

# PHIL 201 A02: Critical Thinking

CRN# 22398

HSD A240, MTh 10:00-11:20

**Instructor:** Dr. Thomas Land

**Office:** CLE B 331

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

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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 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. This course aims to develop critical thinking skills by introducing students to a set of principles for assessing when we do have good reasons and when we don't. In studying these principles, we will use the media (including social media) as a case study running throughout the entire course. But the principles themselves apply much more widely – 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 students 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. 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, *Applying Critical Thinking to Modern Media*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021, available at the UVic Bookstore.

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

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. If you miss class, ask your Study Group (see below) if you can borrow their lecture notes.

However, the pandemic situation may require us to move to online teaching. This will be the case for the first two weeks of the semester. It is expected that we will then go back to in-person learning for the rest of the term, but we cannot be sure that this will work as planned. When we are in remote learning mode, the course will be a *synchronous* online course. You are required to attend Zoom lectures and should not expect recordings to be made available.

## **Zoom Link**

When remote learning is in effect, we will use the following link for Zoom lectures:

## **Study Groups**

You will be assigned to 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 Group Projects; (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. For the two Group Projects (see below) additional meetings will likely be needed.

Study Group meetings may be in person or online. 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: 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 due will follow a slightly different pattern.

## Requirements

Assignment	Due Date	% of final grade
6 Homework Quizzes	Sundays at 11:00pm	3% each
2 Tests (online)	Feb 10 and Mar 17	16% each
2 Group Projects	Mar 6 and Apr 3 at 11:00pm	10% each
Final Exam	TBD	30%

### 1. Homework Quizzes

Each week without a major assignment 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.
- Each homework quiz is worth 3% 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 documented illness or other extenuating circumstances. Such documentation must be received 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 simply 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 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. *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 Projects

Two Group Projects, each worth 10% of the final grade. These assignments ask you to apply the skills taught in this course in a real-life context: For each of them, your Study Group jointly analyzes an argumentative news item (typically an opinion piece) and each student writes a brief reflection piece about the experience.

### 4. Final Exam

The final exam will be a three-hour online exam consisting of a written analysis of an argumentative news item (typically an opinion piece), which accounts for 30% of the final grade.

In this assignment you will apply the skills you have acquired in this course to actual news media content. The final exam will thus be similar in format and content to the two Group Projects.

**Course Schedule (subject to change)**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Reading</b>
1	Jan 10, 13	Introduction, Chp. 1: Critical Thinking and the Challenges of Modern Media <i>Homework 1 due Jan 16 at 11:00pm</i>
2	Jan 17, 20	Chp. 2: Claims, Reasons, and Arguments <i>Homework 2 due Jan 23 at 11:00pm</i>
3	Jan 24, 27	Chp. 2 cont'd. <i>Homework 3 due Jan 30 at 11:00pm</i>
4	Jan 31, Feb 3	Chp. 3: Obstacles to Critical Thinking <b>***add Kenyon reading***</b> <i>Homework 4 due Feb 6 at 11:00pm</i>
5	Feb 7, 10	Chp. 4: Fake News Feb 10: <b>Test 1</b>
6	Feb 14, 17	Chp. 4: cont'd. <i>Homework 5 due Feb 20 at 11:00pm</i>
Reading Break – no class on Feb 21 and 24		
7	Feb 28, Mar 3	Chp. 5: Media Bias Mar 6: <b>Group Project 1 due</b>
8	Mar 7, 10	Chp. 6: Manipulation through Fallacies and Rhetoric <i>Homework 6 due Mar 13 at 11:00pm</i>
9	Mar 14, 17	Chp. 7: Experts and Evidence Mar 17: <b>Test 2</b>
10	Mar 21, 24	Innumeracy ( <b>***add Kenyon reading***</b> ) <i>Homework 7 due Mar 27 at 11:00pm</i>
11	Mar 28, 31	Chp. 8: Science, Nonscience, and the Media Apr 3: <b>Group Project 2 due</b>
12	Apr 4, 7	Chp. 8 cont'd. <i>Homework 8 due Apr 10 at 11:00pm</i>
	Exam period	<b>Final exam</b> (date TBD)

## **Lectures and Lecture Notes**

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

It is crucial to your success in this course that you take notes on the lectures. Do not rely on the lectures 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.

## **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.

## **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. 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.

### **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 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 violations of 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, or 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/>)**

- Sun, Jan 23: last day for 100% reduction of fees
- Wed, Jan 26: last day to for adding first-term courses
- Sun, Feb 13: last day for 50% reduction of tuition fees. 100% of tuition fees will be assessed for courses dropped after this date.
- Mon, Feb 28: 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 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.