

Universal Intellectual Standards

Paul has been a forceful advocate in favour of a set of “universal intellectual standards” that can be used to assess or evaluate thinking (Pasch and Norsworthy 14).

Paul believes that there are standards which must be applied to thinking in order to check the quality of reasoning related to a problem, issue, or situation. To help students learn the standards, instructors should pose questions which require students to apply them (10). He asserts that “the ultimate goal is for these standards to become infused in the thinking of students, forming part of their inner voice, which then guides them to better and better reasoning” (13). Some of the most essential standards are:

1. Clarity:

Clarity is a gateway standard. Students cannot determine whether a statement is accurate or relevant if it is unclear. Unclear statements might need more elaboration, examples, illustration and/or expressing a point in another way (10).

2. Accuracy:

A statement can be clear but not accurate (not true), as in “most dogs are over 300 pounds in weight” (10).

3. Precision:

Sometimes a statement needs more details and specifications. A statement can be clear and accurate, but not precise, as in “Jack is overweight.” Jack’s weight is not mentioned; is it one pound or 500 pounds (10)?

4. Relevance:

A statement might not be relevant to the question at issue, i.e., it is not related to the problem (Paul 10). For example, talking about the benefits of having green tea in a passage which mainly deals with the benefits of colours.

5. Depth:

A statement can be superficial, which means lacking depth. It fails to deal with the complexities of the issue. For example, the statement “Just Say No”, which is often used to discourage children and teens from using drugs, is clear, accurate, precise, and relevant. Nevertheless, it lacks depth because it treats an extremely complex issue superficially (11).

6. Breadth:

Breadth means that all sides of an issue or a problem are taken into consideration. Questions such as “does the author need to consider another point of view?” or “Is there another way to look at this question?” help determine the breadth of a statement. A line of reasoning may be clear, accurate, precise, and deep, but still lack breadth if it only recognizes the insights of one side of the question (11).

7. Logic:

During thinking a variety of thoughts are brought together into some order. When the combinations of thoughts are mutually supporting and make sense in combinations, the thinking is logical. When the

combination is contradictory in some sense, it does not make sense; it is illogical (12).

8. Significance:

When ideas or materials are important, they are significant.

Questions such as the following can be asked to determine significance:

- Is this the most important problem to consider?
- Is this the central idea to focus on?
- Which of these facts are most important?
- Is the text important? (12)

9. Fairness

The author might consider only his own viewpoint or some sides of an issue or a topic and ignore the others because they do not associate with what s/he believes. Students may be asked the following question: Are viewpoints of others presented in the text? (13).