



# Become Certified in the Paul-Elder Framework for Critical Thinking™

*Foundation for Critical Thinking, February 2024*

## **Purpose and Overall Approach to the Foundation for Critical Thinking Certification Process:**

### **Introduction**

The Paul-Elder Framework for Critical Thinking™ is the most integrated approach to critical thinking in the world and is based in the natural languages we speak every day. Our approach – also referred to as the Paulian Approach to Critical Thinking™ – offers a developed language for critical thinking and a conceptual framework that can be incorporated into the core of teaching and learning at all levels. It is directly relevant to skilled reasoning in every domain of human life; we advance a fairminded, robust conception of critical thinking across education and society.

Those certified in our approach (“facilitators,” also referred to as “certified facilitators”) are well-versed in the foundations of critical thinking and embrace substantive, fairminded critical thinking as essential to the cultivation of the educated mind and the creation of ethical, compassionate critical societies across the world.

It is understood that internalizing critical thinking concepts and principles occurs over many years of study in the field; however through an intensive training program in critical thinking, facilitators can learn critical thinking at a level that will enable them to facilitate understanding of the foundational tools, concepts, and principles in the Paul-Elder Framework – a disciplined, explicit, robust approach to critical thinking.

As they advance, facilitators will continue to deepen their understanding of critical thinking over time through additional training.

When people have internalized the basic concepts and tools implicit in a fairminded, rigorous conception of critical thinking, and when they actively and routinely practice contextualizing these principles in problem-solving and decision-making, their thinking – and hence the quality of their choices and actions – improves. One develops as a critical thinker in a way that is similar to how one develops as a basketball player, ballet dancer, or pianist. First, one must understand the basic principles; second, one must regularly engage in self-monitored, self-evaluative practice (putting the principles to work in various contexts) to progressively upgrade one’s understanding and skill.

## Material Benefits

1. Those currently certified in our approach have demonstrated to the Foundation for Critical Thinking that they can competently and accurately facilitate understanding of the foundational tools, concepts, and principles of the Paul-Elder Framework for Critical Thinking. In practice, this means that:
  - a. Educational leaders (e.g., curriculum designers, professional development leaders, instructional coordinators, etc.) can facilitate understanding of fundamental Paul-Elder critical thinking tools, concepts, and principles with their colleagues.
  - b. Educators can prove to their administrations that they are able to facilitate understanding of fundamental Paul-Elder critical thinking tools, concepts, and principles with their students.
  - c. Consultants, trainers, coaches, etc.\* can facilitate understanding of fundamental Paul-Elder critical thinking tools, concepts, and principles with their clients and employees.

\*Certified consultants and other facilitators teaching critical thinking “for profit” are subject to unique responsibilities. These are detailed below in the section “Mechanics of the Paul-Elder Critical Thinking Certification Program,” under the heading “Fees and Ongoing Requirements for Certification” in item #6.

2. Facilitators are authorized, but only while actively certified, to announce this certification on their websites and in other marketing materials for consulting services.\* Those currently certified may also include their certification status in their curriculum vitae.

*\*All wording is subject to approval by the Foundation for Critical Thinking.*

3. The Foundation for Critical Thinking *may* publicly acknowledge certified facilitators on any of its websites, including [www.criticalthinking.org](http://www.criticalthinking.org), and in its email communications to its community. (We will not do this for any facilitator who prefers not to be acknowledged in this way.)
4. Facilitators are given a facilitator’s manual full of lessons and activities to use with students, colleagues, clients, and employees.

## General Educational Benefits

This certification program is organized on the principle that one learns critical thinking by engaging one's mind in thinking critically. Those in the program will engage in a variety of activities through which they will internalize critical thinking concepts and principles (while applying them to the logic of problems and issues within academic disciplines and/or the workplace). As their learning progresses, participants will increasingly develop their ability to facilitate others' understanding of critical thinking as well.

Through our certification program, participants increasingly internalize these critical thinking foundations:

1. Understanding the pervasive role of thinking in human life.
2. Understanding the problems common to human thought, which serve as barriers to skilled thinking within all disciplines and all parts of life.
3. Understanding critical thinking as essential to high-quality thinking within any subject, discipline, profession, or domain of thought.
4. Understanding how to analyze thinking by focusing on its parts or "elements."
5. Understanding the importance of adhering to intellectual standards while reasoning through problems and issues in any domain of human thought.
6. Understanding the importance of fostering intellectual virtues across instruction and society at all levels, and in all disciplines and professions.
7. Rethinking content as a mode of thinking and analyzing the foundational logic of subjects and disciplines.
8. Fostering deep and transformative learning through close reading.
9. Distinguishing between questions of fact, of preference, and of judgment, and recognizing the importance of these distinctions in teaching, learning, work, and daily life.
10. Seeing the development of critical thinking as unfolding in stages, and as involving deep commitment on the part of the learner.
11. Understanding the relationships between thinking, feeling, and motivation.
12. Comprehending and appreciating the formidable barriers to critical thinking that can be categorized under the terms *egocentric* and *sociocentric* thinking.

