

PHIL 201 A02: Critical Thinking

CRN# 22527

RSN 133, MTh 10:00-11:20

Instructor: Dr. Thomas Land

Office: CLE B 331

Office Hours: Tue 1:30-3:00 and by appmt.

Email: tland@uvic.ca

Course Description

When we think critically, we don't accept things simply on faith. Instead, we care about whether we have good reasons for what we think and do. Having good reasons increases the probability that our beliefs are true and our actions successful. This in turn gives us greater control over our lives and improves the chances of accomplishing our goals, both individually and collectively. This course aims to develop critical thinking skills by introducing you to a set of principles for assessing when we do have good reasons and when we don't. These principles apply to a great variety of topics and contexts – for instance, to academic reading and writing, business, politics, and social interactions. Therefore, the course is not focused on a particular academic discipline. Instead, it develops key analytic skills that will serve you well in a wide variety of both academic and non-academic contexts. Topics to be covered include argument, deductive and inductive reasoning, common mistakes in reasoning, bias, experts, and scientific reasoning, among others. All of these topics will be treated informally and non-technically, with a focus on ordinary language and familiar situations. In particular, we will not use any mathematical or formal-logical techniques.

Learning Outcomes

By successfully completing this course you can expect to improve your skills in

- assessing the credibility of claims and deciding which sources of information to trust
- constructing arguments to support your own claims
- communicating effectively
- reading academic texts and writing academic papers

To achieve these outcomes you will learn to

- define and apply concepts such as 'argument', 'validity', and 'genetic fallacy'
- decide when to trust the opinion of others, including experts and media sources
- assess the validity of arguments
- identify mistakes in reasoning
- identify cognitive biases and develop strategies for guarding against them
- appreciate how scientific reasoning works

Course Website

This course has an associated website on UVic's *D2L Brightspace* tool. This will be used for assignments, communication, and to make available additional materials. To access your customized *D2L Brightspace* page, sign in to UVic and click on *Online Tools*. You should see *D2L Brightspace* as an option. If you are unable to access the website, please contact me.

Textbook

The required textbook is Lewis Vaughn and Chris MacDonald, *The Power of Critical Thinking*, Sixth Canadian Edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. It is available in electronic form, in an abridged, custom-published version for this course, via the [UVic Bookstore](#).

You are strongly encouraged to make use of the online *Student Resources* for this book, which can be found *revise link* [here](#). They include media activities, self-quizzes, and flashcards.

Select additional readings will be made available on the course website.

Course Format

This course is designed to be taught as an in-person lecture course with regular in-class activities, both individual and group-based. Attendance is required. Lectures will not be streamed or recorded. While I will make available the lecture slides I use, lecture content goes beyond what is included in the slides, so reading the slides is no substitute for attending class. If you miss class, ask your Study Group (see below) if you can borrow their lecture notes.

Study Groups

You will be asked to join a group of 4-5 students. This is your Study Group for the entire semester. Study Groups do three things: (a) discuss assigned exercises; (b) work on the Group Project; (c) study for tests.

Study Groups typically meet once a week before Thursday's class (but will sometimes meet in class). The standing assignment is to discuss exercises and note questions to bring to class. Study Group meetings may be in person or online, at your discretion. Different formats and tools are available for online meetings (e.g. discussion forum or chat in Brightspace; Zoom; other apps).

Weekly Schedule and Study Habits

The key to success in this course is *regular* studying. It's just like exercising or learning an instrument: Do a little bit most days, not a few mega-sessions and otherwise nothing. The exercise assignments, Study Group meetings and Homework quizzes are designed to facilitate this. Plan to do *some* work for this course on at least *four* days each week. Most weeks will have the following elements:

- do the week's reading
- complete study exercises
- discuss study exercises and lectures with your Study Group
- complete the week's Homework quiz

Weeks that have a test or group project will follow a slightly different pattern.

