

THIRD EDITION

3



# **Skills for Success**

READING AND WRITING

Jenni Currie Santamaria

**Teacher's Handbook**  
WITH TEACHER ACCESS CARD

**OXFORD**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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## Critical Thinking Foundations: Implications for the Language Classroom

**James D. Dunn** Q Series Consultant, Critical Thinking Skills  
Junior Associate Professor - Tokai University  
Coordinator - Japan Association for Language Teaching, Critical Thinking  
Special Interest Group

Critical Thinking has become a buzzword in education over the past decade (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004; Moore, 2013; Mulnix, 2012; Scriven & Paul, 2007) and for good reason—it is a very important skill for life. But how should we, as educators, best integrate critical thinking into our language learning classroom? This article will give a working definition of critical thinking, shed light on the foundations of critical thinking, and provide some concrete avenues to introduce it into your classroom.

### What is Critical Thinking?

It can be very difficult to get a good grasp on what critical thinking is because it can be a particularly nebulous concept, made up of sub-objects which form the foundation of what most people envision as critical thinking (Scriven & Paul, 2007; van Gelder, 2005). To understand critical thinking, we need to first understand what it is made up of. The building blocks of critical thinking are higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). These skills, which are the fundamental skills utilized during the process of critical thinking (Dalton, 2011; Ford & Yore, 2012), are essential to understand in order to start students on the path toward being critical thinkers. Textbooks like *Q: Skills for Success Third Edition*, which integrate language practice that focuses on the implementation and development of HOTS in a second language, help to enable students to become more critical thinkers.

### What are Higher-Order Thinking Skills?

Higher-order thinking skills are derived from Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) which gives us a simplified, yet powerful, way to look at how students use their brains to remember, process, and use information (Fig. 1). The top three sections of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy are what many consider the higher-order thinking skills, or activities, if you will. One of the best uses for the taxonomy is attributing verbs to each tier in order to help an educator build activities that utilize these skills. Each skill has a myriad of verbs that comprise the level of thinking which, when integrated into a textbook, help students develop their understanding of a new language, and also foster the ability to think more critically about the information presented to them in the classroom or even in life.

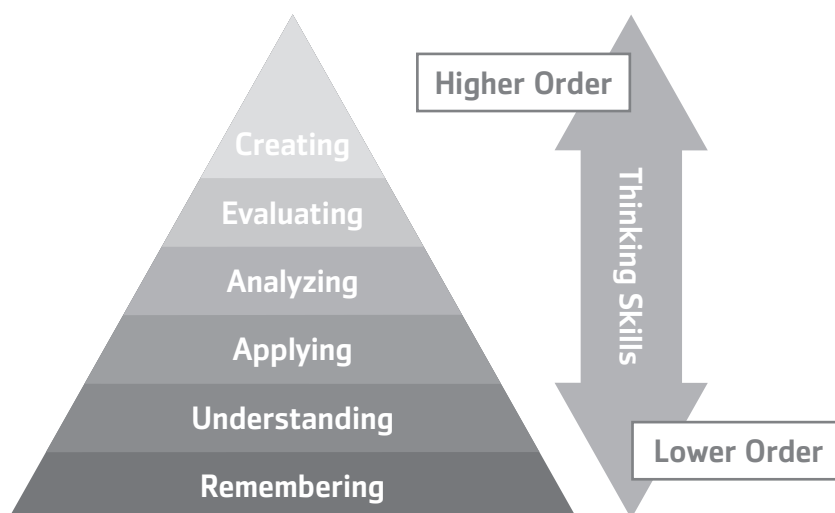


Fig. 1: Bloom's Revised Taxonomy

The verbs that are associated with the higher-order thinking skills are essential for developing the potential for critical thinking. The following are a few verbs, with activity suggestions that come from *Q: Skills for Success*, for the higher-order thinking skills that you can use in your classroom.

## Analyzing

Analysis in language learning has a few beneficial effects. First, students are introduced to using their own judgement in the process of learning a new language. This helps in the development of pattern recognition and familiarization with the structure of knowledge. This aids in the student's ability to distinguish between items, recognize fact or opinion, and compare and contrast items. These skills are valuable in the production of both written and spoken English.

