

2017 VCE Extended Investigation: Critical Thinking Test examination report

General comments

The 2017 Critical Thinking Test assessed students' ability to:

- recognise how statements can be made into arguments
- see different sides of an issue
- evaluate arguments
- generate arguments for and against a proposition.

Students seemed familiar with various dialectical approaches. They also tried to understand the particulars of an issue rather than giving formulaic responses.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Questions 1 and 2

The drag-and-drop items required students to see how comments related to each other and how they could be envisaged as arguments about an issue.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	9	11	36	42	3.1

Students were asked to consider the proposition that a year of community service should be compulsory for all young Australians.

(The statements in the table below have been labelled 1–9 for the purposes of this report, but the statements were not labelled in this way on the test. Italicised statements are the drag-and-drop items.)

For	Against
Compulsory community service can achieve results that would otherwise be out of reach. (statement 1)	<i>Those who are forced to do things will not do them well.</i> (statement 2)
<i>Requiring community service would treat everyone equally.</i> (statement 3)	There are those who can and will organise any system to suit themselves. (statement 4)
It is easy for people to become selfish when nothing is required of them. (statement 5)	<i>Compulsory community service will make people resentful rather than grateful.</i> (statement 6)
	Individuals contribute to society in all sorts of ways without compulsion. (statement 7)
<i>There are many things the community needs that are expensive and unpopular.</i> (statement 8)	Compulsory community service involves costly administration. (statement 9)

One way to begin responding to a question such as this would be to categorise the statements to be allocated as being either 'for' or 'against' the proposition. For example, statements 3 and 8 were potentially arguments for compulsory community service, and statements 2 and 6 were potentially arguments against compulsory community service.

There were two empty cells on the 'Against' side of the table. Statement 1 was concerned with what can be achieved with compulsory community service, and statement 2 could be seen as a retort by claiming that enforced services will not be performed well and hence, by implication, not worth having.

Statement 5 was about the good character development that would be a result of compulsory community service, and statement 6 contradicted this by claiming that compulsory community service would cause resentment rather than unselfishness.

There were three empty cells on the 'For' side of the table, so students needed to decide which of the 'Against' side statements were related to them. Statement 3 was concerned with the fairness of the system, and there was a match with statement 4, which claimed that the system would not be the same for everyone. Statement 9 was concerned with the costs of the system, and statement 8 claimed that there are community services that need to be done. Statement 7 claimed that people already contribute to society, but neither statement 3 nor statement 8 was concerned with the status quo, so there was no match for statement 7.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	10	19	22	20	29	2.4

Students were asked to consider the proposition that Australia should have a system of automatic consent for organ donation with an option to opt out.

(Italicised statements in the table below are the drag-and-drop items.)

For	Against
There is currently a low level of organ donation.	<i>There should be encouragement for people to opt in to organ donation.</i>
	An opt-out system can lead to actions that go against the wishes of the family of the deceased.
<i>In a voluntary system, no-one considers donating their organs until tragedy strikes and it is too late.</i>	It is unfair to force people to make a decision about something they do not want to think about.
Those who really object to organ donation can opt out.	<i>It is unfair to presume consent to organ donation on the basis of inaction.</i>
<i>An opt-out system will result in more organs being available for transplantation.</i>	Human organs are not just another commodity to be acquired as efficiently as possible.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	4	13	26	24	20	11	2	2.9

Question 3 invited analysis of a set of opposing arguments about whether there should be quotas to increase the number of women in the Australian Parliament. Students were required to choose the argument that they found the most convincing and explain why. They were also directed to analyse the arguments presented rather than offering their own opinion about the proposition.

This question was an analytical task focused on a specific argument, inviting students to identify and justify which argument they saw as decisive in the set. Many students commented on a number of arguments, or the whole case 'For' or 'Against'. There was no penalty for commenting on more than one argument, although there was no advantage to commenting on more than one. Students who examined an argument in detail were rewarded.

The following high-scoring response traces a line of argument in the first sentence, claiming that the unfairness of the competition is a fact from which the conclusion follows. The student is aware of the relationship of this argument to other arguments about the issue, and claims that argument **B**. was least open to challenge.

