

The background image shows a weathered, light blue doorway set into a dark, textured wall. The doorway is open, revealing a bright, sandy desert landscape with dunes and footprints. The scene is bathed in warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. A semi-transparent orange banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the title and presenter information.

# *How to integrate critical thinking at lower levels*

Presented by  
John Hughes

Bringing the world to the classroom and the classroom to life

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John Hughes is a teacher, teacher trainer and course book author. He has worked in ELT since 1992 and managed departments of Business English and Teacher Training. He currently combines a variety of roles including part-time teaching, running online training courses, and lecturing on ELT methodology at Oxford University in the summer. He has written many books with National Geographic Learning including *Spotlight on First*, *Practical Grammar (three levels)*, *Total Business 2*, *Success with BEC Vantage*, *Aspire*, and the six-level general English course series called *Life*.

He lives near Oxford and writes the blog [www.elteachertrainer.com](http://www.elteachertrainer.com) and is a contributor to the National Geographic Learning [In Focus Blog](#).





Create

Evaluate

Analyze

Apply

Understand

Remember



Create

Evaluate

Analyze

Apply

Understand

Remember

Creative thinking

Critical thinking

Basic comprehension



## A poll

A I think you can integrate critical thinking into your teaching at any language level. The challenges are the same.

B I think you can also integrate critical thinking at lower levels but it's more challenging to do.

C I don't think critical thinking is used so much at lower levels because we spend more time using lower order thinking skills to learn basic English.

D I don't think critical thinking is relevant at lower levels because students need to concentrate on learning basic English with lower order thinking.

# The critical thinking paradox



## **The critical thinking paradox**

**“Just because a student has lower level English, that doesn’t mean they have low level intelligence.”**

## **The critical thinking paradox**

**“Just because a student has lower level English, that doesn’t mean they have low level intelligence.”**

**“Tasks that are aimed at higher order thinking often require higher level language.”**



# The false perception of critical thinking

analyze      evaluate      bias

perspective      argument      conclusion      compare

contrast      judgement      relevance      inference      reflection

explanation      rationale      reasoned      emotive

elucidation



Create

"Present your idea to the class."

Evaluate

"Choose the best idea in your group."

Analyze

"Work in groups and read the list of ideas.  
Which do you like? Why?"

Apply

"Work in pairs. Plan a holiday with the phrases  
from the listening."

Understand

"Read the text and answer the true/false questions."

Remember

"Listen to these words and repeat them."



<http://www.englishprofile.org/>

**CEFR KEY = A1\*, A2\*\*, B1\*\*\***

## **REMEMBER**

Say\*

Repeat\*\* (say again\*)

Remember\*

Learn\*

Read/Listen\*

Write/Speak\*

## **UNDERSTAND**

Understand\*

Know\*

Find\*

Translate\*\*\*

Answer\*

Define\*\*\*

## **APPLY**

Use\*

Show\*

Practise\*

Describe\*\*

Match\*\*\*

Know why/how\*\*

## **ANALYZE**

Ask for/Look for\* (information)

Study\*

Test\*

Compare\*\*\*

Find out\*\*

Search/Research\*\*\*

## **EVALUATE**

Discuss\*

Think\*

Believe\*\*

Choose\*

Decide\*

List\*\*

## **CREATE**

Make\*

Draw\*

Plan\*

Write\*

Present

Solve\*\*\* (a problem\*)

# **Ten practical ways to integrate critical thinking at lower levels**

# 1. Teach students key language for CT tasks

## QUESTIONS

Why\*  
Where\*  
Who\*  
Which\*  
When\*  
What\*  
How\*

## GIVING AN OPINION

I think that...\*  
I believe that...\*  
I know that...\*  
It's excellent\*\*/great\*/good\*/OK\*/not very  
good\*/bad\*/terrible\*

## GIVING REASONS AND OPTIONS

Because\*  
So\*  
Or\*

## COMPARING AND CONTRASTING

It's better than.../the best\*  
It's more important than/the most important.\*  
But\*  
However\*

## ADDING AND EXEMPLIFICATION

And\*  
Also\*  
For example,\*  
In addition\*\*\*

## 2. Encourage students to use open questions

1. Are you a student?
2. Is there a television in your house?
3. Do you have a car?
4. Do you often use social media?
5. Do you like food from different countries?
6. Did you do anything fun at the weekend?

## 2. Encourage students to use open questions

1. Are you a student?
2. Is there a television in your house?
3. Do you have a car?
4. Do you often use social media?
5. Do you like food from different countries?
6. Did you do anything fun at the weekend?

What...?    Where...?    Who...?    Why...?    When...?

How long...?    How much/many...?

# 3. Build in personalization

## Exercises

### 1 Underline the correct word.

- 1 I am/are Olga.
- 2 You am/are Nick.
- 3 You 'm / 're a student.
- 4 I 'm/'re a teacher.
- 5 I 'm/'re from London.
- 6 You 'm/'re from Beijing.

