

Critical Thinking: A Campus Life Casebook (2nd ed.)

By *Madeleine Picciotto*

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The transition to college life is often fraught with mixed emotions. While many students are eager to start a new chapter in their lives outside of the safe embrace of their parents' homes, they are often ill-equipped to think critically about the difficult changes and unexpected twists and turns that pepper the undergraduate experience. Without the daily guidance of their parents to help them navigate their way through conflict and moral dilemmas, many first year students find themselves feeling lost and overwhelmed.

In her book, *Critical Thinking: A Campus Life Casebook(2nd ed.)* Madeleine Picciotto provides students with practical tools that will help them make informed decisions, thus allowing them to rely less on their parents for answers to life's difficult questions. In this second edition, Picciotto details one of the most vital components in college student success: the art of critical thinking. While everyday life demands college

students to think critically, many students have never had formal training in the successful application of this skill. In a deceptively simple format, Picciotto presents college students with a step-by-step method for analyzing all angles of an argument or situation before making the decision to act. By using the fictional campus of Cromwell College as the setting, Picciotto helps familiarize student readers with “a set of techniques and approaches that will enable [them] to examine critically...the everyday events of college life.”

In perhaps the most important section of the book, Picciotto uses her introduction to detail the critical thinking process. The reader is introduced to Tanya, a student at Cromwell College who meets her friend Kevin in the library and listens to him rant about his sociology professor. After presenting Kevin’s argument about why his professor should not take attendance in class, Picciotto outlines the critical thinking steps Tanya must use to decide whether she agrees with Kevin’s argument. Picciotto explains the importance of identifying the central issue and thesis in an argument and how to detect some of the techniques people use (slanted language, euphemisms, and ambiguous words or phrases) to manipulate arguments in their favor. She also defines key concepts such as “tentative truth” versus “opinion” and “descriptive assumptions” versus “prescriptive or value assumptions,” and presents a checklist of 13 common logical fallacies that weaken arguments. Finally, Picciotto provides a step-by-step guide for critically analyzing arguments, and coaches the reader through these steps by applying them in additional scenarios.

Picciotto uses the next 15 chapters as forums for exercising the critical thinking skills outlined in the introduction. Each chapter is an individual case study that presents the reader with actual issues and dilemmas college students face on a daily basis. The scenarios presented in these case studies cover topics such as: roommate conflict, racism, religious freedom and the presence of cults on campus, fraternity hazing, issues of access and discrimination against the disabled, the stigmas attached to same-sex relationships, dealing with unplanned pregnancy, financial aid frustrations, off campus living, and faculty-student romance. At the conclusion of each chapter, Picciotto challenges the reader to think critically about the case by considering all aspects of the dilemma at hand. She asks the reader to consider personal feelings about the scenario by answering questions, role-playing possible solutions, and completing writing assignments. In addition to these in-depth scenarios, there are ten shorter mini-cases in the back of the book which ask the reader to analyze dilemmas such as: suspicion of theft, unhealthy relationships, and eating disorders. In an effort to present these case studies in a realistic context, Picciotto continues using Cromwell College as the setting, and provides the reader with a brief institutional history, a campus map, and a copy of the student code entitled *Cromwell College Regulations and Responsibilities*.

Picciotto tackles the sensitive issue of date rape in *Case 4: BOZ Will Be BOZ, Acquaintance Rape and Responsibility*. In this chapter, the reader is introduced to Angelica Caputo, Cromwell College’s resident “bad girl.” Besides being a favorite topic of conversation for Cromwell’s gossipy freshman class, Angelica is also a brilliant student, one of Cromwell’s “intellectual stars.” In this case study, Angelica claims to

have been date raped by three upperclassmen BOZ brothers at a rush event sponsored by their fraternity. After Angelica recounts the experience to her roommate, Picciotto takes a break in the story and asks the reader to consider whether Angelica's version of the facts constitute a violation of Cromwell's sexual misconduct policy. She also asks the reader to think about the mitigating circumstances surrounding the case. Does Angelica share some responsibility in what happened to her because she was scantily clad? Picciotto continues by giving the reader the BOZ brothers' side of the story. Again, she pauses and asks the reader to consider whether Angelica's flirtatious behavior towards the BOZ brothers constitutes consent. She also provides role-playing scenarios and writing exercises that ask the reader to consider the situation from the point of view of other students who attended the BOZ party, representatives on Cromwell's Greek Council, and members of the Judicial Advisory Committee (JAC). The scenario is further complicated when it is revealed that two of Angelica's classmates witnessed the event and heard Angelica's protests. Finally, after scrutinizing both sides of the argument presented to the Judicial Advisory Committee, the reader is asked to make a ruling in the case. Again, Picciotto challenges the reader to think critically about the evidence presented to the JAC before making a final decision.

Critical Thinking: A Campus Life Casebook (2nd ed.) is an invaluable resource because it teaches students how to analyze arguments and think critically. The book is especially applicable to first year students because each case study challenges them to consider how they might act if faced with difficult but real situations that occur everyday on college campuses across the nation. This book would also be helpful for professors teaching core courses or freshmen writing seminars because Picciotto provides ideas for group projects and individual reflection exercises. Finally, graduate students considering careers in student affairs will find *Critical Thinking* especially interesting because Cromwell's Dean of Students is one of the book's main characters. The scenarios presented will also assist new professionals in preparing for the types of students they may be working with and some of the situations they may encounter. This is an excellent resource for all members of the campus community and a must read for first year students.