



**University
of Victoria**

PHIL 201 - Critical Thinking Fall 2023, A01

Instructor: Geordie McComb (he/him)

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Teaching assistant: TBA

Drop-in times: Schedule to be posted on [Brightspace](#).

Time & Location: 11:30am–12:50pm, Monday and Thursday, Hickman 105

Books you have to buy: None! See [Brightspace](#) for course materials.¹

Tech help: Email helpdesk@uvic.ca or visit the [IT Service Desk website](#).

Welcome!

This course is an introduction to some basic tools for thinking well about *arguments*—about the ways we try, by giving reasons, to persuade one another to believe this or that.

And they are everywhere. We find arguments in the news and on social media, in ads and on PowerPoint slides, in science textbooks and policy proposals, as well as in the dark recesses of the web, where conspiracy theorists and pseudo-scientists peddle their wares.

Some arguments, of course, *should* persuade you. But how can you tell the good from the bad? The tools taught in this class will help; they will help you to spot the good ones and to uncover the bad ones, even those dressed up to look good.

By the end of this course, you should understand many common argument patterns and fallacies. This understanding should, in turn, help you to read more efficiently, to write stronger essays, and, in general, to be a better critical thinker. It should also help you to perform well on standardized exams such as the LSAT and GRE.

¹These course materials are based on those developed by Dr. Carrie Klatt.



Course Plan

Here is the course plan, which I may adjust from time to time:

Unit I: Arguments

| Week | Topic | Work Due |
|--------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Week 1, Sept 4–8 | Arguments, Premises, Conclusions | |
| Week 2, Sept 11–15 | Deduction, Induction, Validity, Soundness | |
| Week 3, Sept 18–22 | Implicit Premises, Argument Patterns, Diagramming | Assg 1, Sept 18 Assg 2, Sept 21 |
| Week 4, Sept 25–29 | Review, Test | Assg 3, Sept 24 Test 1, Sept 28 |

Unit II: Deductive Arguments

| | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Week 5, Oct 2–6 | Propositional Translations | |
| Week 6, Oct 9–13 | Truth Tables | Assg 4, Oct 12 Assg 5, Oct 14 |
| Week 7, Oct 16–20 | Review, Test | Assg 6, Oct 15 Test 2, Oct 19 |

Unit III: Inductive Arguments

| | | |
|----------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| Week 8, Oct 23–27 | Enumerative Induction, Argument by Analogy | |
| Week 9, Oct 30–Nov 3 | Causal Arguments, Explanations and Hypotheses | Assg 7, Oct 30 Assg 8, Nov 4 |
| Week 10, Nov 6–10 | Review, Test | Assg 9, Nov 5 Test 3, Nov 9 |

Unit IV: Fallacies

| | | |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Week 11, Nov 13–17 | Fallacies of Irrelevant Premises | |
| Week 12, Nov 20–24 | Fallacies of Unacceptable Premises, Biases | Assg 10, Nov 23 Assg 11, Nov 24 |
| Week 13, Nov 27–30 | Review, Test | Assg 12, Nov 25 Assg 13, Nov 26 Test 4, Nov 30 |

The last day to add a first-term class is Sept 22, and the last day to drop one without penalty of failure is Oct 31. For other important dates, see the [academic calendar](#).



Brightspace

Lecture notes, practice assignments, announcements, and other course materials will be available on [Brightspace](#). To set up a study group, or to find one, see the Discussions page.

Grading

Here is how grades will be calculated:

| Assignments and Tests | Percentage of Grade |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| Assignments (best 10 of 13) | 25% (2.5% each) |
| Tests 1, 2, and 3 | 60% (20% each) |
| Test 4 | 15% |

There is no final exam.

Assignments: Complete them on [Brightspace](#), and take as much time as you need. But do submit them by 11:30pm (Victoria time) on their respective due dates, which are listed above, in the course plan. Late submissions will not be graded, absent special considerations.

NB: If you do not attempt most of the assignments, it will be difficult to do well in this course. Also, do at least open them; otherwise, after their due dates have passed, the answers will not be accessible to you.

Tests: Take them in class on their respective due dates, which are, again, listed above.

Percentage grades: Here is how to understand them:

| | | | |
|----------------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Superior work | A+ (90–100%) | A (85–89%) | A- (80–84%) |
| Good work | B+ (77–79%) | B (73–77%) | B- (70–72%) |
| Adequate work | C+ (65–69%) | C (60–64%) | — |
| Min. acceptable work | D (50–59%) | — | — |
| Inadequate work | F (0–49%) | — | — |

For more information, e.g., about religious observance, see the [September 2023 Undergraduate Calendar](#). For information specifically about grading, e.g., about N grades and DEF status, see the calendar's [grading section](#).



When you need help:

- i Do the practice questions and see the explanations of the answers.
- ii Go to drop-in hours on Zoom (times and dates to be announced). Feel free to drop in to these group meetings! Your instructor or a teaching assistant will be available to discuss any difficulties that you have understanding course material. Many difficulties in this class can be cleared up quickly and easily.
- iii Study with your classmates. They can be a great resource. That said, please see below about what kinds of information sharing count as academic misconduct.
- iv Drop by during office hours or email me to schedule a time to Zoom. These are one-on-one meetings during which I am available to discuss anything to do with the course.

Lateness policy

To receive special consideration for a missed test or assignment—because of illness, a medical or family emergency, etc.—contact me as soon as possible. Email: gmccomb@uvic.ca Please include “PHIL 201” in the subject line.

NB: If you miss an *assignment*, or two or three of them, there is no need to request special consideration, since only your best 10 of 13 grades count.

Recorded lectures

If you are unable to attend a lecture, and need to catch up, a recording may be available for you to do so. Email me for access.

Accessibility

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are very welcome in this course. If you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please contact the [Resource Centre for Students with a Disability](#), and feel free to approach me for any further help.

Mental health

The [UVic Student Wellness Centre](#) provides cost-free and confidential mental health services to help you manage personal challenges that impact your emotional or academic well-being.



Academic misconduct

Academic misconduct is a grave offence, and the University of Victoria treats it very seriously. Misconduct includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- copying the answers or work of another person
- sharing information or answers when doing assignments or tests, except when collaborative work is allowed
- possessing any unauthorized materials or equipment during a test
- accessing unauthorized information when doing assignments
- impersonating a student on an assignment or test, or being assigned the results of such impersonation
- accessing or attempting to access assignment or tests before it is permitted to do so
- attempting to help others to engage in any of the above conduct

It is your responsibility to understand the [Policy on Academic Integrity](#). More generally, students enrolled in courses in the Faculty of Humanities are expected to be familiar with university policies, including the [Tri-Faculty Standards for Professional Behaviour for Students](#)

Copyright

All course content and materials that instructors make available for educational purposes are for the exclusive use of students registered in the class. Any further use or distribution of the materials—for example, posting them to note-sharing sites—requires the written permission of the instructor, except under fair dealing or another exception in the Copyright Act. Any evidence that a student is circulating materials without permission will be referred to the Chair of the Philosophy Department for investigation.

Territory acknowledgement

The institution which brings us together is located on the traditional territory of the $lək^wəŋən$ peoples, whom we acknowledge and respect together with the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples, whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. We are grateful for the opportunity to study here, on these beautiful lands. How we came to have this opportunity, and what it means for these to be their traditional lands, are questions we in the humanities especially should ask, in light of historical and present injustice.