

**Teaching the Right Things?  
or Why Maclean's is a Waste of Good Lignin.  
by Blanche DuBois**

Yo MacLean's and profs one and all! What are we doing to our students, eh? So you think you're a good teacher/professor from one of those top 10 schools like Mount Allison, St. Francis-Xavier, Acadia, Winnipeg or Taranna?

Below is a self-administered test. Check which of these skills you think you are imparting in those courses you teach. I've linked them to three categories: Seek, Ponder and Tell.

\* ***Seek:***

Can your students do any of the following:

- Plan a Search:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ decide what information is needed;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ choose among sources;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ choose strategies (e.g., survey, interviews, observation, experiment, reference works) for obtaining information; and
  - \_\_\_\_\_ construct a systematic search procedure.
  
- Use Various Methods of Observation and Discovery:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ distinguish the rational from the emotional;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ apply quantitative, philosophical, aesthetic; empirical, or other methods as appropriate;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ understand new concepts and models;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ use multiple approaches for information gathering;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ locate sources of information; and
  - \_\_\_\_\_ observe accurately and record precisely.
  
- Comprehend and Extract:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ find the main ideas in complex material;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ derive a clear statement of the problem;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ relate arguments or evidence to conclusions; and
  - \_\_\_\_\_ extract information from various formats, representations, or presentations.
  
- Sort and Evaluate:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ determine whether the information gathered is sufficient;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ deal with inadequate, irrelevant, unreliable, or conflicting information;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ infer the intent, viewpoint, and expertise of a writer;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ recognize deception and manipulation;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ recognize how a writer achieves his or her effects; and
  - \_\_\_\_\_ summarize or organize into models.

*Ponder:*

Can your students do any of the following:

- Formulate Hypotheses and Strategies for Analysis:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ construct one or more hypotheses consistent with a set of data;  
 \_\_\_\_\_ choose one or more strategies for analyzing the data; and  
 \_\_\_\_\_ apply a variety of quantitative and nonquantitative techniques.
  
- Apply Techniques, Rules, and Models to Solve Problems:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ select the appropriate techniques, rules, or models for a given situation;  
 \_\_\_\_\_ use the techniques, rules, or models with accuracy and;  
 \_\_\_\_\_ evaluate competing hypotheses, rules, models, or strategies.
  
- Demonstrate Breadth, Flexibility, and Creativity:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ apply familiar models, rules, and understandings in unfamiliar subject  
 areas, cultures, or problems:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ translate information from one medium to another;  
 \_\_\_\_\_ modify analyses in response to new information;  
 \_\_\_\_\_ deal with unfamiliar issues, cultures, art forms, and areas of knowledge;  
 \_\_\_\_\_ construct original ideas or products; and  
 \_\_\_\_\_ synthesize information from different sources or formats.
  
- Evaluate Assumptions, Evidence, and Reasoning:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ distinguish fact from opinion and first-hand from second-hand  
 information;  
 \_\_\_\_\_ evaluate evidence for adequacy, relevance, reliability, credibility, utility,  
 and completeness; and  
 \_\_\_\_\_ evaluate reasoning for validity, completeness, appropriateness, and  
 consideration of opposing evidence.
  
- Find Relationships and Draw Conclusions:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ find causal and noncausal relationships;  
 \_\_\_\_\_ recognize strengths and weaknesses in analogies;  
 \_\_\_\_\_ recognize which differences and similarities are relevant and significant;  
 and  
 \_\_\_\_\_ evaluate conclusions for plausibility and reasonableness.

- Writing Effectively:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ prepare a draft;  
 \_\_\_\_\_ revise a draft into presentable form;  
 \_\_\_\_\_ use language effectively and precisely; and  
 \_\_\_\_\_ achieve emphasis, coherence, appropriateness, and clarity.
  
- Communicate Quantitative or Visual Information:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ prepare drafts, tables, charts, and illustrations;  
 \_\_\_\_\_ make quantitative or visual relationships clear; and  
 \_\_\_\_\_ integrate graphical, visual, and statistical information into written presentations.”

Your students should be able to do the above after spending a year with you. It’s more than narrative, projection and parable and more than solving an equation. You guessed it. Taken in total, it is critical thinking. It’s what you mythmakers in liberal arts and sciences purport to do as a result of reading those old yellow notes. Get my meaning?

If Maclean’s could measure this, rankings would mean something. But listen up, the chance of doing this is between zero and nil. My guess is that Brandon students have a better chance at achieving critical thinking than most others, interacting with professors close up, being crucial. Then again, I object to being rated by Maclean’s, since it is like a car being rated by the makers of the Trabant. Go figure. Aye!

**Teaching I.Q.—Total your score.**

10 – 20	-	O. K.
20 – 30	-	Superior
30 – 40	-	Genetic Drift
40 – 50	-	You’re lying and teach at _____

\* My thanks to ETS of Princeton, NJ, for inspiring this rant. It’s been 15 years since I first visited them and spoke to their experts about “Tasks in Critical Thinking” which they developed for the New Jersey Department of Education in 1988.

