



Critical Thinking Skills Resources Overview



Resources to Help Students Develop Their Critical Thinking Skills

Just like accounting, biology, and literature, critical thinking can be taught. With employers consistently ranking critical thinking as one of the most important skills, your students need intentional instruction and practice to develop their abilities. CAE's Critical Thinking Skills Resources include scenarios designed to enhance students' critical thinking skills when integrated into your curriculum.

Each scenario presents students with real-world situations and covers the key concepts of critical thinking skills: organizing information, defining the problem, analyzing data, preparing arguments, critiquing arguments, and communicating conclusions. The following pages provide a sampling of the scenarios available. If you are interested in custom scenarios for your curriculum, please let us know.

CAE's Critical Thinking Skills Resources provide student and faculty materials along with the scenarios, including a Critical Thinking Framework that helps students understand and apply the steps to demonstrate critical thinking. Faculty training is available to assist educators with incorporating critical thinking skills into course content.

Sample Critical Thinking Practice Scenarios



Bayville Commuter Rail

Summary: Introduces critical thinking skills concepts to students.

Time: 3 classroom sessions (150 minutes)

Student Role & Task: You are a local elected official in Bayville, a sprawling city on the west bank of the Eagle River. Recently, a severe storm hit Bayville and flooded the Blue Line commuter rail tunnel, which connects Bayville to the neighboring city of Carston. The flooding caused severe damage to the tracks and electrical systems, resulting in greatly reduced operations.

You are preparing for a meeting to decide on a repair plan. The executive assistant to the Bayville city council has assembled four documents for you and the other council members to read and analyze before the meeting. Your task is to analyze all of the information in the following documents, answer a set of questions, and write a memo recommending a repair plan.



New Horizons

Summary: Provides students with practice applying their critical thinking skills in a business scenario which includes the following business concepts:

- Manufacturing operations
- MIS
- Supply chain management
- Finance
- Accounting
- Marketing
- Management

Time: 7 classroom sessions (350 minutes)

Student Role & Task: New Horizons is one of Europe's largest producers of photovoltaic (PV) solar panels. In an effort to become one of the world's leading sustainable energy producers, they have decided to expand from Germany to the U.S. market and are looking for a city in which to establish a new factory. They have narrowed down their search to 2 finalists: Danville, a mid-sized urban city which sits between two major metropolitan areas in the Midwest and Eaton Shores, a less urban, coastal city in the Eastern U.S.

They have hired you to research and recommend a site for their new factory.



The Green Grocer

Summary: Provides students with practice applying their critical thinking skills in a business scenario which includes the following business concepts:

- Managerial accounting: Expenses, inventory management, in stock, price per unit, price per volume (cubic inch)
- Supply chain management and ESG: Carbon footprint, shipping weight, product ban, visible pollution, petroleum use, solids in air emissions, shipping weight, decomposition, reusable materials
- Marketing: Publicity, public relations, consumer opinion, consumer behavior, consumer surveys, market segments, target market, demographics, psychographics

Time: 1 classroom session (50 minutes)

Student Role & Task: You have been the Manager of the Green Grocer, a grocery and health food store. The co-owners have asked for your help in deciding which type of shopping bag will be the most environmentally friendly, cost effective and in line with customer expectations.

Your task is to explore three shopping bag options and recommend the one that is aligned with the environmental ideals and economic needs of the store and its stakeholders.



Wagner's Home & Farm Supply

Summary: Provides students with practice applying their critical thinking skills in a business scenario which includes the following business concepts:

- Retail operations: Shrinkage
- Finance: Investment, finance, debt
- Accounting: Fiscal year, wages and benefits, costs
- Retail operations: Shrinkage, book inventory, physical inventory
- MIS: Data, information systems, data management system, analytics
- Management: Contingency planning, allocation of resources
- Marketing: Consumer opinion

Time: 1 classroom session (50 minutes)

Student Role & Task: You have just been hired as the Regional Director for a regional chain of 38 family-owned general merchandise stores located in rural areas of the upper Midwest.

One of your store managers shared his concerns with the self-checkout lanes that were installed a year ago. There has been a major increase in shoplifting, and his profit margins are impacted. Other stores are having the same issue.

Your task is to bring a recommendation to the company Chief Financial Officer to best address the self-checkout problem while also supporting Wagner's business goals and customer expectations.



