

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Making Generalizations

Many facts are presented in a study of world history. Alone, each fact may not be very important. It can become important, however, when it is grouped with other facts to form a pattern. One way to bring out a pattern from a group of facts is to make a *generalization* (jen' uh ruh luh zā' shuhn), or a broad statement based upon individual facts.

In making generalizations, it is important to be accurate. A generalization must be able to be supported by known facts. Each fact given must relate directly to the generalization. In addition, words like "all," "everyone," and "no one" should be avoided, because there are often exceptions to the facts given.

In the following example, four statements concerning Roman soldiers are given. Each deals with only one point. Yet, it is possible to sum them up to make a significant generalization.

Example:

1. The Roman legionaries spent hours practicing with their double-edged iron swords.
2. They went on long marches every day.
3. Before going to sleep, they had to build complete fortified camps.
4. They built roads out of lava blocks so soldiers and supplies could move forward more rapidly.

Taken together, these facts show the great effort put forth by the Roman army.

They can be summed up in the following generalization: *Roman soldiers spent much time training for battle.*

To practice this skill, read the following two groups of facts concerning the Etruscans and early monks. After reading each group, write a generalization.

Group A:

1. The Etruscans taught the Latins how to use the arch in building bridges.
2. They laid the foundations of Rome's first sewer system.
3. They drained the swamp at the foot of the Palatine hill.
4. The Etruscans built the first temple on the Capitoline hill.

Group B:

1. The monks who followed Benedict's rule promised to give up all their possessions before entering a monastery.
2. They agreed to wear simple clothes and eat only certain foods.
3. They could not marry.
4. They had to obey the orders of the abbot without question.
5. They had to attend religious services seven times during the day and once at midnight.
6. They had to work six or seven hours a day in the fields around the monastery, and did clerical work or worked as carpenters and weavers.