One way to integrate analyzing into language learning is to have students order information by a metric. Students are given a list of data and are asked to organize it into an order. This order could be derived from categories, a hierarchy, a taxonomy (like Bloom's), time, location, and importance. This can be further developed into a more challenging task by asking students to distinguish data from a series of similar information. With words that are similar in meaning to each other being used in the same text, it could be beneficial for students to practice differentiating these words and identifying how they differ from each other. Words like *tasty* and *mouth-watering* are very similar but have different depth or connotations.

You can push these activities to have a critical-thinking bent to them by asking the students to justify and explain their organization of data to a partner or a group. By explaining their thought process on how they organized the information, they open themselves up to questions and deeper reflection on how they used the information activity.

## Evaluating

From simple sentences to complicated grammatical structures and vocabulary, all students can give an opinion. The important thing is to make sure their opinion is well formed. This is where evaluating comes into play. It can help students make judgements about information, opinions, and items. It is used to form judgements that are sound and based in logic. This leads to more complex usage of language and the development of more intricate sentence structures.

A good way to introduce evaluating into language practice is to have students assess the validity of an opinion/information. When a student hears or reads an opinion or some information in a textbook, it is important to encourage them to ask questions about it. Where did the information come from? Is it factually correct? Does it stand up to the norms of the student's home culture? With the aforementioned activities in mind, you can ask students to start making their own opinions about information presented to them in a textbook and from the research they do on their own. In addition to the forming of opinions, it is just as important to require students to justify their answers with the information they found from the research.

## Creating

Finally, we come to the act of creating. The highest tier of the HOTS taxonomy, creative thinking is essential for getting students curious and using English in situations not covered in a textbook. Creation is beneficial for mental flexibility, originality in producing language, and making critiques on what students read and hear. These abilities are core to developing fluency and spontaneity in academic and everyday interactions.

Teachers can bring students into creation in language activities by expanding topics into active learning opportunities. By taking a textbook's topic further and expanding on the initial setting or information, students can use real-world problems to acquire new knowledge. By creating solutions to problems, advice for friends, and even recipes for food, students are engaging in the act of creation. These activities can be further expanded into critical thinking activities by having students analyze shared recipes, research substitutions for advice, or justify the solutions they create (using facts and information found in research).

## Conclusion

As you can most likely see, many of the higher-order skill activities tend to build upon one another. This is because each step in the hierarchy depends on the lower rungs of knowledge. These skills then form the foundation of critical thinking and encourage students to participate in intellectual pursuits to further their language acquisition experience. These types of activities can help students in developing fluency and achieving higher test scores (Dunn, 2016; Parrish & Johnson, 2010; Wong, 2016). All students, regardless of home culture, have the innate talent to utilize Critical Thinking Skills. These skills have the ability to impact almost every aspect of a student's life, from job hunting to gaining promotions and even making friends. By integrating higher-order thinking skills into language practice, educators can have an impact on a student's life even outside of the classroom.

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## TIPS

### Critical Thinking tips for Q Third Edition

As you start getting into *Q: Skills for Success*, you will find that higher-order thinking skills and opportunities for students to utilize critical thinking are well integrated into each unit. While it would be completely possible to use only the book (and the online activities) to improve a student's ability to utilize critical thinking, some educators may look to expand activities and get students to look deeper into the subjects introduced in the text. Below are three suggestions for expanding activities in the Student Book that will help you get the most out of it and your students.

#### 1 Change the terms of an activity

When doing an activity, it can be beneficial for your students to tweak the parameters of an activity. *Q: Skills for Success* comes with excellent activities that utilize higher-order thinking skills to promote critical thinking. An example of this could be an activity that asks students to categorize information, for example, categorizing family members by age. The categorization metric, "age," could be changed to something else entirely.

**Change the metric:** Have students categorize family members by height, employment, or even how much they like each family member. This encourages mental flexibility and primes the student for creative use of English.

**Get the students involved:** Ask students to come up with new ways to approach the activity and use these ideas to expand on the topic, vocabulary, and skills they can practice.

#### 2 Get online

Twenty-first century skills have come to the forefront of the educational mindset. Giving students the opportunity to go online, use English, and even go beyond the Student Book is important for utilizing skills that students may need to be a global citizen. *Q: Skills for Success* comes with a host of online practice that utilizes and expands the topics, vocabulary, and grammar in the textbook.

**A jumping-off point:** Educators can push students even further into online research and expansion of the learning topic. Have them investigate aspects of a topic they find interesting.

**The class consensus:** After students do their own research, have them share their findings with the class and write them on the board. After everyone has shared, you can discuss the results from a whole-class perspective.

