

PHIL 201 A03: Critical Thinking
(CRN #12516)
HSD A240, MWTh 2:30-3:20

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Course Description

When we think critically, we don't accept things simply on faith. Instead, we care about whether we have good reasons for thinking as we do. This course aims to develop critical thinking skills by introducing students to a number of principles for assessing when we do have good reasons and when we don't. These principles are highly general, so they apply in all sorts of contexts – including, for instance, academic reading and writing, the news media, politics, as well as discussions with friends and family. By learning to apply these principles students can expect to become more skillful at evaluating claims, constructing arguments, communicating effectively, and, quite generally, academic reading and writing. Topics to be covered include argument, deductive and inductive reasoning, common mistakes in reasoning, and scientific reasoning. All of these topics will be treated informally, with a focus on ordinary language and familiar situations.

Course Website

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

Textbook

The required textbook is Lewis Vaughn and Chris MacDonald, *The Power of Critical Thinking*, Fourth Canadian Edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

You may also use the 3rd Canadian edition (2013). Used copies are sometimes available at the UVic Bookstore or at SUBText.

Any additional materials will be made available via *CourseSpaces*.

Course Format

This course consists primarily of lectures. In these lectures, I will present and explain the course material. At regular intervals, there will be opportunities for students to ask questions. There will also be short periods of class discussion as well as student-led work in small groups. I will sometimes call on students in class.

Requirements

1. Tests

There will be 3 in-class tests, each worth 15% 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 tests later in the course. Students are required to do all four tests. Rewrites will only be scheduled in cases of documented illness or other extenuating circumstances. Such documentation must be received within a week of the test date.

Test dates are posted below in the course schedule. *You are responsible for knowing these dates.* Plan ahead and manage your overall personal workload accordingly.

2. Homework Assignments

Starting in the second week of the semester, each week will have a homework assignment. These typically consist of 10-12 questions (usually a mix of short answer, T/F, and multiple choice), but some variation is possible.

- You are required to submit *ten* (of a total of twelve) assignments. If you complete more than ten assignments (which is recommended), your lowest grades will be dropped.
- Each homework assignment is worth 3% of the final grade.
- Homework assignments will be made available through *CourseSpaces* and must also be submitted on *CourseSpaces*.
- Assignments are due on Fridays at 5:00pm, except for the final three weeks of the semester (after the Reading Break), when assignments are due on Wednesdays at 5:00.
- Late homework will generally not be accepted. Exceptions to this rule will only be made in the case of documented illness or other extenuating circumstances that interfere with the timely completion of the assigned work. Such documentation must be received within a week of the due date.
- It is your responsibility to ensure that you submit the required number of assignments.
- Students are permitted to collaborate on homework assignments, but each student must write up and submit their own answers on *CourseSpaces*. Group submissions are not permitted. If you do a group submission, or simply copy your answers from someone else, this constitutes a violation of academic integrity, as the homework assignment is an individual assignment (for more on this see the link provided in the Academic Integrity section below). Again, however, discussing questions with other students and learning from each other is fine (indeed, a good thing). If you still have questions about the difference between student collaboration and cheating please let me know.

3. News Analysis

The final requirement is a short, written analysis of an argumentative news item (typically an opinion piece) of your own choosing, which accounts for 25% of the final grade and is due on December 12. In this assignment you will apply the skills you have acquired in this course in a real-life context. Details of the assignment will be made available on November 22.

This course does **not** have a final exam.

4. Bonus Work

There is no make-up or bonus work for this course

Course Schedule (preliminary)

Date	Reading
Sep 5	Introduction
Sep 6	Chp. 1: The Power of Critical Thinking
Sep 10	Chp. 1 cont'd.
Sep 12	Chp. 3: Making Sense of Arguments
Sep 13	Chp. 3 cont'd.
Sep 14	<i>Homework 1 due at 5:00pm</i>
Sep 17	Chp. 3 cont'd.
Sep 19	Chp. 3 cont'd.
Sep 20	Chp. 3 cont'd./review
Sep 21	<i>Homework 2 due at 5:00pm</i>
Sep 24	Test #1
Sep 26	Chp. 4: Reasons for Belief and Doubt
Sep 27	Chp. 4 cont'd.
Sep 28	<i>Homework 3 due at 5:00pm</i>
Oct 1	Chp. 4 cont'd.
Oct 3	Chp. 5: Faulty Reasoning
Oct 4	Chp. 5 cont'd.
Oct 5	<i>Homework 4 due at 5:00pm</i>
Oct 8	<i>Thanksgiving – no class!</i>
Oct 10	Chp. 5 cont'd.
Oct 11	Chp. 5 cont'd.
Oct 12	<i>Homework 5 due at 5:00pm</i>
Oct 15	Chp. 6: Deductive Reasoning: Categorical Logic
Oct 17	Chp. 6 cont'd.
Oct 18	Chp. 6 cont'd.
Oct 19	<i>Homework 6 due at 5:00pm</i>
Oct 22	Review
Oct 24	Test #2
Oct 25	Chp. 7: Deductive Reasoning: Propositional Logic
Oct 26	<i>Homework 7 due at 5:00pm</i>

