

Assignment Guidelines: Issue Reflection

Readings:

- Individually selected readings from the textbook and other relevant sources
- Richard Paul and Linda Elder, “The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking,” pp. 4-6, 8-10, 12

Requirements:

The issue reflection should be a **5-6 page paper** (approximately 1,500-1,800 words) describing how you would approach a research project on an issue of concern to you. You must identify a **problem** or **purpose**; formulate one or two relevant **questions** that will help you accomplish that **purpose**; identify key **concepts** from the readings that seem indispensable to understanding **the issue at hand**; suggest possible sources of **information** that would allow you to answer your **questions** and/or develop a plan of action; explain why you are asking this set of **questions** particularly and connect your **purpose** in asking it to **your point of view**.

More specifically, you need to:

State your **purpose** clearly. What are you trying to accomplish? Remember that a **purpose** is narrower than a general topic. You might be trying to understand the causes of intimate partner violence, or how best to support survivors of domestic violence, or how to help perpetrators of intimate partner violence stop their abusive behavior. Narrow your **purpose** and distinguish it from related purposes *[Standards – Precision]*.

Identify key **concepts** from the readings that the reader must understand in order to grasp your **purpose**, or that you will use in formulating your **questions**, gathering information, or stating your assumptions.

Formulate one or two main **questions** that will help to accomplish your **purpose**. For instance, if you are interested in understanding how best to support survivors of domestic violence, you might need to ask: What are the immediate needs of survivors as they leave their abusers? or, How can we obtain the resources needed to meet the needs of survivors?

Identify what **information** you would gather in order to answer your questions and why. What **data** do you need to answer your question? For instance, would you gather the opinions of survivors who have recently left their abusers? Would you interview social workers who work with survivors to determine what they think survivors need? Would you try to gather **relevant data** on survivors such as age, economic status, marital status, number of dependants?

Identify your **point of view**. Why are you, personally, interested in this issue? How might your own social position or personal experience have shaped your interests? How might they have limited your **perspective**? How might they offer new **perspectives** that you have not yet seen addressed in the readings?

Text in Red

Indicates the infusion of the **Elements of Reasoning**

Text in Blue

Indicates the infusion of the **Intellectual Standards**

Text in Green

Indicates the infusion of the **Intellectual Traits**

[Bracketed Text]

Indicates the indirect use of critical thinking **[Elements]**, **[Standards]**, or **[Traits]**

[View more about the Paul-Elder Framework for Critical Thinking](#)

Identify explicitly any **assumptions** you have made in moving from purpose to questions to information. Are you taking anything for granted? Are your assumptions justified? How are your assumptions related to your **point of view**? For instance, perhaps you have assumed that you are working with a particular population, or that women who have recently left their abusers may not yet know what they need.

Evaluation Criteria:

The questions below are designed to help you make sure you are meeting the **Universal Intellectual Standards** used to evaluate critical thinking. For more information on **Universal Intellectual Standards**, see Paul and Elder, pp. 8-10 and 12.

State your **purpose**:

Clarity: Is your purpose clear? Have you plainly stated the problem at issue?

Precision: Is your statement of purpose precise? Have you sufficiently narrowed your goals and distinguished them from other similar goals?

Identify key **concepts**:

Clarity: Have you clearly explained your key concepts? Are you able to explain them in your own words?

Relevance: Have you clearly stated the connection between your purpose and these concepts? Have you explained how these concepts help us to think about or understand this issue?

Accuracy: Have you defined your key concepts correctly? Have you checked your explanation against the readings from which the concepts are drawn?

Formulate your **questions**:

Relevance: Are your questions directly related to your purpose? Will they yield information that will help you to solve the problem you have identified?

Depth: Do your questions address the complexity of the issue at hand? Do they consider the difficulties involved in understanding this issue?

Breadth: Will your questions allow you to gather unbiased information? Are they open enough to yield information that will help you to redefine your purpose if necessary?

Significance: Are these among the most important questions to be asked in addressing the issue you have identified? Do they go to the heart of the problem?

Identify your **information**:

Relevance: How will the information you plan to gather answer the questions you have posed?

Depth: Is the information you plan to gather sufficient to answer all parts of the questions you have posed? Will it allow you to explain some of the complexities of the issue at hand?

Breadth: Will your information reflect the points of view of different people and groups affected by the issue? Will it allow you to consider more than one possibility for solving the problem?

Identify your **point of view**:

Relevance: Have you explained how your point of view or social location is related to your choice of issue? Have you identified how it affects your choice of questions to ask about that issue?

Breadth: Are you fairly representing other possible points of view? Have you plainly acknowledged the value of other points of view?

Fairness: Have you identified any vested interest you have in your point of view? Have you justified the value of your point of view?

Identify your **assumptions**:

Breadth: Have you acknowledged how other starting assumptions might change the way this issue is presented?

Fairness: Have you acknowledged possible problems with your assumptions? Have you explained why your assumptions are reasonable?

As always, you will also be graded on your organization, **clarity** of expression, and writing mechanics. Remember that a citation system is part of your mechanics. Your reflection must be accompanied by a bibliography and documented using a consistent, recognized reference system.