Because this class is about exploring ideas, it is necessary to develop a system of inquiry that fosters your independence as a disciplined sociological thinker. The Paul-Elder Method for Critical Thinking provides a useful framework to help you develop these skills. There are three components to this method: Elements of Reasoning, Standards of Evaluation, and Intellectual Traits.[[1]](#footnote-1)

***Elements of Reasoning*** *–* Analytic thinking is needed to learn a significant body of content. The elements of reasoning listed below can be used to analyze a text, investigate a question, or develop your own point of view.

* **Purpose** – All reasoning has a purpose.
* **Question** – All reasoning is an attempt to figure something out, to settle some question, or solve some problem.
* **Information** – All reasoning is based on data, information, and evidence.
* **Key Concepts** – All reasoning is expressed through, and shaped by, definitions and theories.
* **Implications and Consequences** – All reasoning leads to conclusions and has repercussions.

***Standards of Evaluation*** *–* Analytic thinking should be judged according to intellectual standards. These standards will help you evaluate quality of the texts you encounter, the statements you hear from others, and your own point of view.

* **Clarity** – Reasoning should be understandable, free from confusion or ambiguity.
* **Accuracy** – Reasoning should be free from errors, mistakes, or distortions.
* **Breadth** – Reasoning should consider multiple sources, perspectives, and angles.
* **Depth** – Reasoning should attend to the complexity of the problem.
* **Fairness** – Reasoning should acknowledge biases and respectfully respond to the perspectives of others.

***Intellectual Traits*** – These traits are associated with a cultivated critical thinker and result from the consistent and disciplined application of the intellectual standards to the elements of reasoning.

* **Intellectual Empathy** – Having a consciousness of the need to imaginatively put oneself in the place of others in order to genuinely understand them. This trait correlates with the ability to reconstruct accurately the viewpoints and reasoning of others and to reason from premises, assumptions, and ideas other than our own.
* **Intellectual Integrity** – Recognition of the need to be true to one's own thinking; to be consistent in the intellectual standards one applies; to hold one's self to the same rigorous standards of evidence and proof to which one holds one's antagonists.
* **Fairmindedness** – Having a consciousness of the need to consider all viewpoints, without reference to one's own feelings or vested interests, or the feelings or vested interests of one's friends, community or nation; implies adherence to intellectual standards without reference to one's own advantage or the advantage of one's group.
1. The Paul-Elder Method is further elaborated on their website - <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/college-and-university-students/799>. I have paired down the full model to focus class discussion on key dimensions of the Paul-Elder Model. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)