and later depositing facts on exams.

2. **Multiplicity** (subjective knowledge): Students in this stage believe that knowledge is just an opinion, and students and faculty are equally entitled to believe in the veracity of their own opinions. They may rebel at faculty criticism of their work, attributing it to capricious whim and faculty inability to recognize the value in alternative perspectives.

3. **Relativism** (constructed knowledge): Students at this level recognize that opinions are based on values, experiences, and knowledge. They can argue their perspective and consider the relative merit of alternative arguments by evaluating the quality of the evidence. Knowledge is “constructed” through experience and reflection. These students view faculty as having better-informed opinions in their areas of expertise and as being able to teach students techniques for evaluating the quality of evidence underlying conclusions.

DEFINING TRAITS OF A CRITICAL THINKER

INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY VS. INTELLECTUAL ARROGANCE

Knowing and admitting limitations, including prejudice and bias

INTELLECTUAL COURAGE VS. INTELLECTUAL COWARDICE

Boldly face issues as well as penalties for nonconformity

INTELLECTUAL EMPATHY VS. INTELLECTUAL NARROW-MINDEDNESS

Consciousness of need to imaginatively put one's self in someone else's place.

INTELLECTUAL AUTONOMY VS. INTELLECTUAL CONFORMITY

Rational and independent control of beliefs, values, and inferences.

INTELLECTUAL INTEGRITY VS. INTELLECTUAL HYPOCRISY

Being true to and consistent in one's thinking and practices.

INTELLECTUAL PERSEVERANCE VS. INTELLECTUAL LAZINESS

Use intellectual insights and truths in spite of difficulties, obstacles, and frustrations. Value need to struggle.

CONFIDENCE IN REASON VS. DISTRUST OF REASON AND EVIDENCE

Form rational viewpoints, draw reasonable conclusions, despite deep-seated obstacles in the character of the human mind and society as we know it.

FAIR-MINDEDNESS VS. INTELLECTUAL UNFAIRNESS

Value objectivity and the need to treat all viewpoints alike.