



## **USING CRITICAL THINKING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT)**

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**Abstract:** The innovation teaching methodology using critical thinking skills through cases, activities, exercises; disadvantages and advantages of using critical thinking skills in language learning lessons and enabling students to think and react independently in any situations, practicality and skillful usage of language teaching is described in the article

**Keywords:** critical thinking, ELT, integration, developing skills, methodology, problem solving, water, eco, eco-friendly

Using critical thinking in English language teaching involves encouraging learners not just to understand and produce language, but to analyze, evaluate, and apply it meaningfully. It shifts teaching beyond grammar and vocabulary memorization to fostering deeper comprehension, reasoning, and independent thought. Here's a detailed look at how to integrate critical thinking into ELT, along with strategies, benefits, and practical examples:

### **Why Use Critical Thinking in ELT?**

**Enhances Language Skills:** Students engage with language in more meaningful contexts, improving speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills.

**Develops Lifelong Skills:** Encourages analysis, problem-solving, and decision-making—useful beyond the classroom.

**Promotes Engagement:** Learners become active participants, not passive receivers.

**Builds Confidence:** Thinking critically gives learners more control over their language use and understanding.

### *Core Strategies to Foster Critical Thinking in ELT*

#### **1. Ask Open-Ended Questions**

Instead of: "What is the capital of France?"

Ask: "Why do you think Paris has become such an influential city?"

Encourages evaluation and reasoning.

#### **2. Use Authentic Materials**

Articles, videos, podcasts, interviews, and news stories provoke thought.

Example: After reading an article, ask: "What are the writer's assumptions? Do you agree?"

#### **3. Debates and Discussions**

Topics like social media, environmental issues, or education encourage argumentation and critical evaluation.

#### 4. Problem-Solving Tasks

Real-world scenarios where students propose and defend solutions using English.

#### 5. Compare and Contrast Activities

E.g., compare two characters from a novel, or two cultural traditions.

#### 6. Encourage Reflection

After tasks, ask students: "What did you learn? What would you do differently?"

**Example Activities.** Speaking: Debate. Topic: "Should homework be banned?"

Students prepare arguments for/against and justify their positions.

Reading: Critical Analysis. Read an editorial.

Ask: What is the author's main point? Are there biases?

Writing: Argumentative Essay

Topic: "Technology is making us less social."

Guide students to take a stance, provide evidence, and consider counterarguments.

Role Play. Scenario: Students act as city council members discussing how to reduce pollution. Encourages use of persuasive language and critical evaluation of ideas.

#### *Tips for Teachers*

Model critical thinking: Show how to question and evaluate texts or arguments. Create a safe environment: Encourage all ideas and avoid judgment. Use scaffolding: Start with guided questions before asking students to generate their own. Integrate Bloom's Taxonomy: Move from remembering → understanding → applying → analyzing → evaluating → creating.

Final Thought. Incorporating critical thinking into ELT turns language learning into a meaningful, active, and reflective process. It empowers students not only to use English, but to think in it, helping them grow both linguistically and intellectually.

Here's a sample lesson plan that integrates critical thinking into an English language class, designed for intermediate to upper-intermediate learners (B1–B2 CEFR level). You can adapt it for younger or older learners.

Lesson Plan: Critical Thinking through Debate

Objective: Effective usage of new innovations in teaching and enable students to be able to act independently and develop critical thinking

Students will: be able to think critically and use critical thinking. Practice speaking and listening skills. Analyze arguments and develop opinions. Use persuasive language and critical thinking to support their ideas.

Example: After reading an article, ask: "What are the writer's assumptions? Do you agree?" 3.

## Debates and Discussions

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Lesson Title: "Is Social Media More Harmful Than Helpful?"

Time: 60–75 minutes

Group Size: Pairs or small groups

Level: Intermediate – Upper Intermediate (B1–B2)

Materials Needed: Printed or digital article (short, balanced article on pros/cons of social media)

Whiteboard or digital board. Debate planner worksheet (optional – I can create one for you)

Lesson Procedure

1. Warm-Up (10 minutes)

Ask students: "What do you use social media for?"

"Can you think of any positive and negative effects of using it?"

List ideas on the board. Encourage students to explain why they think each point is good or bad.

2. Input: Reading & Critical Questions (15 minutes)

Give students a short article titled "Is Social Media Helping or Hurting Us?"

After reading, discuss in pairs or small groups:

What are the key points made? What is the author's opinion, if any?

Do you think the article is biased? Critical Thinking Focus: Evaluating evidence, identifying bias, questioning author intent.

3. Language Focus (10 minutes)

Introduce useful phrases for debating:

Agreeing: I see your point, but... / That's true, however...

Disagreeing: I don't think that's always the case / I see it differently...

Giving examples: For instance... / A good example of this is...

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7. Debate Time (15–20 minutes)

Each side presents their arguments.

Encourage polite interruptions, questions, rebuttals.

Optional: A moderator (teacher or student) guides the discussion.

8. Reflection & Feedback (10 minutes)

Ask: Which arguments were most convincing? Why?

Did your opinion change?

What was difficult about debating in English?

Critical Thinking Focus: Self-assessment, reasoning, perspective-shifting.

Assessment (Informal) Observe students' ability to: Express opinions clearly

Use critical thinking to build/rebut arguments. Participate actively

Extension Ideas Writing: Have students write an opinion essay on the topic.

Reading: Assign a follow-up article with a different perspective.

Listening: Use a TED Talk or podcast on social media and analyze its argument structure.

Critical thinking exercises in language teaching can significantly enrich learning, but they also come with some challenges. Here's a breakdown of their advantages and disadvantages:

### **Advantages of Critical Thinking Exercises in Language Teaching**

*Enhances Communication Skills.* Encourages students to express opinions, justify arguments, and engage in debates, which promotes more authentic language use.

*Builds confidence* in using the target language in real-world discussions.

*Promotes Deeper Understanding.* Moves students beyond rote memorization to analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information in the language.

*Helps internalize vocabulary* and grammar through meaningful use.

*Develops Cognitive Skills.* Stimulates higher-order thinking (analysis, inference, evaluation), which benefits both language learning and general intellectual growth.

*Cultural Awareness and Perspective-Taking.* Many critical thinking activities involve analyzing texts, media, or social issues, prompting students to explore cultural perspectives and question assumptions.

*Motivates Learners.* Real-world relevance and thought-provoking topics can increase student engagement and intrinsic motivation.

*Fosters Autonomy and Collaboration.* Encourages learners to take ownership of their learning, while also promoting group interaction and teamwork in discussions or problem-solving tasks.

### **Disadvantages of Critical Thinking Exercises in Language Teaching**

*Language Proficiency Barriers.* Low-level learners may struggle to express complex ideas, leading to frustration or disengagement.

May require more scaffolding than traditional exercises.

*Time-Consuming.* Requires more classroom time than drills or structured activities.

*Preparing and facilitating these exercises* can be demanding for teachers.

*Assessment Challenges.* Difficult to assess subjective or open-ended responses consistently. May not align well with standardized testing formats focused on discrete skills.

*Cultural Sensitivity Issues.* Some topics might touch on controversial or culturally sensitive areas that can cause discomfort or conflict in diverse classrooms.

**Teacher Preparation and Training.** Not all language teachers are trained in critical thinking pedagogy, which can lead to superficial or ineffective implementation.

**Classroom Management Concerns.** Encouraging open debate or discussion may lead to off-topic tangents, dominance by outspoken students, or even conflict if not well-managed.

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