Requirements

Assignment	Due Date	% of final grade
6 Homework Quizzes	Sundays at 11:00pm	4% each
2 Tests (online)	Feb 8 and Mar 21	16% each
Group Project (in-class)	Mar 4 and 7	14%
Final Exam (online)	TBD	30%

1. Homework Quizzes

Each week without a major assignment (except the final week) will have a homework quiz. This is usually (but not always) a 10-12 question online quiz (typically a mix of short-answer, T/F, and M/C).

- You are required to complete *six* (of a total of eight) quizzes. If you complete all eight (which is recommended), your two lowest grades will be dropped.
- You *must* complete homework quiz No. 1 (first week)
- Each homework quiz is worth 4% of the final grade.
- Homework quizzes will be done in *D2L Brightspace*.
- Quizzes must be completed by Sunday at 11:00pm (PST) – but I strongly recommend that you complete them on Thursday or Friday.
- Late quiz submissions will generally not be possible. Exceptions will be made only in the case of illness or other extenuating circumstances. To be eligible for an exception, you must get in touch with me within a week of the due date of the quiz.
- It is your responsibility to ensure that you complete the required number of quizzes.
- This is an individual assignment. You must submit your own answers. Group submissions are not permitted. If you collaborate on the quiz, or copy someone else's answers, this constitutes a violation of academic integrity.

2. Tests

Two online tests, each worth 16% of the final grade. These are for the most part non-cumulative, but some of the fundamental ideas discussed in the early part of the course will also figure on the second test. Both tests are required. Rewrites will only be scheduled in cases of illness or other extenuating circumstances. If you miss a test, you must contact me as soon as possible to schedule a make-up test. The test dates are Feb 8 and Mar 21 (also posted below in the course schedule). *You are responsible for knowing these dates.* Plan ahead and manage your personal workload accordingly. *Both tests will be online tests that take place during class-time. So: Do NOT come to class on the days of the tests; instead, plan to be at a computer with reliable internet access.*

3. Group Project

A Group Project, worth 14% of the final grade. This assignment asks you to apply the skills practiced in this course in a real-life context: Your Study Group jointly analyzes an argumentative news item (typically an opinion piece) and each student writes a brief individual reflection piece about the experience. You will work on the Group Project *in class* on March 4 and 7.

4. Final Exam

The final exam will be a three-hour online exam covering the entire course content, which accounts for 30% of the final grade.

Academic Concessions

UVic recognizes its responsibility to offer academic concessions to students whose ability to complete course requirements is interrupted by 1) unexpected and unavoidable circumstances or 2) conflicting responsibilities. In general, academic concessions take two forms:

1. during the term when all course requirements can be completed by the student before the instructor must submit the final grades (these are often informally called “extensions”); and
2. after the term has ended or when course requirements cannot be completed before final grades are submitted (including deferrals, extended deferrals, aegrotats, withdrawals under extenuating circumstances and backdated drops).

For additional details, please see the [regulations](#) and [guidelines](#) on academic concessions.

If you foresee or experience circumstances that prevent you from completing course requirements, please be proactive and contact me right away. The sooner you do, the easier it typically is to address the situation.

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Reading
1	Jan 8, 11	Introduction, Chp. 1: The Power of Critical Thinking <i>Homework 1 due Jan 14 at 11:00pm</i>
2	Jan 15, 18	Chp. 1 cont'd; Chp. 3: Making Sense of Arguments <i>Homework 2 due Jan 21 at 11:00pm</i>
3	Jan 23, 25	Chp. 3 cont'd. <i>Homework 3 due Jan 28 at 11:00pm</i>
4	Jan 29, Feb 1	Chp. 4: Reasons for Belief and Doubt Kenyon, “Biases Within Reason” <i>Homework 4 due Feb 4 at 11:00pm</i>
5	Feb 5, 8	Chp. 4 cont'd. Feb 8: Test 1
6	Feb 12, 15	Chp. 5: Faulty Reasoning <i>Homework 5 due Feb 18 at 11:00pm</i>
Reading Break – no class on Feb 19 or 22		
7	Feb 26, 29	Chp. 8: Inductive Reasoning <i>Homework 6 due Mar 3 at 11:00pm</i>
8	Mar 4, 7	Group Project (in-class – bring a laptop)
9	Mar 11, 14	Chp. 8 cont'd. <i>Homework 7 due Mar 17 at 11:00pm</i>
10	Mar 18, 21	Chp. 9: Inference to the Best Explanation Mar 21: Test 2

