

## PHIL 201 A02: Critical Thinking

TWF 12:30 – 1:20

**Instructor:** Dr. Thomas Land

**Office:** CLE B 331

**Office Hours:** Wed 3:00-4:00 and by appmt.

**Email:** [tland@uvic.ca](mailto: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 our attitudes and beliefs as well as our actions. Having good reasons in turn gives us greater control over our lives and improves the chances of accomplishing our goals. 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. So the course is not about any particular academic discipline, but instead focuses on developing key analytic skills that will serve students well across disciplines. 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.

### 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'
- to apply guidelines about when to trust the opinion of others, including experts
- to identify mistakes in reasoning
- to apply selected formal techniques for assessing the validity of arguments
- what cognitive biases are and how to guard against them
- how scientific reasoning works

### Course Website

This course has an associated website on UVic's *D2L Brightspace* tool. This will be used for lectures, 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*, Fifth Canadian Edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. We will use an abridged, custom-published version, which is available through the UVic Bookstore. An electronic version of the full book may be rented for 180 days [here](#).

You are strongly encouraged to make use of the online *Student Study Guide* for this book, which can be found [here](#).

## Course Format

This course will be taught as an *asynchronous online course*. This means that there will be no classroom meetings and you are not required to attend lectures in real time. Instead the course will have the following weekly schedule (with explanations below):

Time	Activity
Before Tuesday's lecture	Do the assigned reading
Tuesday 12:30-1:20 PST	Lecture
Tue PM/Wed AM	Process lecture and work on assigned practice exercises
Wednesday 12:30-1:20 PST	Pod Meeting
By Thu noon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Post report of Pod Meeting to Discussion Forum</li><li>– Post additional questions you may have</li></ul>
Friday 12:30-1:20 PST	Class Discussion
Sunday 11:00pm PST	Weekly Homework Assignment due

**Lecture:** The instructor explains the week's reading – attend in real time (via Zoom) or watch a recording later. To attend lectures in real time, use the Zoom link provided on *Brightspace*.

**Pod Meeting:** You will be assigned to a group of 4-5 students for the entire semester. This is your Pod. Your Pod is your study group. You meet (virtually) with your Pod once a week. These meetings are required. I recommend meeting during our scheduled class time on Wednesdays. But this is not required. Find a time that works for all of you. Different formats and tools are available, e.g. discussion forum, Zoom, or chat.

**Class Discussion:** Class meets as a whole, instructor addresses questions posted on the discussion board and clarifies concepts; additional exercises, occasionally additional lecture. Real-time attendance is not required – you can attend in real time (via Zoom) or watch a recording later. To attend in real time, use the Zoom link provided on *Brightspace*.

We will experiment with different formats and may decide to conduct this component entirely via the course website's discussion forum.

**Weekly Homework Assignment:** see below, under Requirements.

Please note that this is the *planned* format for the course. We will have to see how well this works and adjust as needed. Suggestions are welcome.

## Requirements

Assignment	Due Date	% of final grade
2 Pod Meeting Report	variable (see below)	2.5% each
9 Weekly Homeworks	Sundays at 11:00pm	3% each
3 Tests	Oct 2, Oct 27, and Nov 27	15% each
Group Project	Nov 13 at 11:00pm	3%
News Analysis	Dec 15, 11:00pm	20%

### 1. Pod Meeting Report

Every week one member of your Pod writes up a brief report of your discussion and posts it to a Discussion Forum on Brightspace. Each Pod member is required to write a report twice throughout the semester. Reports are graded pass/fail. Each report is worth 2.5% of the final grade. Detailed instructions for this assignment will be posted on Brightspace.

### 2. Weekly Homework

Starting in the second week, each week will have a homework assignment. This is usually (but not always) a 10-12 question online quiz (usually a mix of short-answer, T/F, and M/C).

- You are required to submit *nine* (of a total of eleven) assignments. If you complete more than nine assignments (which is recommended), your lowest grades will be dropped.
- Each homework assignment is worth 3% of the final grade.
- Homework assignments will be done in *D2L Brightspace*.
- Assignments must be completed by Sunday at 11:00pm (PST) – but I strongly recommend that you complete them on Fridays after class discussion
- Late homework will generally not be accepted. Exceptions will be made only in the case of documented illness or other extenuating circumstances. 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.
- This is an individual assignment. You must submit your own answers. 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.

### 3. Tests

There will be 3 online 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 three 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 personal workload accordingly.

### 4. Group Project

An assignment intended as a practice-run for the News Analysis assignment (see item #5). The group jointly produces an analysis of a news item and each member writes a brief reflection piece about the experience. Due Nov 13 at 11:00pm. Graded pass/fail. Worth 3% (2% + 1%).

### 5. 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 20% of the final grade and is due on December 15. In this assignment you will apply the skills you have acquired in this course in a real-life context.

