INTRODUCTION
Mary Smith an English 20 student at California State University Sacramento in the spring of 2001, felt that Roger Ebert’s review of the film Erin Brockovich was inconsistent with his past arguments and did not properly emphasize why he didn’t really like Erin Brockovich.

As a current English 20 student, this semester I was taught to apply our basic paper writing and critical thinking models to the kinds of arguments presented in newspaper articles as well as those in the entertainment media.

One of my goals in English 20 was to use these common PW and CT models to construct arguments and defend them.

As a former English 20 student Mary Smith was also taught to evaluate arguments in newspaper articles and entertainment media in the same manner using the same models.

In evaluating Mary’s paper using these exact models that she was supposed to have used in writing her paper, I believe that Mary’s paper presents some serious problems in the areas of internal and external logic and organization.

(Thesis) Certainly, after evaluating Mary’s paper based upon the critical thinking and paper writing models I believe that it is poor because she fails to follow the format of the PW and CT models that she was supposed to use.

(Argument One) I believe that Mary’s thesis is unclear and awkward because she seems to be trying to prove two separate points.

(Argument Two) I believe that Mary’s second argument present problems in internal logic of organization in which it fails to support his thesis.

(Argument 3) Finally, I believe Mary’s arguments are factually inaccurate because she seems to ignore all of the reasons Ebert gives other than wardrobe for his not liking Erin Brockovich.
BACKGROUND ONE
Before I begin let me present a brief overview of Mary’s analysis.
In her paper, Mary Smith is attempting to prove that “Roger Ebert’s review of the film Erin Brockovich was inconsistent with his review of Pretty Woman and did not properly emphasize why he really didn’t like Brockovich.”
Mary attempts to prove her thesis with two supporting arguments.
The first argument is that “Ebert expressed a dislike of the wardrobe of which Julia Robert’s made use in Brockovich and his thesis attributed to his overall negative review primarily to the film’s wardrobe department. I believe this is inconsistent.”
Mary’s second supporting argument states that “Ebert is a well-respected movie critic, and I find it unlikely that he would allow this unspoken contradiction to cloud his review of Brockovich. I believe that the reason he truly disliked the film was not properly emphasized in his review.”
In other words Mary is saying that Ebert did not criticize Julia Robert’s wardrobe in Pretty Woman so he must have thought it fit her character and its use supported the themes of the film.
Secondly, Ebert did criticize Julia Robert’s wardrobe in Erin Brockovich so he must have thought it did not fit her character and therefore its use did not support the themes of the film.
Therefore, since Mary believes that Julia Robert’s wardrobe did fit her character in both Erin Brockovich and Pretty Woman, then Ebert is contradicting himself by stating the aforementioned arguments.

BACKGROUND TWO
Since Roger Ebert’s reviews of Pretty Woman and Erin Brockovich are the subject of Mary’s paper, I would like to briefly summarize his review of Pretty Woman.
Roger Ebert is one of the film industry’s best-known and influential film critics.
For decades Ebert has been reviewing films, doing interviews, and writing books on a
wide variety of topics.
He has been a film reviewer for the past twenty-three years for the Chicago Sun Times and usually reviews heavy-duty films such *Pretty Woman* and *Erin Brockovich.* *Pretty Woman*, a romantic comedy released in 1990, stars Julia Roberts as Vivian Ward a carefree, prostitute and Richard Gere as Edward Lewis, a successful businessmen. The film was directed by Garry Marshall and led to Julia Roberts winning a Golden Globe for Best Performance by an Actress.
Roger Ebert who gave the film “two-thumbs up” and 3 ½ stars, wrote a warm review of *Pretty Women*, which was published March 23, 1990 in the Chicago Sun Times. In his review Ebert feels that “Vivian played by Julia Roberts, is as smart as she is attractive, which makes her very smart.”
He states that the “characters are emerging as believable, original, and sympathetic and that they seem to work easily together.”
Ebert further states, “that the movie is sweet and innocent…it protects the fragile love story in the midst of cynicism and compromise.”
Lastly, Ebert states that the final scene, “involving a limousine, a fire escape and some flowers is awkward and feels tacked on. But by the end of the movie I was happy to have it close as it does.”

