**SUGGESTIONS FOR CRITIQUES**

Ask yourself whether you find the conclusion or conclusions convincing. If so, why? Which particular data, analyses, or arguments convinced you. If not, why not? What is unclear, lacking, or outright wrong? What alternative interpretations or arguments might be plausible?

Further, if you are convinced (of course, that's a matter of degree), what follows, or what applications might the conclusion have, or what experiment might be done next? If not convinced, what would be necessary (usually in the form of further observations, or experimental data) to convince you? Or if you find alternative interpretations or arguments more convincing, what might be done to support these--hopefully at the same time it refutes the author? (again a matter of degree, or perhaps refutes the author in some ways but not in others).

One trick I use: Negation. Insert a "not" in an assertion, or imagine the opposite result. Does it make sense? If not (i.e., if the "not" is not believable on prior grounds), then either the assertion or the result convey little or no information. For example, consider the argument that psychopathology is due to low self-esteem--supported by the finding that people who are drunk all the time, or abuse spouses or children, or who go in and out of mental hospitals done't have high self-esteem. Ask yourself whether a finding that such people have as high self-esteem as anyone else would be at all plausible. What sort of (social) world would that be? My conclusion: The finding proves nothing at all about the origins of pathological behavior. (All mathematical arguments that X implies Y can be phrased in terms of showing that if X didn't imply Y then both Z and not-Z would be true. Since--accepting the Law of Contradiction--we believe that Z and not-Z cannot be both true, we accept that X implies Y by virtue of the impossibility it doesn't. In our work, we must substitute implausibility for impossibility.)

N.B. Don't apply my trick to the social world. The fact that someone chooses to say something at all may be important, even if its negation is absurd. For example, teammates aren't compelled to say that Lemieux is a wonderful person (just that he plays exceptionally); thus, the fact they say so in an interview does convey information, even though a world in which they say that he's an SOB in an interview after winning the Stanley Cup is indeed an implausible one.

*To Students in 88 - 703, from Robyn Dawes*