### 2 Write 'm or 're.

- 1 Angie: Hello, I \_\_\_\_\_ Angie.
- 2 Helen: Hi Angie. I \_\_\_\_\_ Helen.
- 3 Angie: You \_\_\_\_\_ in my English lesson.
- 4 Helen: Yes, I \_\_\_\_\_ a student from Germany. You \_\_\_\_\_ from France.
- 5 Angie: Yes. I \_\_\_\_\_ from Paris.

### 3 Write I or You.

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_'m Peter.
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_'re Chen.
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ am a teacher.
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ are a student.
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_'m from England and \_\_\_\_\_'re from the USA.

### 4 Write sentences about you .

- I'm \_\_\_\_\_.(name)  
I'm a \_\_\_\_\_. (teacher/student)  
I'm from \_\_\_\_\_. (country/city)

### 5 Write sentences about a student in your class.

- You're \_\_\_\_\_. (name)  
You're a \_\_\_\_\_. (teacher/student)  
You're from \_\_\_\_\_. (country/city)



## 4. Make students create the exercise

### 1 Write the words in the sentences.

sofa   painting   curtains   cupboard   lamp

1 That's a beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ on the wall.

2 Can you look in the \_\_\_\_\_ for my book.

3 We can all sit on the \_\_\_\_\_. It's big enough.

4 Turn the \_\_\_\_\_ on if you can't see.





5 Open the \_\_\_\_\_. The view from the window is fantastic.

**2 Write five sentences with gaps for these words: *desk, plant, carpet, TV, photo***

**Then test your partner.**

# 5. Get students to say 'why'

fantastic   not bad   It was fun  
nice   boring   terrible!   ~~OK~~   fine  
not very good   It was funny   Great!

			
<i>Fantastic</i>		<i>OK</i>	

Today is ... because...

Last weekend was ... because...

The new song by ..... is ... because...

The new film with ... is ... because...

## 6. Go beyond basic comprehension questions

**Read the text and answer the questions.**

- 1 Is Santiago de Cali and Cali the same city?
- 2 What is the population of Cali?
- 3 What river is in Cali?
- 4 When is it normally dry in Cali?

Santiago de Cali is in southwest Colombia. Most people call it 'Cali'. It has a population of 2.3 million and it's the third largest city in Colombia. The main river in Cali is the Cauca River. The dry seasons are December to March and July to August.

## 6. Go beyond basic comprehension questions

**1 Who did the writer write it for? (students, tourists, older visitors)**

**2 What are the topics in each text? (art, history, business, sport, etc.)**

Cali in southwest Colombia is a city with a lot of new business. It has a good airport for visitors, with comfortable hotels. There is good public transport, but the taxis are the fastest way to get around. Most good restaurants are in the centre of Cali and serve a mix of traditional and international food.

People in Cali work hard and play even harder! The city is famous for its music and nightclubs. It's the home of Salsa in Colombia and you can take courses with some of the best dancers in the world. August and September are good months to visit because of the Festival of Pacific music and the World Festival of Salsa.

## 6. Go beyond basic comprehension questions

**Plan a paragraph about your town or city. Think about:**

- The type of reader
- The types of topics

**Then write your paragraph (50-60 words)**

# 7. As with language, grade the CT task

## Example A

### Critical thinking fact or opinion

- 4** Look at the sentences (1–6) from the article.  
Which sentences:
- a give facts?
  - b give the author's opinion?
- 1 He can jump between twenty and thirty metres.
  - 2 Cliff diving is a very exciting extreme sport.
  - 3 In this photo, American Andy Lewis walks above a canyon.
  - 4 Highlining is a great adventure.
  - 5 The landscape is perfect.
  - 6 Extreme paragliders can fly over 3,000 metres high.

## Example B

### Critical thinking fact or opinion?

- 6** Look at the sentences (1–6) from the article.  
Which sentences:
- a give facts?
  - b give the author's opinion?
  - c report other people's opinion?
- 1 The email inbox shows 243 unread emails.
  - 2 The good news is that now there is an excellent website to help people like me.
  - 3 When Ryan Nicodemus and Joshua Fields Millburn set up this website, they had 52 visitors in the first month.
  - 4 Some people also think that there is a problem with having lots of stuff in our heads.
  - 5 People said they were bored of watching TV.
  - 6 We should also have less stuff in our heads.

# 7. As with language, grade the CT task

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# 8. Use information-rich photos





## 8. Use information-rich photos

The Foster family with their plastic possessions, in Ohio, USA

A photograph of the Foster family in their yard, surrounded by a massive accumulation of plastic items. A young boy sits in a blue inflatable pool, while a girl leans on a large yellow exercise ball. The yard is filled with shoes, balls, and other plastic goods, with a house and a car in the background.



## 9. Move onto creativity



Women chat on the station platform in Winterthur, Switzerland.

# 10. Use more than one teaching approach

*We visited Rome last year.  
I worked in London last week.  
He lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.  
She studied art in 2015.*

1. Is the action in the past or the present?
2. What do we add to the verb?
3. What is different about the verbs *live* and *study*?