BACKGROUND THREE
I would also like to give a brief overview of Ebert’s review of the film *Erin Brockovich.* *Erin Brockovich*, a drama film that came out in 2000, stars Julia Robert as Erin Brockovich, a feisty, single mother who convinces attorney Ed Masry, played by Albert Finney, to hire her for a secretarial position.
While going through other documents, “Erin” stumbles upon documents that show that PG&E had polluted the water in the small town of Hinkley.
Through hard work and perseverance, Masry and Brockovich were able to bring a successful lawsuit against PG&E in which they were ordered to pay $333 million in damages.
The film, directed by Steven Soderbergh, was nominated for Best Picture; Best
Supporting Role by Albert Finney, and Julia Roberts won an Emmy for Best Actress. However, Ebert only gave the film two stars and said, “Roberts performance upstages the story; and unwise wardrobe decisions position her character somewhere between a caricature and a distraction.”

Ebert also said that the film “lacks focus and energy and that the supporting characters are not vivid or convincing.”

He further states “scenes with members of the suffering families genuflect in the direction of pathos, but are cut and dried. It doesn’t feel like we are seeing Erin Brockovich share the pain, but like we’re seeing Julia Roberts paying another house call.”

**ARGUMENT 1A**

Mary’s thesis statement presents an internal logic problem. According to our paper writing and critical thinking models, I as a writer, must maintain my position or claim such as “S is T” throughout my paper, then in respect to my statement, I am being consistent.

However, if in another place in that same argument I state that it is not the case that “S is T” or “S is not T” then my argument is internally inconsistent. This idea of internal logic is where Mary first experiences problems.

Her thesis, actually attempts to prove two separate points, therefore it is internally inconsistent and lacks logic. She attempts to prove that “Ebert’s argument was inconsistent with his past arguments and that Ebert talked about wardrobe because he did not want to reveal why he really didn’t like *Erin Brockovich*.

Mary is saying that “S” is true or that Ebert was in fact inconsistent with his past arguments.

Mary believes that since, “Ebert did not say he was offended or distracted by the outfits in *Pretty Woman* like he did in his review of *Brockovich*,” he is being inconsistent. Further Mary believes that “T” is true or that Ebert talked about wardrobe because he
Emily Minner did not want to reveal why he really did not like *Erin Brockovich*. Therefore Mary is arguing that since “S” is true and “T” is true, the reason for “S” is “T”. In other words, Ebert was inconsistent with his past arguments in reviewing *Erin Brockovich* because he wanted to hide or conceal his real reasons for not liking the film. However, the way Mary’s thesis is stated the reader would believe that Ebert’s inconsistency has little to do with his reasons for not revealing, “why he really didn’t like *Erin Brockovich*.” Clearly how Mary’s thesis is stated displays her problems with internal logical and consistency.

**ARGUMENT 1B**

Besides, how it is written, Mary’s thesis presents other problems in the area of logic. Once again, according to our critical thinking model on general concepts, I am not only responsible for what I assert, but also what I imply or assume as well. Often, the most damaging inconsistencies are generated by what an argument implies or assumes is true. This is certainly true in Mary’s case in which one of her most obvious problems with internal logic is her assumption that two reviews written ten years apart about two different kinds of films should be consistent.

Mary states “Ebert gave *Erin Brockovich* a negative review based in large part upon her wardrobe.” Further, “Ebert’s positive review of *Pretty Woman* fails to even mention the wardrobe despite, the fact that it was skimpier and more revealing then Brockovich’s.” Mary, states that “Ebert chose to make an issue of the wardrobe department’s decisions, which compares contradictorily with his earlier review of the film *Pretty Woman*.” Although Mary has the right to say that all movie critics need to be consistent over long periods of time, this has nothing to do with whether he is correct about Ebert’s consistency issue.

