

CRITO Outline¹

I. Conclusion: Begin by stating your central claim or thesis in the form of a declarative sentence (followed by a brief explanation of its terms, if necessary). Your conclusion (thesis) should be explicit and clear, substantive, and the object of possible or actual reasoned debate. It should be something you believe to be true, and in which you have a genuine interest.

II. Reasons: Summarize briefly each of the reasons (premises, evidence, examples...) you will muster in support of your conclusion. They should be collectively sufficient to convince a thoughtful reader of the truth (accuracy, credibility...) of your conclusion.

III. Inference: Put the central argument of your essay into *standard form*, so as to be certain that it is sufficient to constitute a valid deductive, or strong inductive, argument for your conclusion.

IV. Truth: Consider the probable truth or falsity of each of your reasons, so as to assess the soundness (if deductive), or cogency (if inductive) of your central argument.

V. Objection: As far as the argument proper is concerned, if C, R, I, and T have been satisfied, your work should be complete. However, it is possible (and in actual practice quite likely) that you have missed something: a different perspective from which some element of your argument seems wanting, or some piece of overlooked evidence or interpretation. Therefore, it is very helpful (and also strengthens the persuasiveness of your essay for those inclined to disagree with it) to give full consideration to the strongest objection you can raise to some aspect of your argument. That is, what if a reasonable and intelligent person thought your conclusion, or one of your reasons, or the inference itself, had somehow missed the mark? After presenting the strongest possible objection to your argument and according it serious consideration – that is, developing it fully and sympathetically – respond to it as completely and respectfully as you can.

¹ This analytical format for examining and refining the reasoning of a position paper was developed by David K. Johnson and Matthew R. Silliman. Many of our students have found it to be of great help in writing papers for any discipline.