

Philosophers' Non-Profit Offers Online Critical Thinking Course

By [Justin Weinberg](#). January 25, 2021 at 10:07 am [1](#)

A Boston-area non-profit organization has created a free*, online, critical thinking course for students and teachers—a “boot camp for arguments”—based on a pedagogical technique that has some empirical research behind it.

ThinkerAnalytix, founded by [Nathan Otey](#) and [Anne Sanderson](#) (Harvard), launched their course, “[How We Argue](#),” last fall. The goal of the course “is to equip students to analyze and evaluate the arguments they read in academic papers, op-eds, and social media.”

Otey and Sanderson say they founded ThinkerAnalytix with the aim of teaching philosophy in Boston-area high schools, but, they say, “we quickly discovered that most students—even the highest performers—lacked the basic argument analysis and reasoning skills which are the prerequisites for reading and discussing philosophical texts.” They add, “in many cases students could not identify the main claim of an argument or its basic premises.”

So they decided to help students acquire the basics of critical thinking, and developed their course around one of the few techniques for teaching it that have documented [empirical support](#): argument mapping (see more [here](#)).

Sanctuary cities should be encouraged

Sanctuary cities are safer than other cities

Sanctuary cities are allowed in the Constitution

A. Sanctuary cities encourage good relationships between undocumented people and law enforcement

B. Immigrants commit less crime than native citizens

Sanctuary cities tend to have a higher immigrant population

Assume that all of the following statements are true. Which statement gives the best reason to believe Premise B? (Choose one)

- Murder rates are lower in San Francisco than in St. Louis or Detroit.
- Undocumented immigrants are less likely to report if they were a victim of crime due to fear of their immigration status.
- Sanctuary cities are protected by the Tenth Amendment.
- 1.6 percent of immigrant men between the ages of 18 and 39 are incarcerated, compared to 3.3 percent of men who were born in the US.
- Sanctuary cities restrict the authority that law enforcement has when conducting investigations.

Screenshot from the How We Argue course

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They report that “when we started teaching argument mapping to high school and college students, two things jumped out immediately: 1) they liked mapping a lot; 2) they engaged material with a level of rigor and precision we had never seen before.”

The screenshot displays an argument mapping tool. At the top, a box contains the claim: "Claim: Organically grown food is good for the environment". Below this, a bracket groups two boxes: "Evidence: Organic food results in less soil erosion" and "Reasoning:". The "Reasoning:" box is empty with three horizontal lines. Below the "Reasoning:" box, another bracket groups a box containing the text: "Soil erosion promotes flooding and drought". Below the mapping area, there is a section labeled "(Source)" with a table of four options, each with a radio button:

(Source)	
<input type="radio"/>	Soil erosion is common on farmlands
<input type="radio"/>	Growing food organically tends to reduce soil erosion
<input type="radio"/>	Farming organically is good for the environment
<input type="radio"/>	Soil erosion is bad for the environment

Screenshot from the How We Argue course

Otey and Sanderson also offer workshops in argument mapping for K-12 teachers and university professors whose feedback helps them develop and improve the How We Argue curriculum.

So far, over 120 instructors and over 1500 students have registered for the course, which takes about 5 to 8 hours to complete.

ThinkerAnalytix also developed a [puzzle game](#) for argument maps about current issues and a workbook on Intellectual Charity. Their future plans include the development of modules on advanced argument analysis skills, persuasive writing, scientific reasoning, formal logic, and possibly bioethics.

You can check out the course [here](#).

* **Correction:** while the course was free during its beta-testing period, pricing for the course now starts at \$5.00; however, anyone for whom that cost would be an obstacle can request “financial aid” and take the course for free. Details [here](#). (via Simon Cullen)

Source: <https://dailynous.com/2021/01/25/philosophers-non-profit-offers-free-online-critical-thinking-course/>