

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Approach

The SBLM Program approaches education through broad-based leadership, management, decision making, and integrative knowledge of the Army, especially its existence in a dynamic world environment. The program emphasizes education over training.

The SBLM Program's educational philosophy is learner and peer-focused. It is practice oriented. The program features multiple opportunities for life related, problem-centered, consequential, critical thinking. The emphasis is on how to think, not what to think.

Seminar discourse and group work for individual learning reinforces the focus on peers. In small groups, students relate program material to their prior experience and learning as well as benefit from others' experience. The groups serve to facilitate personal development as group members learn about their own skills of leadership, teamwork, and personal influence.

We employ a variety of teaching and learning techniques at AMSC. These include guest speakers, case studies, practical exercises, lectures, field trips, reading and writing, and research. The Resident Student Syllabus Guidelines presented later in this *Academic Guide* describes each of these techniques in more detail. Salient to all these techniques, however, is the SBLM Program's approach to critical thinking.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is integral to SBLM Program teaching and learning methods. It is defined as disciplined, self-directed thinking displaying a mastery of intellectual skills and abilities—thinking about your thinking while you're thinking to make your thinking better.

*The parts of Critical Thinking are:*¹

1. All reasoning has a *PURPOSE*.
 - a. Take time to state your purpose clearly.
 - b. Distinguish your purpose from related purposes.
 - c. Check periodically to be sure you are still on target.
 - d. Choose significant and realistic purposes.

¹ Paul, R. (1996). Helping students access their thinking. Center for Critical Thinking [Available Internet], <http://www.criticalthinking.org>, then click on "College and University," then click on "Library."

2. All reasoning is an attempt to *FIGURE SOMETHING OUT, TO SETTLE SOME QUESTION, TO SOLVE SOME PROBLEM*.
 - a. Take sufficient time to clearly and precisely state the question at issue.
 - b. Express the question in several ways to clarify its meaning and scope.
 - c. Break the question into sub questions.
 - d. Identify if the question has one right answer, is a matter of opinion, or requires reasoning from more than one point of view.

3. All reasoning is based on *ASSUMPTIONS*.
 - a. Clearly identify your assumptions and determine whether they are justifiable.
 - b. Consider how your assumptions shape your point of view.

4. All reasoning is done from some *POINT OF VIEW*.
 - a. Identify your point of view.
 - b. Seek other points of view and identify their strengths as well as weaknesses.
 - c. Strive to be fair-minded in evaluating all points of view.

5. All reasoning is based on *DATA, INFORMATION, and EVIDENCE*.
 - a. Restrict your claims to those supported by the data that you have.
 - b. Search for information that opposes your position as well as information that supports it.
 - c. Make sure that all information used is clear, accurate, and relevant to the question at issue.
 - d. Make sure you have gathered sufficient information.

6. All reasoning is expressed through, and shaped by, *CONCEPTS* and *IDEAS*.
 - a. Identify key concepts and explain them clearly.
 - b. Consider alternative concepts or alternative definitions to concepts.
 - c. Make sure you are using concepts with care and precision.

7. All reasoning contains *INFERENCES OR INTERPRETATIONS* by which we draw *CONCLUSIONS* and give meaning to data.
 - a. Infer only what the evidence implies.
 - b. Check inferences for their consistency with each other.
 - c. Identify assumptions that lead you to your inferences.

8. All reasoning leads somewhere or has *IMPLICATIONS* and *CONSEQUENCES*.
 - a. Trace the implications and consequences that follow from your reasoning.
 - b. Search for negative as well as positive implications.
 - c. Consider all possible consequences.

These eight parts then must be merged with the intellectual standards that characterize the quality of reasoning about a problem, issue, or situation. You will be expected to infuse these into your thinking. The most significant of these are:²

— *CLARITY*: Could you elaborate further on that point? Could you express that point in another way? Could you give me an illustration? Could you give me an example? Clarity is the gateway standard. If a statement is unclear, we cannot determine whether it is accurate or relevant. In fact, we cannot tell anything about it because we do not yet know what it is saying. For example, the question, “What can be done about the education system in America?” is unclear. In order to address the question adequately, we would need to have a clearer understanding of what the person asking the question is considering the “problem” to be. A clearer question might be “What can educators do to ensure that students learn the skills and abilities which help them function successfully on the job and in their daily decision-making?”

— *ACCURACY*: Is that really true? How could we check that? How could we find out if that is true? A statement can be clear but not accurate, as in “Most dogs are over 300 pounds in weight.”

— *PRECISION*: Could you give more details? Could you be more specific? A statement can be both clear and accurate, but not precise, as in “Jack is overweight.” (We don’t know how overweight Jack is, one pound or 500 pounds.)

— *RELEVANCE*: How is that connected to the question? How does that bear on the issue? A statement can be clear, accurate, and precise, but not relevant to the question at issue. For example, students often think that the amount of effort they put into a course should be used in raising their grade in a course. Often, however, the “effort” does not measure the quality of student learning, and *when this is so*, effort is irrelevant to their appropriate grade.

— *DEPTH*: How does your answer address the complexities in the question? How are you taking into account the problems in the question? Is that dealing with the most significant factors? A statement can be clear, accurate, precise, and relevant, but superficial (that is, lacks depth). For example, the statement “Just say No” often used to discourage children and teens from drugs, is clear, accurate, precise, and relevant. Nevertheless, it lacks depth because it treats an extremely complex issue, the pervasive problem of drug use among young people, superficially. It fails to deal with the complexities of the issue.

² Paul, R. (1996). Universal intellectual standards. Center for Critical Thinking. [Available Internet], <http://www.criticalthinking.org>, then click on “College and University,” then click on “Library.”

BREADTH: Do we need to consider another point of view? Is there another way to look at this question? What would this look like from a conservative standpoint? What would this look like from the point of view of...? A line of reasoning may be clear, accurate, precise, relevant, and deep, but lack breadth (as in an argument from either the conservative or liberal standpoint which gets deeply into an issue, but only recognizes the insights of one side of the question.)

— *LOGIC*: Does this really make sense? Does that follow from what you said? How does that follow? But before you implied this and now you are saying that; how can both be true? When we think, we bring a variety of thoughts together into some order. When the combinations of thoughts are mutually supportive and make sense in combination, the thinking is “logical.” When the combination is not mutually supportive, is contradictory in some sense, or does not “make sense,” the combination is not logical.

Executive Core Qualifications of the Senior Executive Service (SES)

The Army Management Staff College prepares selected Army Civilian and Military leaders to assume leadership and management responsibilities throughout the sustaining base. Graduates of the SBLM Program may one day be the Senior Executive leading the organization. Several SBLM Program graduates are already in the SES. To enter the SES, that graduate must have first met the qualifications of the SES. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) defines certain core qualifications needed by senior executives. For more information about the Executive Core Qualifications, view this Internet site: <http://www.opm.gov/ses/ecq.html>