#### 3 Expand into deeper critical thinking skills

*Q: Skills for Success Third Edition* has an array of first-rate critical thinking and higher-order thinking skills built into each unit with activities in the Student Book and in the Online Practice. Once the activity is finished, you can further move the class toward critical thinking skills by having students share their answers, ask questions about how they came to those answers, and justify their answers to each other.

**Give students the chance to compare and contrast:** By giving students the opportunity to share answers with each other and compare their findings, you allow them to brainstorm new ideas, evaluate each other's answers, and develop debate skills naturally.

**Justify justify justify:** Whenever you have your students give an opinion, make sure they are justifying their opinions with evidence, life experience, or both. Circular logic like "I like pizza because it is delicious, and it tastes good." is something that needs to be avoided. A better answer would use their life experience to justify their like of pizza such as, "I like pizza because it is delicious. Tomato sauce is so great and even a little healthy!" Strive to have students give good opinions at all times.



## Making Assessment Effective

Elaine Boyd Q Series Consultant, Assessment

In most educational settings nowadays, the requirement for assessments, both classroom and summative at the end of a course, is increasing. Teachers regularly assess their students informally in class, but they often get very little support or training in what and how to assess in a more structured way so that the tests are valid for learning and give reliable information to the teacher. Teachers intuitively understand that any assessment needs to be fair—both in terms of what is expected of the students and in the results that reflect the students' ability or competence in language. A learning program should include ongoing assessments that feed back into the classroom, give students information about what they need to focus on, and allow teachers to plan class content according to their students' needs. This is commonly known as Assessment for Learning and, although these assessments are usually conducted informally in class, they still need to be designed and delivered in a way that is fair and valid if the tests are to support learning effectively. What can help teachers to both manage and deliver fair and meaningful assessments that progress learning is an understanding of the principles that underlie assessment, why these principles are important, and how to make sure any assessment aligns with the principles.

The main points to consider when implementing an assessment program is the purpose of the assessment, its suitability for the intended test-takers (i.e. the students), and the reliability of the results. We capture these by implementing three principles—validity, reliability, and fairness/fitness for purpose. Let's consider each in turn.

### Testing principle 1: Validity

We say a test is valid when we know it is testing what we intend it to test and that the testing focus (or construct) aligns with what the test-takers needs are. Put simply, this means you need to have a very clear idea of what construct (or sub-skill/competence) you are testing. For example, if we want to test a speaking skill, we don't set a task that involves a lot of reading because we will not know if the student has given a poor performance because of a lack of competence in reading or in speaking. Equally, if we want to assess a student's discourse competence, such as the internal organization of a piece of writing, then we need to give them a task that gives the test-taker a good opportunity to demonstrate this. Each test task needs to have a tight focus on what it is testing and not aim to assess too many things at the same time. This is why tests often have a variety of task and item types. This is arguably the most important principle, and if a test is not valid, it will never be reliable or fair.

### Testing principle 2: Reliability

Reliability is very important for major summative tests, which can be very high stakes in that they can have a life-changing outcome. But many teachers do not realize that reliability is important even for classroom tests. We need to be sure that the information we are getting about the students' learning or achievement is correct because actions ensue from these results. This means even for informal classroom and ongoing assessments, we need to aim to make any assessment reliable. We do this by making sure the instructions are clear, that the tests are standardized so that even different versions are testing the same skills or competences, the marking is standardized, students are only tested on what they have been taught, etc. This can be a particularly challenging issue when we think about productive skills, which are core to communicative competence, but it is important to be as consistent as possible so that our students feel that they have been fairly assessed.

## Testing principle 3: Fairness

In many ways, fairness is what drives the need for valid and reliable tests, but there is another aspect to fairness that can make a real difference to the test-taker and that is their involvement in the process. This involvement includes communication with students about what is expected of them and why, ensuring they are aware of what they will be assessed on, e.g. performance criteria of grading scales, and always giving meaningful feedback regarding the results of the assessment. This is especially important in ongoing classroom assessment models.