Clayton Hill Hat Mill

Summary: Provides students with practice applying their critical thinking skills in a business scenario which includes the following business concepts:

- Finance: Interest, financing, risk
- Marketing: Consumer opinions, trends, and habits; social media; internet searches and online advertising; brand loyalty; consumer behavior
- Management information systems (MIS): Data analytics
- Marketing: Marketing strategies, pay-per-click (PPC) advertising
- Accounting: Assets, budget
- Supply Chain: Inventory, fulfillment

Time: 1 classroom session (50 minutes)

Student Role & Task: The Clayton Hill Hat Mill is a consortium of artisan crafters specializing in the production of traditional hand-made hats. They sell their wares at local farmers' markets and craft fairs from late spring until early fall. They also have a simple website where they post hours and contact information and provide a photo gallery of some of their products.

Their hats have garnered enough attention and sales that they are looking to expand their business. They are debating between opening a traditional brick-and-mortar store or building their existing website into an e-commerce site to sell their products.

Your role is to help them develop potential business strategies for their new venture and provide recommendations.





Clayton Hill Hat Mill Market Segments

Summary: Provides students with practice applying their critical thinking skills in a business scenario which includes the following business concepts:

- Management: Sustainability
- Accounting: Price, revenue
- Marketing: Market, market segmentation, trends, demographics (age, education level, gender identity), psychographics, quantitative data, qualitative data, behavioral data (customer buying interests, previous purchases, how customers first heard of the company or product), social media
- Business strategy: E-commerce

Time: 1 classroom session (50 minutes) + a written assignment

Student Role & Task: The Clayton Hill Hat Mill is a consortium of artisan crafters, specializing in the production of traditional hand-made hats made from a variety of products such as felted wool, straw, knitted textiles, and cotton. What started as a group of hatmakers—with each making their own hats in isolation and selling together at a shared booth at farmers’ markets and craft fairs on the weekends—has turned into a more established business, including both a brick-and-mortar storefront and an e-commerce website from which to sell their wares.

The brick-and-mortar store operates as both a studio space, where customers can watch the hat-making process and request fittings and alterations, and a shop where they can purchase hats on display. Their e-commerce website allows buyers to make custom requests or purchase some of the company’s best-selling items from overflow inventory.

While the company has been profitable—increasing sales revenue for five straight years—there is room for growth. The Clayton Hill Hat Mill has hired you as a marketing consultant to help them research the hat industry, its market segments and to recommend the best one for the Clayton Hill Hat Mill.



Leena Ray’s Breads & Spreads

Summary: Provides students with practice applying their critical thinking skills in a business scenario which includes the following business concepts:

- Managerial Accounting: Income statement, fixed costs, variable costs, break even point, degree of operating leverage
- Operations: Customer wait time, automation
- Marketing: Customer loyalty, upselling, consumer opinion

Time: 1 classroom session (50 minutes)

Student Role & Task: Leena Ray’s Breads & Spreads offers middle eastern food using fresh ingredients with great customer service. They are known for their handmade hummus and hot shawarma sandwich. The restaurant has become very popular, and this causes customers to wait in long lines. The owner, Leena, has observed that some of the customers drop out of the line before making it to the counter to place their orders. Not wanting to “leave money on the table,” she is seeking help from you in preparing a strategy for speeding up the pace of service.

You must decide whether to increase labor or automation based on the relative risk of each option, the impact on sales, and customer preference.



Colossal Retail vs. WEVA

Summary: Provides students with practice applying their critical thinking skills in a business scenario which includes the following business concepts:

- Strategy: E-commerce, innovation, disruption, pricing, international business, supplier relationships
- Operations: Supply chain management, shipping, manufacturing, quality assurance
- Marketing: Social media, advertising, target market, market share

Time: 1 classroom session (50 minutes)

Student Role & Task: *This pair of scenarios allows one classroom to examine two sides of a strategic situation by comparing the approaches of competing online retail companies.*

Scenario 1

Colossal Retail is an e-commerce company known for its vast online marketplace, which offers an extensive range of products from electronics and apparel to groceries and digital services.

You work in the strategic planning office of Colossal's CEO and your team has been tasked with recommending an approach to respond to the threat of WEVA.

Scenario 2

Founded in China just three years ago, WEVA is known for its extensive product selection, which includes electronics, fashion, home goods, and more. It operates as a marketplace, connecting consumers with third-party sellers from around the world, but particularly from manufacturers in China. WEVA's innovation is that it ships directly from Chinese wholesalers to consumers. The platform emphasizes affordability and convenience, catering to cost-conscious shoppers by providing free shipping and frequent promotions.

You work in the strategic planning office of WEVA's CEO, and your team has been tasked with recommending an approach to expand WEVA's revenues, customer awareness, and market share without dramatically increasing costs.

This is a sampling of the critical thinking scenarios available as part of CAE's Critical Thinking Resources. Our team will work with you to determine the best scenarios to incorporate into your curriculum. We can also develop custom scenarios. Please contact us with questions and to discuss the needs of your program. www.cae.org/contact-us or 212.661.5800.