## Educational Benefits for Educational Leaders

Educational leaders (e.g., curriculum designers, department heads, professional development leaders, instructional coordinators, etc.) in our program come to explicitly recognize that critical thinking is not just one of many divergent educational aims, but rather a way of teaching and learning at a high level of effectiveness within any subject, field, or discipline. Commitment to internalizing the first principles of critical thinking is required of program participants, who will come to see, by degrees, that critical thinking is essential to:

- Properly designing instruction at all levels and in all fields of study.
- Internalizing and thinking through any content one is learning.
- Effectively reasoning through life's daily issues, problems, and decisions.

When immersed in our program over time, facilitators come to recognize that teaching in a critical manner is essential for:

- Skilled reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
- Skilled reasoning within all subject areas.
- Skilled decision-making and problem-solving in all parts of life.
- Skilled analysis and evaluation of one's emotions and values.
- Intelligent choices in human relationships.
- Skilled decision-making in the workplace.
- Teaching students, colleagues, employees, clients, etc. how to take command of their own reasoning in all parts of life.
- Skilled civic choices, personal choices, etc. . . .

### **Educational Benefits for Consultants and Employers**

Critical thinking is essential not only in education, but in the workplace at all levels. Therefore, some may seek certification in our approach for the purpose of facilitating understanding and contextualization of critical thinking in professional life.

To reason well through complex problems and issues requires that today's managers and employees be skilled in the analysis of thought, or in other words, deconstructing it to identify its parts – the elements of reasoning (such as assumptions, information, inferences, concepts, and point of view) – in order to understand the basic logic of one's reasoning and of the issues one is facing. They must also be able to assess their own and others' reasoning by using universal intellectual standards such as clarity, accuracy, relevance, precision, logic, and significance.

Those in our program will learn to more explicitly and systematically:

- Identify goals and purposes.
- Gather relevant information.
- Formulate questions clearly and precisely.
- Determine the assumptions they and others are using and examine those assumptions for justifiability.
- Think through the implications of the decisions that they and others make and what solutions they come to.
- Make logical and accurate inferences and interpretations.
- Articulate the concepts or ideas guiding their thinking and that of others.
- Consider alternate ways of looking at problems and situations.

Through our certification program, employers and consultants learn to help managers, employees, and/or clients:

- Use the foundational principles of critical thinking in everyday choices.
- Discover ways and means for using critical thinking as a set of tools for thinking deeply through the questions, issues, and challenges they face in their work.
- Develop the art of intelligent decision-making using critical thinking concepts.
- Understand the important long-term implications and benefits of building a critical thinking culture within the organization.
- Develop the skills, abilities, and traits of the critical person and the critical mind.
- Understand the importance of developing critical thinking skills, abilities, and traits for reasoning well through complex issues.
- Understand critical thinking as the key to high-quality reasoning within any domain of thought or work.
- Understand how to analyze thinking by focusing on its parts or elements, and how to use the elements of reasoning in working through decisions and problems.
- Understand the importance of universal intellectual standards in thinking, and how to apply these standards to workplace decisions.
- Understand the fundamental barriers to critical thinking development.
- Understand the relationship between cognition and affect, and how emotions and desires influence work performance for better or worse at all times.

**Mechanics of the Paul-Elder Critical Thinking Certification Program:**

**Those wishing to become certified in our approach must successfully complete the following:**

**1. Prerequisites: Initial and Intermediate Internalization of the Foundations in the Paul-Elder Framework for Critical Thinking**

This may be accomplished through one or more of the following:

- a. successful completion of one of our semester-long [online courses](#) and engaged attendance\* at one of our [live events](#) or [guided study groups](#),
- or-
- b. engaged attendance\* at three (3) or more of our [live events](#), [guided study groups](#), on-site or online professional development programs (customized for your organization), or a combination of these.

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*\*Engaged attendance* means you are actively participating in the sessions and completing the assignments (both in-session activities and homework where applicable) to the satisfaction of our instructor(s).

We may provide exemptions to the Internalization prerequisite in some cases. In such instances, we will ask the applicant to articulate in writing the primary theory in the Paul-Elder framework for Critical Thinking to the satisfaction of the Foundation for Critical Thinking.

If you have worked with our approach in some significant manner not listed above, please [contact us](#) to discuss your potential unique route to completing the prerequisites.

**2. Establishment of an Active Subscription in [The Center for Critical Thinking Community Online Website at Community.CriticalThinking.Org](#)**

Maintenance of this subscription is required for ongoing certification.