Actually the mere fact that Mary makes consistency one of her main points is part of her logical flaws.
Ebert may in fact be inconsistent; however, this would not make his statements or judgments about *Erin Brockovich* or *Pretty Woman* invalid, as Mary would like to believe.

ARGUMENT 2
I believe Mary’s second argument presents a problem with internal logic in the area of organization in which her argument fails to match her thesis statement. According to our PW and CT models on organization, the supporting arguments must be such that if you prove them then the reader should accept them as true. If the supporting arguments do not logically match or support the thesis statement, then there isn’t any point in proving them.

Further, our models state that the most important aspect of organization is that the supporting arguments must match the thesis statement. However, in Mary’s paper she fails to follow this critical point of organization. Her second part of her thesis states, “Ebert talked about wardrobe because he did not want to reveal why he really didn’t like Brockovich.”

Mary’s second argument, supposedly supporting her thesis, states “Ebert was a well-respected movie critic, and I find it unlikely that he would allow this unspoken contradiction cloud his review of *Brockovich*. I believe that the reason he truly disliked the move was not properly emphasized in his review.”

However, her second argument fails to mention the wardrobe problem that the second part of her thesis was going to prove. She fails to mention in her argument that Ebert used the wardrobe as way to conceal why he truly disliked the film.

However, in reality this is essentially what Mary is trying to prove in her thesis. As Mary stated, “I am only concerned with proving that whatever Ebert’s real problem with the movie was overshadowed by his prose about the *Brockovich* wardrobe. Certainly, Mary’s second argument cannot be proven with her thesis. Perhaps it would be better if Mary stated that, “I believe the reason he truly disliked the
ARGUMENT 2B

Another problem related to argument two deals with the idea that Mary seems to be saying that Ebert does not give his real reasons for disliking Erin Brockovich in his review.

Further, Mary believes that she knows what the “real reasons” were even though Ebert does not state them.

Mary states, “that she believes the reason he truly disliked the film was not properly emphasized in his review.”

In addition to this statement, Mary also states that, “there must be some other reason, aside from wardrobe, that made him dislike Brockovich.”

However, since Mary is neither a film critic nor a friend of Ebert there is no way she can prove this argument to be true.

Mary’s inability to prove her arguments relates to the do-ability category of organization in the CT models.

According to our CT models, “one of the points that you can always consider is whether or not the writer including yourself, has presented a thesis than can reasonably be proven/supported given his/her background and the available time/space.”

Certainly given her lack of authority and expertise, Mary’s second argument is not something she can prove.

Therefore as mentioned earlier, if the arguments cannot logically support or match the thesis, then there is no point in proving the thesis.

ARGUMENT 3

Mary’s final problems deal with external logic and consistency in which she fails to see that Ebert does in fact give other reasons for not liking Erin Brockovich besides her
wardrobe.

According to our CT and PW models, external logic relates to what you and your audience agree is true of the real world. Further, it is simply once you agree to take certain facts, beliefs, or assumptions as true, as givens, you can’t go back on that agreement just to fit your argumentative needs. Mary seems to believe that she knows what Ebert was saying and she uses this “belief” to fit into her argumentative needs.

Mary has a real external logical problem if she misrepresents Ebert’s arguments and I believe she does just that. Mary is saying that Ebert does not criticize the wardrobe in *Pretty Woman*, so he must have thought that it fit her character and supported the themes of the film. However, Ebert did criticize the wardrobe in *Erin Brockovich*, so he must have thought it did not fit her character and did not support the themes of the film. However, this is not what Ebert is saying.

In his review of *Erin Brockovich*, Ebert does state “unwise wardrobe decisions position her somewhere between a caricature and a character.” However, Ebert clearly states that the wardrobe does fit her character the “real Brockovich liked to dress provocatively; that’s her personal style and she’s welcome to it.”

Clearly, Mary is attempting to put what she “believes” Ebert is saying into her argument, which highlights external logic.

ARGUMENT 3B

Moreover, Ebert gives many other reasons that Mary fails to see, for not liking *Erin Brockovich*.