Oct 29	Chp. 7 cont'd.
Oct 31	Chp. 7 cont'd.
Nov 1	Chp. 7 cont'd.
Nov 2	<i>Homework 8 due at 5:00pm</i>
Nov 5	Chp. 8: Inductive Reasoning
Nov 7	Chp. 8 cont'd.
Nov 8	Chp. 8 cont'd.
Nov 9	<i>Homework 9 due at 5:00pm</i>
Nov 12-14	<i>Reading Break – no class</i>
Nov 15	Chp. 8 cont'd.
Nov 19	Review
Nov 21	Test #3 <i>Homework 10 due at 5:00pm</i>
Nov 22	Chp. 9: Inference to the Best Explanation <i>News analysis assignment distributed</i>
Nov 26	Chp. 9 cont'd.
Nov 28	Chp. 9 cont'd. <i>Homework 11 due at 5:00pm</i>
Nov 29	Chp. 9 cont'd.
Dec 3	Buffer
Dec 5	Last class – Review <i>Homework 12 due at 5:00pm</i>
Dec 12	<i>News analysis due at 5:00pm</i>

Attendance and Notes

Students are expected to attend class and come prepared to discuss the assigned readings. I do not take attendance, but I expect you to attend. Experience shows that students who attend class perform better in the course.

Lecture slides will be made available on the course website. However, these will be elaborated upon in class, so downloading the slides is no substitute for coming to class. They do, however, give you a sense of what was discussed if you have to miss class. You do not generally need to inform me if you have to miss class.

The use of lecture slides is for your own learning only. You are not permitted to distribute them to others or make them available on the internet (e.g. by posting them to a social media). Doing so constitutes a violation of copyright.

It is crucial to your success in this course that you take good lecture notes. 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 you make later reviewing easier for yourself. A good way of taking notes is to download and print the lecture slides and then annotate them in class.

Office Hours

I hold regular office hours so that students may drop in and ask specific questions about the course material. I encourage you to make use of these. 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. The function of office hours is not, however, for me to repeat to you a lecture you have missed. If you ask me to do this, I will tell you to obtain a set of lecture notes from another student. If after doing so you have specific questions about the material, I will be happy to answer them during office hours.

Technology (Computers, Phones etc.)

The use of laptops in class is permitted, but you are strongly encouraged *not* to use a laptop and instead take notes by hand (this does not apply to students for whom the use of a laptop or other electronic device is part of their learning strategy). There is extensive research documenting that the use of a laptop (or other electronic device) is distracting not only for yourself, but also for those sitting near you (see e.g. [here](#) and [here](#)). In order to minimize distraction to other students, those requiring the use of a laptop or other electronic device will be asked to sit in a designated section of the classroom.

Texting, social media, internet surfing, and the use of cell phones generally, is prohibited. If you engage in any of these activities in class, I will ask you to leave. Repeated failure to comply with this policy may lead to disciplinary action.

Email

I will sometimes communicate important information about assignments, readings, or other matters to you via email. Emails will be sent to the address listed in UVic's system as your contact information. It is your responsibility to check this email address 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 A03) and/or 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 course's student discussion board, which is accessible through the course website. Students are encouraged to use this feature to discuss questions about course mechanics as well as course content. I periodically monitor the discussion board, to make sure that all information is correct.

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](#).

Significant Dates (<https://web.uvic.ca/calendar2018-05/general/dates.html>)

- Tues., Sept. 18: last day for 100% reduction of fees
- Fri., Sept. 21: last day to for adding first-term courses
- Tues., Oct. 9: last day for 50% reduction of tuition fees. 100% of tuition fees will be assessed for courses dropped after this date.
- Wed., Oct. 31: last day for withdrawing from second-term courses without penalty of failure

Accessibility

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you need an academic accommodation you will need to register with the Centre for Accessible Learning (<https://www.uvic.ca/services/cal>). Please do so as early as possible. Please feel free to go directly to the Centre for Accessible Learning or to approach me.

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.

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 (or TA) 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 pp. 51-53 of the most recent ([September 2018](#)) 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.