



**University
of Victoria**

PHIL 201 - Critical Thinking
Summer 2024 - A01
CRN: 31248

Instructor: Geordie McComb (he/him)

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Teaching assistant: TBA

Time & Location: None! The class is fully online.

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

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

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 final exams, 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.

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 tests such as the LSAT and GRE.

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



Course Plan

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

Unit I: Arguments

Week	Topic	Work Due
Weeks 1–2 May 13–27	Arguments, Premises, Conclusions Deduction, Induction	Assg 1, May 16
	Validity, Soundness Counter-Example Method	Assg 2, May 21
	Implicit Premises, Argument Patterns, Diagramming, Review	Assg 3, May 23 Test 1, May 25–27

Unit II: Deductive Arguments

Weeks 3–4 May 28–June 10	Propositional Translations	Assg 4, May 30
	Truth Tables	Assg 5, June 3
	Short Truth Tables Review	Assg 6, June 6 Test 2, June 8–10

Unit III: Inductive Arguments

Weeks 5–6 June 11–23	Enumerative Induction	Assg 7, June 13
	Argument by Analogy Causal Arguments	Assg 8, June 17
	Explanations and Hypotheses Review	Assg 9, June 19 Test 3, June 21–23

Unit IV: Fallacies

Week 7 June 24–28	Fallacies or Irrelevant Premises	Assg 10, June 25
	Fallacies of Unacceptable Premises	Assg 11, June 26 Assg 12, June 26
	Biases Review	Assg 13, June 27 Test 4, June 28

The last day to add a class is May 20, to drop one with 100% fee reduction is May 19, to drop one with a 50% fee reduction is May 30, and to drop one without penalty of failure is June 12. For details and other important dates, see the [academic calendar](#).



Course materials

Fully online class: This section of PHIL 201 will be run as a fully online course. You need not be online at any particular time, but there will be due dates for the assignments and tests.

Brightspace: Pre-recorded lectures will be available to view at any time on [Brightspace](#). Posted grades will also be available on the site, as well as lecture notes, practice assignments, solutions to selected assignments, announcements, and other course materials.

Study groups: 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: They are to be completed online. Take them on their respective due dates, which are, again, listed above in the course plan. Be sure to complete them within the allotted time.

Live help sessions: They will be run at various times during the week. Feel free to drop in at any point during the posted time. These sessions are not mandatory.

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 [May 2024 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! A teaching assistant or your instructor 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. If 48 hours pass without a reply, please email me again.

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. If you miss more than three assignments, or if you miss a *test*, please email me as soon as possible. You will be able to make up the missed material.



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 affecting 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 assignments 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.