Merit Online Learning
Developing Critical Thinking Skills Series

Middle School through College Prep
ESL Intermediate through Advanced

Complete series: 4 levels
Level 1: Skill levels 5.5 – 6.5, Intermediate English Language Learners
Level 2: Skill levels 7 – 8, Advanced English Language Learners
Level 3: Skill levels 8.5 – 9.5, College Prep
Level 4: Skill levels 10 – 11, College Prep

Note skill levels correspond to U.S. equivalent grade levels.

Internet Explorer 6.0+ (Windows)
Safari 3.0+ (Windows and Mac)
Firefox 2.0+ (Windows, Linux, and Mac)

What Does Developing Critical Thinking Skills Do?
Developing Critical Thinking Skills gives students personal, immediate feedback and provides online tracking for teachers.

The program helps students sharpen their critical thinking skills and develop their ability to make inferences. Students read a passage and then answer several skill questions about it. The questions focus students to determine main idea, comprehend logical development, make inferences, and read closely for details. Feedback explains incorrect choices and rewards correct answers.

Scope of the Program: Skills
Each Developing Critical Thinking Skills level contains 66 passages divided into 3 units of progressive difficulty. The topics represented are: history and culture, music and the arts, nature and science, historical figures, famous personalities, entertainment and recreation, and unusual facts.

All units provide Vocabulary, Sequence, Inference, Main Idea, and Interpretation skill practice. Crossword Puzzles keyed to the passages offer a challenge for the more advanced student. Examples of questions for each skill are in the Tips and Strategies unit.

Tips and Strategies
A Tips and Strategies unit addresses each skill in the program. It contains examples of passages with skill questions and a step-by-step analysis of each answer choice. Teachers can use the Tips and Strategies unit as a together activity to introduce reading skills to a class. It can be used for group mini-lessons as well as for individual review of skills with which a student is having trouble.

Implementation
Suggested allocation of time for using the program
For best results we recommend that students use the program 20 to 30 minutes a session, two to three times a week, for six to eight weeks, in conjunction with other methods of instruction. Program usage should be paced to allow students sufficient time between sessions to absorb the material.
Suggested overview of student sessions
Students advance through the program at their own pace.

Each Developing Critical Thinking Skills unit is divided into three sections for students to work through:
- **Tryout** – A diagnostic pre-test
- **Workout** – Learning and practice with feedback and help messages.
- **Finals** – A diagnostic post-test

The Workout section of the program is designed to promote learning and mastery by providing feedback immediately after students select an answer. When students select a wrong answer, the feedback explains why the choice is wrong. Students try again until they answer correctly. The Workout section is designed so that students may do as many rounds as necessary to master the material.

Students can redo a unit or section of a unit for additional practice. Note that playing again will reset student scores but not time on task.

Tracking students' work
Students and teachers are able to track improvement through students' Online Portfolios and Reports. Using these tools to view the Workout rounds informs students and teachers of what skills students are mastering and what skills students are having difficulty mastering.

Program Structure or “Anatomy of the Program”

The Developing Critical Thinking Skills program appears in the student's Learning Center.

Student's Learning Center

The student clicks the + next to the Developing Critical Thinking Skills program level to see the units of the program.

The student clicks the unit name to start a lesson.
Next, the student selects a section. The section menu indicates whether the student has done the Tryout and Finals and the % complete for the Workout.

**Section Menu**

Students can adjust the text size and choose a different background color at the start of each section. At the start of the Workout they can also choose a graphic reward theme.

**Display Options: Text Size, Rewards, Background Color**
In all sections the student is asked to read a passage and then answer several skill questions.

Sample Question

Most people associate flying with birds, but many people do not know that some birds cannot fly at all. Rather than fly, the penguin swims like a fish. Penguins are found in many places, but most live on the ice near the South Pole. The South Pole is the coldest place on Earth. The penguins' feathers trap air, which keeps them warm in the icy polar region. Penguins love to swim, but even more, they love to eat fish!

Sample Vocabulary Question with Feedback

If you live in the United States, you have probably eaten a long, skinny green vegetable called a cucumber. However, few Americans have eaten a sea cucumber. A sea cucumber is an animal that lives on the bottom of the ocean. It is about one foot (3 meters) long and has a little mouth at one end. Can you guess how the sea cucumber earned its funny name?
Following each round, the student sees a summary screen showing his/her progress and achievement in that round.