**3. Facilitators' Training in the Foundations of Critical Thinking**

Once prerequisites are achieved, you may proceed to facilitators' training for certification. During this training, participants learn how to facilitate understanding of our approach in education, professional consultation, or otherwise in the workplace – under certain conditions – and are given specific guidelines for doing so. This phase of the certification process may be completed through one of the following:

- a. Successful completion of an [Online Certification Course](#) (which we offer periodically)  
-or-
- b. successful completion of a facilitators' training program at any [event](#) where certification is offered\*  
-or-
- c. customized tutoring/training for you individually to be conducted online ([contact us](#) for details and pricing information).

\*Not all Foundation events offer facilitators' training.

**4. Successful Completion of Assessments**

The applicant must successfully complete the relevant assessments, most of which will be administered at the end of or after facilitators' training. The assessment process includes sufficient performance on the [Online Critical Thinking Basic Concepts Test](#), writing a short paper on key concepts in critical thinking, demonstrating a minimum level of proficiency on the [International Critical Thinking Essay Test](#), and demonstrating sufficient public speaking skills by recording oneself in a mock training session on our approach.

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## 5. Application for Certification in the Paul-Elder Approach to Critical Thinking and Payment of the Certification Fee

Once the steps above have been completed, participants may apply for certification in the Paul-Elder Framework for Critical Thinking.

The Foundation for Critical Thinking will issue an invoice for the certification fee of \$500 after the participant finishes facilitators' training, successfully completes the required assessments, and submits an [Application for Certification](#).

Upon completing the final steps and payment, applicants will be provided documentation that confirms their certification status.

If participants complete facilitators' training but are unable to successfully complete the assessment process, they may attend additional training and retry the assessments. For reassessment, a \$250 fee is required.

### Certification may be granted at the following levels:

#### Level One Certification:

This level is achieved after completing the processes described above. Facilitators at this level show proficiency in facilitating foundational activities in:

- The analysis of thought (focused on the elements of reasoning).
- The assessment of thought (focused on the universal intellectual standards).
- The intellectual virtues.
- Understanding academic subjects and professions as modes of thinking to be reasoned through using the tools of criticality.
- The intrinsic barriers to critical thought: egocentric and sociocentric thinking.
- Bringing critical thinking into everyday learning, work, and decision-making.

All workshop activities assigned by certified facilitators are designed by Foundation for Critical Thinking Fellows, and these activities utilize Foundation for Critical Thinking reading materials. Details on this are provided below under the section "Fees and Ongoing Requirements for Certification."

#### Level Two Certification

This level is achieved through additional training after Level One. Level Two involves:

- The analysis and assessment of thought at greater levels of complexity and comprehensiveness.
- Deeper understanding and development of intellectual virtues.

- Deeper understandings of academic subjects and professions as modes of thinking to be reasoned through using the tools of criticality.
- Deeper understanding of the intrinsic barriers to thought: egocentric and sociocentric thinking.
- Asking essential questions within a field of study or domain of thought.
- Ethical reasoning and why it is essential to advancing human societies.
- Further integrating critical thinking into everyday work and decision-making.

If you have achieved Level One Certification and are interested in advancing to Level Two, please [contact us](#) for more details.

### **Fees and Ongoing Requirements for Certification:**

After a participant has successfully completed facilitators' training and submitted an [Application for Certification](#), the Foundation for Critical Thinking will issue an invoice for the certification fee of \$500 USD. After completing payment and receiving their certification document(s), facilitators are certified for one year, assuming they meet the ongoing requirements.

Facilitators must reapply each year to remain certified. Continued certification is contingent upon:

1. The willingness of the certified facilitator to continue training directly under Foundation for Critical Thinking Scholars and/or Fellows. This entails one of the following:
  - a. Engaged participation in at least one Foundation for Critical Thinking [event](#), [course](#), or [guided study group](#).
  - or-
  - b. A contracted tutoring/training series with one of our Fellows or Scholars. ([Contact us](#) for options and details.)
2. Submission of a presentation video every four months for Foundation approval, with the video showing the facilitator competently leading a training session in the Paul-Elder Approach.
3. Submission of an annual report of the groups and individuals with which the facilitator utilized the Paul-Elder Approach during the preceding year of certification.
4. Generally ethical conduct in professional dealings and in representing the Paul-Elder Framework for Critical Thinking.



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5. Understanding and agreeing that copyright laws apply to the use of our intellectual property. Facilitators will never create unauthorized copies of our [books](#), [Thinker's Guides](#), or other Foundation for Critical Thinking Materials.