11	Mar 25, 28	Chp. 9 cont'd. Chp. 10: Judging Scientific Theories <i>Homework 8 due Apr 3 at 11:00pm</i>
12	Apr 4, 8	Chp. 10 cont'd. Review
	Exam period	Final exam (date TBA)

Lectures and Lecture Notes

Lectures will present and explain the course material. You are expected to attend lectures *after* doing the assigned readings. Most lectures use slides that I will make available.

It is crucial to your success in this course that you take notes on the lectures. Do not rely on the lecture slides alone! Research shows that taking good notes helps your learning. By taking your own notes (and this does *not* mean copying the lecture word for word) you process the material more thoroughly than you otherwise would and make later reviewing easier for yourself. A good way (but by no means the only good way) of taking notes is to annotate the lecture slides.

Discussion Forums

The course website features two discussion forums, one for Study Groups (Study Group Discussions) and one for the class as a whole (Class Discussion). Use these to ask questions, reach out to other students or bring problems to my attention. I monitor and occasionally comment on discussion posts.

Office Hours

I hold weekly office hours for one-on-one or small-group meetings with students. Office hours are drop-in – no sign-up needed. I encourage you to make use of them. I especially encourage you to come to office hours if there is something you don't understand or if you are struggling in the course. If this is the case, don't delay! The sooner you bring up such issues, the better I am usually able to help you.

This course has two TAs who will hold additional office hours during the week before a test and on an as-needed basis.

Announcements and Email

I will regularly communicate course-related information to you using the 'Announcements' function in *Brightspace*. Please ensure that you read these announcements. You can configure your *Brightspace* page so that you get notified (by email or text) when a new announcement is posted. Occasionally, I will also email you. Emails will be sent to the address listed in UVic's system as your contact information. It is your responsibility to make sure that this information is current and to check this email address at least once a day.

If you contact me via email, I will make every effort to respond in a timely manner, which generally will be within 48 hours (longer on weekends). To make sure your email does not end up in my spam folder, I encourage you to put the course number in the subject line (i.e. PHIL 201) and use your UVic email address.

If you have a question about assignments, due dates, or other course policies, the syllabus should be your first resource. *I will not respond to any emails that ask questions which are answered in the syllabus.* Your second resource should be the discussion board, which is accessible through the course website. You are encouraged to use this feature to discuss questions about course mechanics as well as course content.

Student Conduct

The University of Victoria is committed to providing a respectful and productive learning environment. All members of our community, including students, have both the right to experience and the responsibility to help create such an environment. For details on the rights and responsibilities this involves please read through the [Trifaculty Code of Professional Behaviour for Students](#). This document also contains links to applicable university policies. It is part of your responsibility as a student in this course to know your responsibilities as outlined in the code of professional behaviour (which covers, among other things, attendance and classroom behavior, online conduct in university learning systems, and academic integrity).

Intellectual property of materials on D2L Brightspace

Please note that all assignments for this course and all materials posted to the LMS website (including lecture recordings, if applicable) are the intellectual property of myself and the University of Victoria. Do not circulate this material or post it to note-sharing sites without my permission. Posting course materials to note-sharing sites or otherwise circulating course materials without the permission of your instructor violates the [Policy on Academic Integrity](#). Any evidence that you are circulating materials without permission will be referred to the Chair of the Philosophy Department for investigation.

Academic Integrity (Plagiarism etc.)