**Sample Summary Screen**

![Sample Summary Screen]

**Section Details**

**TRYOUT:** The program presents three passages to test the student's critical thinking skills. The student answers three questions for each of the skills within the program. When the student has finished all the questions, a summary screen will show how the student did. The student gets a star for each correct answer and a check for skills in which the student has answered all questions correctly. A Questions Missed Report gives details for questions answered incorrectly.
WORKOUT: Each Workout round presents the student with two passages and accompanying questions. The student needs to play at least five rounds to complete the Workout.

The student is awarded stars for skill questions answered correctly on the first try. The student needs to collect 10 stars for each skill in order to complete the Workout. The student can play as many rounds as needed to collect the stars. Note: Three Vocabulary questions answered correctly earn one star. Each Main Idea, Sequence, Interpretation, and Inference question answered correctly earns one star.

In addition to the skill questions for a passage, the student is challenged to solve a crossword puzzle enrichment activity. The student is awarded a star for each puzzle solved. The student has the opportunity to collect 10 stars for the puzzle enrichment activity, but the student only needs to collect stars for the skill questions to complete the Workout. To complete the Workout, the student needs to answer 50 skill questions correctly on the first try. The Student may replay the Workout for additional practice.

At the end of each Workout round a summary screen will show how the student did. The student gets a star for each correct answer. Red indicates correct answers for the current round. Gray indicates correct answers for preceding rounds.

When the student has collected 10 stars in a skill area, the student gets a check indicating the skill has been passed. When the student has gotten checks in all skill areas, the Workout has been completed.

Sample Main Idea Question

If you live in the United States, you have probably eaten a long, skinny green vegetable called a cucumber. However, few Americans have eaten a sea cucumber. A sea cucumber is an animal that lives on the bottom of the ocean. It is about one foot (.3 meters) long and has a little mouth at one end. Can you guess how the sea cucumber earned its funny name?

What is the main idea of the paragraph? Choose the TWO answers that together tell what the paragraph is about.

- sea cucumber
- pickle
- ocean animal
- green vegetable

Yes, that’s right.
Yes, these two answers tell the main idea.
Sample Inference Question

If you live in the United States, you have probably eaten a long, skinny green vegetable called a cucumber. However, few Americans have eaten a sea cucumber. A sea cucumber is an animal that lives on the bottom of the ocean. It is about one foot (.3 meters) long and has a little mouth at one end. Can you guess how the sea cucumber earned its funny name?

From the clues in the paragraph, what do you think is true but NOT actually stated?

- A sea cucumber can grow leaves.
- A sea cucumber tastes delicious.
- The sea cucumber is a living creature that looks like a cucumber, which is a long, skinny vegetable.

Not correct.
The paragraph tells us that sea cucumbers are animals. Therefore, they can not grow leaves.

Sample Crossword Puzzle

If you live in the United States, you have probably eaten a long, skinny green vegetable called a cucumber. However, few Americans have eaten a sea cucumber. A sea cucumber is an animal that lives on the bottom of the ocean. It is about one foot (.3 meters) long and has a little mouth at one end. Can you guess how the sea cucumber earned its funny name?

Complete the puzzle to earn a Crossword Puzzle star.
Click the clue you wish to answer.
Then, type your answer in the input box and click OK.

Across
- The sea cucumber is not a vegetable. It's an ______
- Past tense of EATY
- The ___ cucumber is found in the ocean

Down
- Homonym of MIND
- The two kinds of cucumber have the same
FINALS: The program presents three passages to test the student's critical thinking skills. The student answers three questions for each of the skills within the program. When the student has finished all the questions, a summary screen will show how the student did. The student gets a star for each correct answer and a check for skills in which the student has answered all questions correctly. A Questions Missed Report gives details for questions answered incorrectly.

The student may view the Questions Missed Report to see any questions the student missed on the Finals.

The report includes the passage, the correct answer, and what the student answered.

The Questions Missed Report is also available in the Online Portfolio.
Monitoring Student Work in the Online Portfolio

The Online Portfolio shows the student's summary screen for the most recently played section in the unit. To see the student's progress click earlier sections' radio buttons to view their summary screens. The Performance Detail also includes overview information about the unit in the left column.

Monitoring Student Work With Reports

Reports show student progress and performance through the sections of the program.

Reports are useful for viewing and exporting information about a whole class or information about one student over several classes.

Developing Critical Thinking Skills student work can be tracked with the following reports:

- Performance Summary Report
- Work-to-Date Report
- Performance Detail Report
Tips and Strategies Unit
The link to Tips and Strategies appears in the unit column of the Developing Critical Thinking Skills program in the student's Learning Center. Click the link to access Tips and Strategies.

We recommend teachers review the Tips and Strategies section with their students.

Tips and Strategies Menu

Tips and Strategies Sample

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