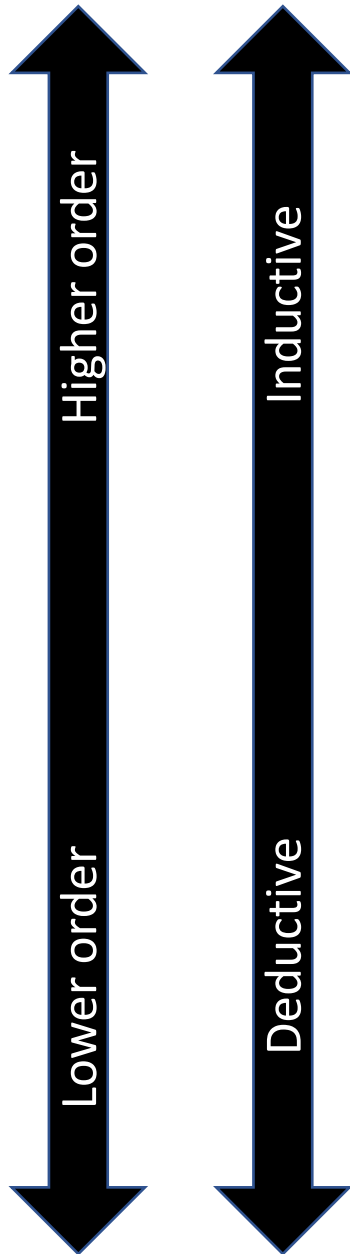
## PAST SIMPLE REGULAR VERBS



*We visited Rome last year.  
He lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.  
She studied art in 2015.*

Use the past simple to talk about finished actions.

# 10. Use more than one teaching approach



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# Ten practical ways to integrate critical thinking at lower levels

1. Teach students key language for CT tasks
2. Encourage students to use open questions
3. Build in personalization
4. Make students create the exercise
5. Get students to say 'why'
6. Go beyond basic comprehension questions
7. As with language, grade the CT task
8. Use information-rich photos
9. Move onto creativity
10. Use more than one teaching approach

## **The critical thinking paradox**

**“Just because a student has lower level English, that doesn’t mean they have low level intelligence.”**

**“Tasks that are aimed at higher order thinking require higher level language.”**

## The critical thinking **solution**

**“Just because a student has lower level English, that doesn’t mean they have low level intelligence.”**

**“Tasks that are aimed at higher order thinking **don’t have to use** higher level language.”**



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# Take part in a survey on critical thinking

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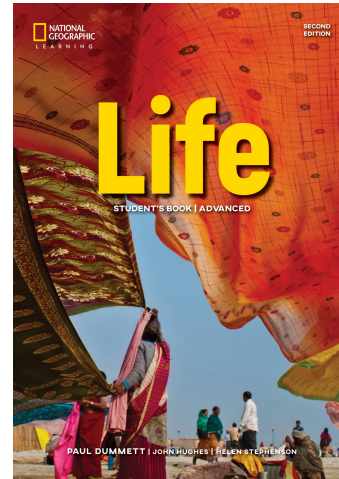
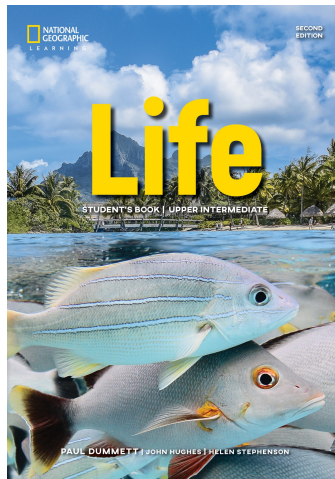
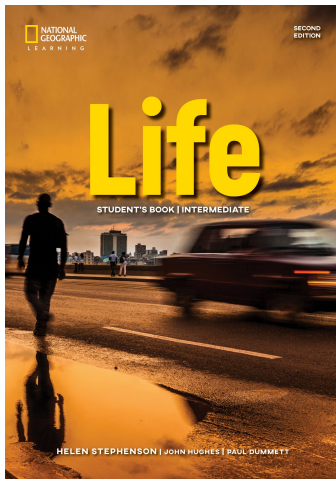
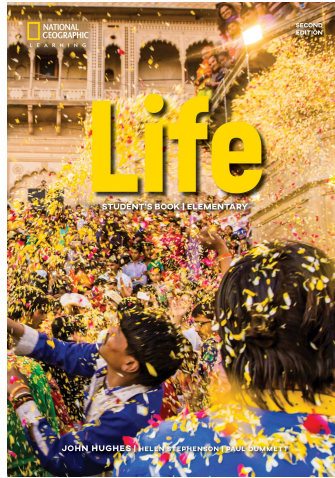
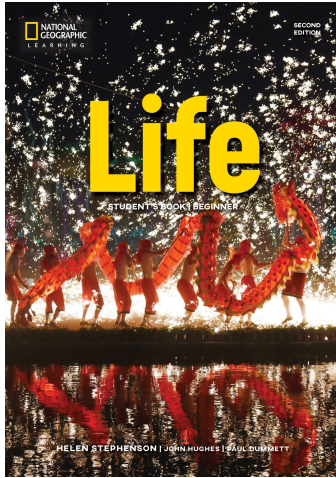
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