### Effective feedback

Arguably the whole purpose of an ongoing classroom assessment program is to generate feedback, which will help both the students and the teacher. It is important for students to understand both what they have been successful at, as well as where they could improve. At the same time, classroom assessment also generates feedback for teachers so they can understand where they may need to implement a remedial or alternative approach to the learning objectives. Research evidence indicates that feedback works best (a) when it is given as soon as possible, (b) when only one or two points are targeted for improvement, and (c) where good guidance is given to learners on how they can improve, i.e. the specific action they need to take to help them. Remember all the tests have an extended answer key which explains why one answer is correct and others are not. This is to support teachers with any explanations and for students who may wish to reflect on any incorrect answers.

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## TIPS

### Assessment tips for Q Third Edition

#### **1 Make sure students know what is expected of them**

Before starting any test, discuss with students what they will be assessed on. This might be a skill or a vocabulary set or a range of language features.

Students need to know how they are being assessed, so go through the rubrics for Writing or Speaking (this will be one or the other – Writing for *Reading and Writing*; Speaking for *Listening and Speaking*) with them to make sure they understand the different assessment criteria and how these link to their learning.

#### **2 Give feedback as soon as possible after the test**

Discuss or point out what students have done well and then give them, either individually or as a class, a single point to improve. Discuss ideas with them around how they might improve but make sure you also have some suggestions to support them.

#### **3 Use the student reflection worksheet**

Make sure students understand each question in the worksheet; then allow them to complete it individually. Students can then discuss their answers in pairs, groups, or as a whole class. You can vary this throughout the course so everyone can share ideas. It's a good idea to build up a list of options for Questions 4 and 5 that everyone can have access to.

#### **4 Use the expanded answer key effectively**

The answers can either be discussed with the class or you may wish to ask students to do their own analysis first and then check how close their understanding is. If, after checking, students are still unsure of why an answer is incorrect, use the expanded key to discuss as a class and/or to prepare any remedial activities.



# Using Video in Language Learning

Tamara Jones Q Third Edition Author

Did you know that approximately 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute? From clips of popular TV shows to music videos to online talks, there is a seemingly infinite variety of videos out there for teachers and students to use as language learning resources.

In fact, there is so much out there, it can actually feel a bit overwhelming. It's incredibly time-consuming to weed out the videos that aren't appropriate or aren't at the right level. Once educators find a video for use, we have to figure out how to transform it from a passive activity to an opportunity for language learning. But creating a worthwhile activity that matches the learning outcomes for the lesson and pushes students to produce language takes time, something today's educators have precious little of.

So before we dive down the YouTube rabbit hole, it's important to keep in mind the reasons why we use videos in our English lessons and how we can save time by taking advantage of videos already tailored to our lessons.

## The Benefits of Using Video in Language Learning

First, videos provide an excellent scaffold for academic topics. The visual support they provide can give students access to content that otherwise might be beyond them. For instance, if students are learning about the laws of science, as they do in *Q: Skills for Success Third Edition, Listening and Speaking Level 4*, watching a video on Moore's law can help students understand better what they are hearing.

In addition, students of all ages genuinely enjoy watching videos. Watching TV is a popular activity for relaxation around the world, so learners tend to associate it with positive emotions. Neuroscientists assert that positive emotions tag learning events and give them prominence in the memory. What this means is that there is actually a biological purpose for making language learning fun, and using videos is one way to achieve that goal.

Finally, videos are an increasingly common source of information in the world nowadays. Where people used to get their news and information from articles and books, now they might also search for video clips on a topic as well. So exposure to video and incorporating them into teaching regularly is a useful 21st-century skill. However, as alternative sources for information have flourished, the need for students to become skeptical consumers has also grown. Critical thinking skills, therefore, are an important part of learning from videos.

## Using Authentic Videos

The internet is crammed with all kinds of videos. But which ones will best meet the needs of our learners? Most teachers would probably agree that using authentic videos, in other words, content that was created with a purpose other than language learning in mind, grabs the attention of students and can motivate them and challenge them. The problem is that "real" videos are often very difficult for people who are not yet proficient users of a language to understand.

The most obvious solution to this problem is for teachers to turn to graded videos. For instance, beginning level students would probably be frustrated if they had to watch an American news report about the emotional benefits of running. The pace of the speaker would be too fast and the students probably wouldn't know much of the vocabulary. However, a graded video covers the same topic and the same content, but with vocabulary and grammar structures that are familiar to the learners and at a pace that is manageable. Luckily, teachers who use *Q: Skills for Success* can take advantage of the videos and accompanying activities presented in the Student Book and online. These videos come from authentic sources, though the language is often graded at lower levels to make the content accessible and level-appropriate.