Violations of academic integrity, such as plagiarism, cheating on exams etc., constitute breaches of university policy and carry serious penalties (e.g. failing the class, being put on disciplinary probation). Note that it is *your responsibility* to be aware of what constitutes plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity, and that *ignorance of this is not an acceptable excuse*. For information, please consult [UVic's Policy on Academic Integrity](#) or contact me. If you are interested in learning more about academic integrity, you can also self-enrol in the [Integrity Matters](#) course in Brightspace. Search for this course under the [Discover](#) tab on your Brightspace homepage.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT or Dall-E) constitute sources just like books and articles. This means that, if you use such tools for completing assignments, you must acknowledge this just as you would other sources. For example, text generated using ChatGPT-3 should include a citation such as: "Chat-GPT-3. (YYYY, MM, DD of query). "Text of your query." Generated using OpenAI. <https://chat.openai.com/>".

Using AI without proper acknowledgment constitutes a violation of academic integrity.

Assignments in this course are designed to help you develop your understanding of complex philosophical material. Typical uses of generative AI do not do this (though there are exceptions). For this reason, I discourage you from using it. Exception: Some assignments may ask you to use AI in a particular way.

If you do use AI tools (e.g. to help you get started on an assignment), you need to cite them (see above) and explain *how* you used them. For example, did you use ChatGPT just for outlining or are passages in your paper copied from it (and if so, which ones)?

You are responsible for what you submit. If an AI-generated text turns out to include mistakes, you are responsible for including these in your assignment.

Accessibility

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this course, please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with me. If you require academic accommodations you need to register with the Centre for Accessible Learning (<https://www.uvic.ca/accessible-learning/index.php>). Please do so as early as possible. You can find information about academic accommodations through the Centre for Accessible Learning's website.

Significant Dates (<https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/dates/>)

- Sun, Jan 21: last day for 100% reduction of fees
- Wed, Jan 24: last day to for adding second-term courses
- Sun, Feb 11: last day for 50% reduction of tuition fees. 100% of tuition fees will be assessed for courses dropped after this date.
- Thu, Feb 29: last day for withdrawing from second-term courses without penalty of failure.

Grading Scheme

Percentage	Letter Grade	Grade Point	Grade Definition
90-100	A+	9	An A+, A, or A- is earned by work which is technically superior , shows mastery of the subject matter, and in the case of an A+ offers original insight and/or goes beyond course expectations. Normally achieved by a minority of students.
85-89	A	8	
80-84	A-	7	
77-79	B+	6	A B+, B, or B- is earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student's full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material. Normally achieved by the largest number of students.
73-76	B	5	
70-72	B-	4	
65-69	C+	3	A C+ or C is earned by work that indicates an adequate comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and/or participating in class activities
60-64	C	2	
50-59	D	1	A D is earned by work that indicates minimal command of the course materials and/or minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.
0-49	F	0	F is earned by work which, after the completion of course requirements, is inadequate and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.
0-49	N	0	N is earned if a student has failed to complete one or more required components of a course. N is a failing grade, but, unlike an F, makes the student eligible for Academic Concessions (so that outstanding requirements may be completed later). However, being eligible for Academic Concessions does not guarantee that these will be granted.

Interpretation of these grade definitions is at the discretion of the instructor. If you receive a grade that you believe is unfair, please begin by discussing the matter with the instructor in a

respectful, open-minded manner. If you still believe the grade you received is unfair you can appeal the matter to the chair of the department.

For additional information regarding grades, please see the most recent edition of the UVic [Undergraduate Calendar](#). All evaluations of tests and assignments will be calculated according to percentage scores. Letter grades and grade point scores are listed purely for reference.

Counselling Services

Your mental health is as important as your physical health. During the semester you might feel overwhelmed, lonely, or stressed about your academic performance. You might experience a personal or family tragedy. The University provides FREE counselling services. (Check www.uvic.ca/services/counselling/ for more information).

Course Experience Surveys (CES)

I value your feedback on this course. Towards the end of term, as in all other courses at UVic, you will have the opportunity to complete an anonymous survey regarding your learning experience (CES). The survey is vital to providing feedback to me regarding the course and my teaching, as well as to help the department improve the overall program for students in the future. The survey is accessed via MyPage and can be done on your laptop, tablet, or mobile device. I will remind you and provide you with more detailed information nearer the time, but please be thinking about this important activity during the course.