# The importance of critical thinking for success in Stage 6 PDHPE

“Critical thinking encompasses cognitive processes such as recognising or developing an argument, using evidence in support of an argument, drawing reasoned conclusions and using information to solve problems. The skills of analysis and problem-solving are aspects of critical thinking" (NSW Education Standards Authority, Draft Health and Movement Science syllabus, 2019).

Critical thinking means being able to present evidence for our ideas, analysing the way we think instead of simply learning facts without ever questioning them. In PDHPE and in life it is essential we inquire critically and question to ensure our opinions, our behaviours, our values and our ideas are supported by evidence.

Applying critical thinking is essential for success in the examination and assessments.

Critical thinking improves our ability to express ideas. The ability to think logically has a huge impact not only on how students understand ideas, but on how they express them.

Critical thinking makes learning more interactive. It adds relevance and can increase engagement as students link learning to their own lives and lived experiences.

Critical thinking will prepare students to learn, adapt and keep up to date with relevant changes in their fields of study, whatever they may be.

Critical thinking and problem solving are considered key skills for an uncertain future, especially considering how remote work is increasingly popular and accessible. Our ability to adapt will be an important skill in an uncertain future. Keeping an open mind, being able to self-direct, self-discipline and self-monitor, is what will allow this generation to succeed no matter what happens next.

If students learn to think critically, then they can use good thinking as the guide by which they live their lives. Politics affects our lives no matter how involved in it we are, and critical thinking will allow students to ensure their decisions are based on facts and logic.

When we compare the language of the Performance Band Descriptions for HSC PDHPE with common grade scales, we see a through line. A consistency of what is required to excel or perform well in our subjects. To get a better picture of our high performing students in PDHPE, we analysed the HSC examination reports over the past 5-6 years (like most HSC teachers would do) to identify what our top students are doing well according to markers.

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| Performance band descriptions for PDHPE (HSC) | Common grade scale for preliminary courses | The common grade scale |
| Band 6  demonstrates **extensive knowledge and understanding** of the range of concepts related to health and physical performance  comprehensively **applies theoretical principles** to design and evaluate specific strategies for improving health, participation and performance  demonstrates a superior understanding of the interrelated roles and responsibilities of individuals, groups and governments in the management and promotion of health  critically analyses movement and the range of factors that affect physical performance and participation  provides **relevant and accurate examples** to **justify complex arguments** about health, participation and performance | A  demonstrates **extensive knowledge of content and understanding of course concepts** and **applies highly developed skills and processes**in a wide variety of contexts.  In addition, the student **demonstrates creative and critical thinking skills using perceptive analysis and evaluation.**  The student **effectively communicates complex ideas and information.** | A  has an **extensive knowledge** and **understanding of the content** and can readily **apply this knowledge**.  In addition, the student has achieved **a very high level of competence in the processes and skills and can apply these skills** to new situations. |

High performing PDHPE students demonstrate their ability to:

* apply extensive understanding and depth to make judgements
* apply understanding and theoretical principles to substantiate judgements
* justify complex arguments through the use of relevant examples to illustrate depth of understanding
* show high level analysis and depth of understanding to make relationships and links between concepts or cause and effect evident.

The differences between bands in the [performance band descriptions](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/pdhpe/pdhpe-syllabus/pbd) is closely linked to application of knowledge and understanding. This application shows evidence of student depth of understanding. It requires analysis and interpretation of information, data, evidence and concepts. Application requires students to make links and build relationships between concepts and pieces of information. Or in our context, it relies on students transferring new information and understanding to new situations such as across health promotion initiatives in Core 1 or across physical activity and sporting contexts in Core 2.

High level students demonstrate syllabus skills and key competencies and apply these to knowledge and understanding, regardless of the Core or Option. This is most apparent through 8-12 mark questions in the HSC which separate lower band and higher band students.