Ebert states the he knows all about the real Erin Brockovich because he saw her on Oprah, where she cried at just the right moment in a filmed recap of her life….there is obviously a story here, but “Erin Brockovich” doesn’t make it compelling.” Ebert further states that the “film lacks focus and energy, and that the character development is facile and thin.”
Both of these are prime examples of Ebert giving other reasons for his negative review of the film.

In addition, to these comments Ebert also makes his negative feelings regarding the supporting cast, particularly Albert Finney, known.

Ebert states that, “the supporting characters are not vivid or convincing. Finney is one the most robust and powerful actors in the movies, but here, as personal injury lawyer, named Ed Masry, he comes across like and office manager at H&R Block. He’s dampened; there’s no fire in his performance.”

Moreover, Ebert says that the “screenplay sees the characters as markers on a story board rather than flesh and blood humans…and that it has the depth and insight of a cable-TV docudrama, and that won’t do for 126 minute major production.”

Once again Ebert gives other reasons besides wardrobe for not liking the film. He obviously does not like the characters or the screenplay and feels like the movie lacks the depth needed to be considered a major Hollywood production.

ARGUMENT 3C

Another aspect of Ebert’s review deals with his comparison of the characters in the film A Civil Action to Erin Brockovich.

By including such comparisons Ebert is giving more reasons that he does not like Brockovich.

Mary fails to see this aspect of Ebert’s review and assumes that Ebert does not give other reasons for not liking Brockovich.

Ebert states that, “seeing the details of Brockovich’s home life, her relationship with her kids and friends, the way she talks, the way she postures, we’re always aware that there’s a performance going on. Streep was so much more convincing in the somewhat similar role of Karen Silkwood (Meryl fighting nuclear wastes).”

Basically, Ebert is saying that Julia Robert’s is not convincing in her portrayal of the “real” Erin Brockovich.

Robert’s performance is “cut and dried” and doesn’t make her character believable.
Mary states that Ebert also made unfavorable remarks about some of the other characters in the movie without comparing them to *A Civil Action*.
However, Ebert does in fact compare Albert Finney and the lawsuit to similar situations in *A Civil Action*.
In discussing Albert Finney, Ebert states, “when he complains the cost of the lawsuit may bankrupt him, all we can think about is the infinitely greater impact of John Travolta’s similar dialogue in *A Civil Action*.”
Ebert later states that “we understand that PG&E has polluted ground water and is apparently responsible for death and disease, but it never emerges as much of a villain, and in the pallid confrontations with its attorneys’ there’s none of the juice that Robert Duvall’s company brought to *A Civil Action*.”
Obviously, by comparing *Brockovich*, to a movie that Ebert evidently enjoyed, Ebert is showing the qualities that *Brockovich* lacked in order to be as convincing or believable as *A Civil Action*.
Certainly, after reading Ebert’s review his “real” reasons for not liking *Erin Brockovich* are quite clear.
Since Mary fails to represent what Ebert is saying and overlooks the numerous reasons Ebert gives for not liking the film, Mary’s argument is filled with external inconsistency and therefore is not valid.

**CONCLUSION**

Clearly, the CT and PW models that Mary Smith was taught as an English 20 student were not put to use in his evaluation of Roger Ebert’s review of the film *Erin Brockovich*.
Mary fails to follow these models in the areas of organization and logic.
How Mary stated her thesis presents an internal logic problem in which she attempts to prove two separate points are truth as the result of each point being true.
Further, Mary’s supporting arguments present another internal problem. They do not match her thesis and cannot be proven therefore, her thesis and arguments are invalid.
In addition Mary also presents external logic problems in which she overlooks that Ebert’s review does in fact give other reasons, besides wardrobe, for disliking *Brockovich*.

Jeffrey fails to see that “Ebert’s real problem or problems with the film were emphasized enough.”

I believe that by successfully proving that Mary’s paper has organizational problems, misrepresents what Ebert is saying, and fails to see that Ebert does in fact give other reasons for not liking the film, I can consider Mary’s entire argument to be invalid.