B. Competition between men and women in public life is not fair or even.

b. the case that competition between men and women in public life is neither even nor fair forms a stronger basis for the establishment of a quota than the other arguments, making it clear that the existence of a quota would act as a booster or leveler for women trying to get into parliament. As an argument it simply states a generally well acknowledged and important fact, and the conclusion that there ought to be a quota follows naturally, as what is 'fair' ought to be promoted and what is not ought to be amended. It doesn't even make a claim to the importance of having women in parliament, and obviously righteous and valid argument but one easily refuted by the sort of person who makes arguments J and L. Argument B accets and acknowledges the key reason behind the lack of women in parliament instead of using the lack of women as an argument in itself. It incorporates the other 5 'for' arguments and can be used to rebut all the 'against' arguments.

The following high-scoring response is a deliberate elaboration of argument L. But rather than repeating the comment, it is rephrased in the student's own terms. The claim is that the current representation is what people want, and that the status quo is unbiased and democratic, and is preferable to government dictation. Argument L held a value position that may have made it an unlikely option for many students, but the student here offers reasoning to support their conclusion and gives substance to their argument.

L. Political representation should not be controlled or engineered by government.

The most convincing argument about quotas for women in parliament is argument L. We live in a democratic society and everyone (men and women) are given the opportunity to vote for those they believe are capable to represent them in parliament. Such a decision is already being controlled by society, and allowing the government to change that would lower the amount of true representation that communities have. While it may be true that there are less women in parliament, this is because society and communities have chosen to have certain men take these places, not because they are men, but because they are seen as capable and suitable to represent. Compared to other arguments such as the majority that are 'for the proposition', this argument does not seem to really hold any bias towards or against men but is rather suggesting that we continue to follow what 'the people' want. It does not express opinion but rather reinforces the idea of the democratic country that we are and highlights the idea that we have the right to vote in who we want to parliament without the governments dictation. Therefore, such an argument that is neither for or against women in general appears to be not only the most realistic and logical but the most convincing.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	4	10	23	21	22	16	5	3.2

In this question students were directed to consider two sets of arguments about whether political parties should be publicly rather than privately funded. They were asked to consider the arguments and offer their position for or against the proposition. Students could have introduced arguments of their own, although most used the arguments presented or a version of them.

Some students were confused about what it would mean to either publicly or privately fund political parties. Some students thought the issue was whether donations to political parties should be made public.

The following high-scoring response is a very detailed elaboration of the argument that private funding of political parties is unfair and undemocratic. A counter argument is rebutted.

Private funding to political parties leads to unfair disadvantages towards those political parties who may not have the same financial resources as others. One of the key principles of being a democratic nation is to have the ability to be represented in government. However, the more we continue to allow private funding to political parties the less likely we are going to be able to uphold this democratic principle.

Politics should not be a game of who has the most money to get elected, it should instead be a representation of who is going to best be able to represent the Australian people. Regardless of whether their campaign and policies cost millions or whether they cost hundreds of thousands. Yet, currently private corporations are dominating our public politics in a way that can only be deemed unfair.

Imagine your political party is being sponsored by a major corporation. The chances are that corporation is going to influence that political party to act in their best interest to retain their funding, not in the unknown public's best interest. Many argue that political donations are carefully monitored so this cannot happen, but the truth is more often than not donors can hide their identities. Meaning the public might not even be able to be aware of the corporation

sponsoring their political party. This could not only open the door for all kinds of corruption in our political parties, but also distort our entire parliamentary system into a privately funded corporation instead of a public body.

Political parties need to be publicly funded rather than privately. It is an essential action we need to take to ensure that our political parties can continue to remain as democratic as possible, with only the interests of the public in mind.

Questions 5 and 6

These questions involved analysis and assessment of research questions and were answered well by most students. There was a general sense that students had thought about the framing of research questions during the year, and the comments offered were often original and specific rather than formulaic. The highest-scoring comments focused on what would be involved in answering a particular question. In this sense, both questions involved envisaging how a research question might be answered.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	6	25	43	26	1.9

The following high-scoring response to Question 5 identifies question **C.** as too broad and indeterminate, and the student elaborates and explains those claims in detail.

C. Seventeen-year-olds have grown up in a post-September 11 world. To what extent did the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City shape their world view?

Question C would be the most difficult to answer, because its conclusion would rely on findings that are too broad. First of all, it does not specify the location of the seventeen-year-olds it intends to survey; a variable that would have a profound impact on its findings — given that teenagers in Zimbabwe, the United States, Indonesia and Hungary are likely to have experienced a diverse range of reactions to the World Trade Center (WTC) attacks. Secondly, it would be difficult to soundly determine the impact that the WTC attacks actually have upon their world view. If the data was self-reported, it would be possible for teenagers to believe their world view had been shaped by the attacks, when in fact it would be much the same had they not occurred.

Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	7	37	41	15	1.7

The following response to Question 6 comments appropriately that water quality is a distinct phenomenon, and that the research is in a specific location and can produce a definite result. In both this and the answer to Question 5 the student shows a sophisticated understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of well and poorly framed research questions.

E. How effective is the Yarra Park wetland filtration system in improving water quality?

Question E would be the easiest to answer. First of all, its conclusion simply relies upon the occurrence of one distinct phenomena. If, upon implementation of the filtration system, water quality was seen to improve by a range of quantitative measures, then the system could be considered largely effective. Conversely, in the same scenario, if no water quality improvement was observed, then the system could be considered mostly ineffective. An additional strength of this question is that it provides a succinct and attainable scope - it outlines one location, the Vane

Park Wetlands, one system, the wetland filtration system, and one outcome, the improvement of water quality. This makes it variables easily controlled and evaluated.

Questions 7–10

The tasks of generating arguments for and against a proposition in Questions 7–10 were more challenging than the other tasks for some students. Some students seemed not to understand what it meant for youth workers to be paid a percentage of the adult wage.

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	4	42	40	14	1.7

In the following high-scoring response to Question 7 the student identifies the training needs of younger workers as the justification for lower wages.

It would be logical to only pay people under the age of 21 a percentage of the adult wage. Young people, given their age, have less experience and expertise in comparison to their older counterparts. Thus, employers usually have to conduct extra training for young workers. A reduced wage for those under the age of 21 would offset this and thus support business. Furthermore, it is likely that younger people have less expenses, and thus require a lesser wage in comparison. Young people need time to develop the skills and experience that older workers have obtained and, in order to ensure that this learning process is not detrimental to businesses or industry, people under the age of 21 should be paid less to offset potential financial loss incurred.

Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	9	36	45	10	1.6

In the following high-scoring response to Question 8, the student claims that giving lower wages for younger workers is discrimination if it is not based on differences in skills. In comparison to the response for Question 7, the tone is more rhetorical and the assertions about the work ethic and capacity of young people are less persuasive.

In the name of fairness and equality in the workplace, it would simply be unfair to pay people under the age of 21 a percentage of the full wage. Those who work the time should be entitled to the same pay as their older workmates. Young people, after relevant training is completed, are likely to have similar skills to older people - only lacking in experience. In fact, young people, given their age, are more likely to have an increased work ethic, and be able to handle more labour-intensive (both physically, and mentally). It would be discrimination on the basis of age to pay those under 21 a percentage of the adult wage.

Question 9

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	4	28	44	25	1.9

The following high-scoring response to Question 9 elaborates on the impact of pervasive media violence, explaining that it desensitises and normalises violence. The explanation in the last sentence is rather formulaic.

Clinical psychology argues that humans are a product of their environment, and are more likely to exhibit behaviours that are embraced by the culture around them. This is how distinct unhomogenised cultures across the globe have come to exist. If the portrayal of violence in entertainment is allowed to continue unabated, the risk of this being normalised increases greatly. Particularly in the 21st century, when human consumption of media and entertainment is higher than it ever has been, people are inclined to reflect the behaviours of those they see and watch around them, especially if this behaviour is normalised. If people begin to exhibit more violent tendencies, the world is likely to become more dangerous for all. Polite and considered discourse - a foundation of democracy risks being toppled altogether, and replaced by violent, unsafe acts. For this reason, portrayal of violence in entertainment ought to be more tightly controlled.

This argument is strong as it encourages people to consider the impact that violent entertainment may have upon the world they live in. People who disagree with tighter controls are likely somewhat self-interested, and enjoy watching and engaging in violent entertainment. This argument implores their self-interest, as it concludes that they may ultimately live in a more dangerous and hostile world.

Question 10

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	9	28	43	20	1.8

The following is a mid-scoring response to Question 10. The point about the role of parents in protecting children from media violence is well made. The student's last sentence, which forms their reflection on the strength of their argument, is very general.

Controlling what we are allowed to see is an affront to our freedom, and ability to choose what we wish to consume. Many studies have been conducted on the effects of seeing violence, and they have all been able to conclude that there is none. There should be no limits on what we are allowed to see, as this is a slippery slope that can lead to censorship and loss of our freedom of speech. If parents do not want their children exposed to violence, it should be their responsibility to control what their child sees and there are countless ways to child-restrict websites or video games. We should not treat everyone as if they are children, incapable of making their own decisions about what they should see.

This is a strong argument as it rebuts a potential argument and goes into depth, adding arguments that support rather than rely on the central contention.