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

### Course Schedule

Week	Date	Reading
1	Sep 9, 11	Introduction, Chp. 1: The Power of Critical Thinking
2	Sep 15, 16, 18	Chp. 1 cont'd; Chp. 3: Making Sense of Arguments <i>Homework 1 due Sep 20 at 11:00pm</i>
3	Sep 22, 23, 25	Chp. 3 cont'd. <i>Homework 2 due Sep 27 at 11:00pm</i>
4	Sep 29, 30, Oct 2	Chp. 4: Reasons for Belief and Doubt Oct 2: <b>Test #1</b> <i>Homework 3 due Oct 4 at 11:00pm</i>
5	Oct 6, 7, 9	Chp. 4 cont'd. <i>Homework 4 due Oct 11 at 11:00pm</i>
6	Oct 13, 14, 16	Chp. 5: Faulty Reasoning <i>Homework 5 due Oct 18 at 11:00pm</i>
7	Oct 20, 21, 23	Chp. 7: Deductive Reasoning: Propositional Logic <i>Homework 6 due Oct 25 at 11:00pm</i>
8	Oct 27, 28, 30	Chp. 7 cont'd. Oct 27: <b>Test #2</b> <i>Homework 7 due Nov 1 at 11:00pm</i>
9	Nov 3, 4, 6	Chp. 8: Inductive Reasoning <i>Homework 8 due Nov 8 at 11:00pm</i>
Reading Break – no meetings on Nov 10 and 11		
10	Nov 13, 17, 18, 20	Chp. 8 cont'd. Nov 13 (11:00pm): <b>Group Project due</b> <i>Homework 9 due Nov 22 at 11:00pm</i>

11	Nov 24, 25, 27	Chp. 9: Inference to the Best Explanation Nov 27: <b>Test #3</b> <i>Homework 10 due Nov 29 at 11:00pm</i>
12	Dec 1, 2, 4	Chp. 10: Scientific Reasoning <i>Homework 11 due Dec 6 at 11:00pm</i>
	Dec 15	<b>News analysis due</b> at 11:00pm

### Lectures and Lecture Notes

Online lectures will present and explain the course material. Students are expected to attend and/or watch these lectures *after* doing the assigned readings, as the lectures explain and elaborate on the readings. Each lecture uses slides that will be made available along with the lecture.

It is crucial to your success in this course that you take notes on the lectures. 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 useful way) of taking notes is to annotate the lecture slides.

### 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) 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 you are circulating materials without permission will be referred to the Chair of the Philosophy Department for investigation.

### Discussion Forum

The course website features two discussion forums, one for Pods (Pod 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 will be held via Zoom and/or Brightspace Chat. They 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 wait! The sooner you bring up such issues, the better I am usually able to help you.

There are two TAs in this course 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/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 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.

### **Online Student Conduct**

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting critical academic discourse while providing a respectful and supportive learning environment. All members of the university community have the right to this experience, and the responsibility to help create, such an environment. The University will not tolerate racism, sexualized violence, or any form of discrimination, bullying or harassment.

Please be advised that by logging into UVic's learning systems and interacting with online resources you are engaging in a university activity.

All interactions within this environment are subject to the university expectations and policies. Any concerns about student conduct, may be reviewed and responded to in accordance with the appropriate university policy.

To report concerns about online student conduct: [onlineconduct@uvic.ca](mailto:onlineconduct@uvic.ca)

### **Plagiarism and Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is intellectual honesty and responsibility for academic work that you submit individually or as a member of a group. It involves commitment to the values of honesty, trust and responsibility. It is expected that students will respect these ethical values in all activities related to learning, teaching, research and service. Therefore, plagiarism and other acts against academic integrity are serious academic offences.

*The responsibility of the institution:* Instructors and academic units have the responsibility to ensure that standards of academic honesty are met. By doing so, the institution recognizes students for their hard work and assures them that other students do not have an unfair advantage through cheating on essays, exams, and projects.

*The responsibility of the student:* Plagiarism sometimes occurs due to a misunderstanding regarding the rules of academic integrity, but it is the responsibility of the student to know them. If you are unsure about the standards for citations or for referencing your sources, ask your instructor. Depending on the severity of the case, penalties include a warning, a failing grade, a record on the student's transcript, or a suspension. It is your responsibility to understand the University's policy on academic integrity, which can be found in the undergraduate calendar.

Please see [UVic's \(revised\) academic integrity policy](#) for further details.

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

- Tue., Sept. 22: last day for 100% reduction of fees
- Fri., Sept. 25: last day to for adding first-term courses
- Tues., Oct. 13: last day for 50% reduction of tuition fees. 100% of tuition fees will be assessed for courses dropped after this date.
- Sat., 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 <b>superior</b> , 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 <b>good</b> 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 <b>adequate</b> 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 <b>minimal</b> 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 <b>inadequate</b> 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 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/](http://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.