In teaching the Paul-Elder Framework to clients, colleagues, students, or employees, facilitators will ensure that participants do one or both of the following:

- a. Purchase (or have purchased for them) copies of whatever [books](#) and/or [Thinker's Guides](#) are necessary for facilitating the relevant activities.  
-or-
- b. Create membership accounts (or have accounts created for them) in [The Center for Critical Thinking Community Online](#).

**6. For certified consultants:**

- a. Certified consultants will use only the Paul-Elder Framework when teaching critical thinking in consultation work, and will never substitute or mix in other critical thinking methodologies.
- b. When teaching critical thinking in consulting work, certified consultants will use only those activities approved by The Foundation for Critical Thinking, most of which are contained in the facilitator's manual that is given to all facilitators.
- c. When teaching critical thinking in consulting work, certified consultants will use only Foundation for Critical Thinking materials, such as [books](#) and [Thinker's Guides](#). These materials may be purchased in print or digital format, such as by having clients establish subscriptions in [The Center for Critical Thinking Community Online](#).
- d. When using books or materials in training on other subject matters, such as leadership books, certified consultants will have these approved by the Foundation for Critical Thinking to ensure that they do not contradict best critical thinking practices and theory.
- e. In place of #3 above, consultants will submit an annual report in which they detail the workshops conducted throughout the year under the concept of "critical thinking." This will include remuneration received for each critical thinking workshop conducted and what Foundation for Critical Thinking materials were used in the workshop (e.g., [books](#), [Thinker's Guides](#), subscriptions to [The Center for Critical Thinking Community Online](#), etc.)
- f. A customized agreement will be required in which a percentage of net income acquired through facilitating critical-thinking workshops will be paid to the Foundation for Critical Thinking.

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Facilitators whose certification lapses can renew it by [submitting an application](#) within one year of the lapse. Beyond this one-year grace period, they must attend facilitators' training again to regain certification.

### **Decertification**

Decertification is different from simply allowing one's certification to lapse.

Facilitators who violate the requirements for maintaining certification, and are determined by the Foundation for Critical Thinking to have done so in bad faith, may be decertified. Decertified facilitators may or may not be allowed to regain certification after any period of time determined by the Foundation for Critical Thinking.

The Foundation reserves the right to publish the name of a decertified facilitator on [www.criticalthinking.org](http://www.criticalthinking.org), and in correspondence with its email list, if it finds that the decertified facilitator 1) has violated the requirements for maintaining certification in bad faith, *and* 2) is likely to falsely represent himself or herself as a certified facilitator.

## Foundation for Critical Thinking Senior Fellows: Brief Biographies

**Dr. Linda Elder**



As President of the Foundation for Critical Thinking and an educational psychologist, Dr. Linda Elder has extensive experience in leading seminars in such topics as “The Art of Making Intelligent Decisions,” “Infusing Critical Thinking Into Your Professional Life,” “Taking Charge Of The Affective Dimension Of Thinking,” and “Critical Thinking: The Key to Survival in a World of Accelerating Change, Intensifying Complexity, and Increasing Danger.” She has presented to more than 50,000 professional educators, as well as countless private-sector businesspeople, military personnel, and other government employees. Dr. Elder has co-authored four books with Dr. Richard Paul, including *Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Charge of Your Professional and Personal Life* and *30 Days to Better Thinking and Better Living Through Critical Thinking*. She is sole author of *Liberating the Mind: Overcoming Sociocentric Thought and Egocentric Tendencies*, is authoring a book on Critical Thinking Therapy (to be released in the first half of 2024), and has co-authored 24 Thinker’s Guides to Critical Thinking.

Dr. Elder has developed an original stage theory of critical thinking development. With experience in both administration and the classroom, Dr. Elder understands first-hand the challenges facing corporations today. She is a dynamic presenter who reaches her audience on a person-to-person level.

**Dr. Gerald Nosich**



Dr. Gerald Nosich is a noted authority on critical thinking and has given more than 250 workshops on all aspects of teaching it. Since the mid-1980s, he has become committed to teaching critical thinking across the curriculum. He is the author of *Reasons and Argument*, *Learning to Think Things Through: A Guide to Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum*, and *Critical Writing: A Guide to Writing a Paper Using the Concepts and Processes of Critical Thinking*.

Dr. Nosich has given workshops on critical thinking throughout the world. He has worked with the U.S. Department of Education on a project for National Assessment of Higher Order Thinking Skills, given teleconferences sponsored by PBS on teaching critical thinking within subject-matter courses, served as a consultant/evaluator for SACS Accreditation of programs at various colleges and universities emphasizing critical thinking, and has been featured as a Noted Scholar at the University of British Columbia.

Dr. Nosich is the creator of numerous articles, audio tapes, and videos on critical thinking. He is a Senior Fellow and Bertrand Russell Distinguished Chair at the Foundation for Critical Thinking. A witty presenter, his down-to-earth sense of humor adds spice to his practical insights.