

PHIL 004 Critical Thinking – Fall 2017 MWF

Instructor and Section Information

Contact Information

Jeff Dale (JD), adjunct professor, www.JDphilosophy.com.
Jeff.Dale@csus.edu, or use the email tool in the course's SacCT site.

Class Meetings

MWF 10:00 – 10:50 am, DH208 (section 7, class #86490).
Final exam F 12/15, 8:00 – 10:00 am, DH208.

Office Visits

Drop-ins MWF 9:00 – 9:45 am, MND3032. (Exceptions: campus holidays and final exam week.)
For other times, email for appointment.

Communications

I generally reply to email within a day, and often much sooner, but I can't guarantee my availability at all times. Students should be proactive so as to avoid the need for last-minute email exchanges, in which I might be unable to give timely replies. Please do not leave me handwritten messages or try to reach me at the department, because my receipt of such communications may be delayed by several days.

Special Note

All CSU employees are considered "mandated reporters" for suspected child abuse or neglect under the California Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act. Hence, I am bound by the requirements of [CSU Executive Order 1083](#).

Course Information

Catalog Description

"Study of the basic skills of good reasoning needed for the intelligent and responsible conduct of life. Topics include argument structure and identification, validity and strength of arguments, common fallacies of reasoning, use and abuse of language in reasoning, and principles of fair play in argumentation." 3.0 units. No prerequisites.

Textbook and Other Requirements

[Logical Reasoning](#), Bradley H. Dowden, free online. (Link in SacCT under "Course.")

Other readings free online. (Links in SacCT in the applicable module folders.)

A subscription to [Top Hat](#) interactive technology, and either an Internet-connected device (Android, Apple iOS, or Windows) or a text messaging device (such as a basic phone with cellular service) to bring to each class meeting.

Level of Course

Students in this course are expected to have college-level writing skills, such as would be represented by successful completion of ENGL 005 or the equivalent. Students without that level of skill will probably need to work harder than average to meet the performance standards of this course.

Statement on Philosophy and Pedagogy

Philosophy is not a “soft” subject. Some people think that philosophy is characterized mainly by vague but deep-sounding notions, and a philosophy class is about sharing our subjective reactions to such notions. This conception bears little resemblance to what you’ll generally find in academic philosophy.

In part, philosophy resembles science. We strive for clarity and precision. We aim for objective truth, as best we can determine it. We ask skeptical questions and carefully judge the quality of the answers. But whereas science analyzes things of the world (empirical data), philosophy analyzes *ideas* – including ideas about the nature of reality and of knowledge (the foundations of science), about the nature of ourselves, and about how to judge goodness, beauty, and truth, and how to defend those judgments. In some ways, this is easier than science – thought experiments don’t require expensive lab facilities or extensive data collection. But in its focus on the abstract rather than the concrete, and in its exploration of difficult questions of value, philosophy offers plenty of challenges for even the sharpest intellect.

Studying philosophy generally does not involve absorbing a large body of facts – we might spend an hour wrestling with a single idea. What it does involve is a sustained effort in improving the strength and agility of one’s thought – valuable brain training that’s hard to find elsewhere. Accordingly, I design my courses to generate and reward the investment in thinking skill – philosophical astuteness that will continue to serve you in life beyond the course. I will challenge you, but if you persevere, and seek help when you need it, you may be surprised at how much you can learn.

General Education Requirements

This course meets the university’s GE requirements for [Area A3, Critical Thinking](#), which are summarized here:

A3 Critical Thinking. To meet the learning objectives of A3, a critical thinking course will do the following:

- A. Lead students to study about and consciously develop skills in critical thinking.
- B. Be structured for the pursuit knowledge through logical analysis and argument construction.
- C. Develop students’ understanding of logical relationships between premises and conclusions.
- D. Develop students’ ability to recognize more common formal and informal fallacies.
- E. Develop basic skills and capabilities applicable to a variety of academic disciplines and to the fulfillment of important life roles, such as citizen, consumer, and moral agent:
 - a. Evaluating the validity, strength, and relevance of arguments.
 - b. Understanding logical structure of both inductive and deductive forms.
 - c. Understanding uses and abuses of argument language, including consideration of connotation, ambiguity, and definition.
 - d. Abstracting the general from the specific, to translate insights from one context into others.
 - e. Arguing fairly and handling bias, emotion, and propaganda.

Learning Objectives

Development of the following skills (LO#):

1. Recognition of an argument in a passage of ordinary text, including distinction of argument from extraneous information and identification of premises and conclusions.
2. Analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of particular arguments.
3. Identification and explanation of errors of reasoning.
4. Evaluation of information sources for credibility and detection of deception.
5. Understanding of the nature of scientific reasoning.
6. Formulation, critique, and effective communication of conceptual analysis and logical argument, including writing an argumentative essay.

Course Plan

- The first part of the course is for development of a framework of understanding for philosophical thinking, which is both to support student success in the remainder of the course and to provide a general philosophical education that non-majors might not get anywhere else: belief, knowledge, and objectivity, and the conduct of discussion (LO1); conceptual analysis, logical reasoning, and the formulation and analysis of arguments (part of LO6).
- The remainder of the course builds on the foregoing and expands into studying and practicing the following: detection and understanding of various forms of inconsistency and unclarity (LO2), recognition of common fallacies (LO3), evaluation of information sources for their credibility and detection of techniques of deception (LO4), and the interpretation of sampling, causation, and scientific merit (LO5).
- The course also includes a progressive exercise in argumentative essay writing: argument analysis, critique, outlining, thesis writing, initial full version, and instructor comments, and revision (remainder of LO6).

Student Work and Assessments

Approach to Study

The course is designed to reward consistent engagement and study throughout the semester. Students are advised to ensure that they have mastered each unit of material as we are completing our coverage of it. When students fall behind, their grades tend to suffer in multiple ways as they struggle to understand the new material. The final exam is cumulative, and cramming to learn large blocks of previously neglected material in the days leading up to the final exam is unlikely to be adequate.

Students should review [“How to Do Well in a College \(Philosophy\) Class,”](#) by CSUS philosophy professor Matt McCormick.

Grading Scale

The semester grade, and each individual assessment comprising it, will be calculated on a 100-point scale, with letter grades according to the following minimums:

		87	B+	75	C+	60	D+
93	A	83	B	70	C	55	D
90	A-	80	B-	65	C-	50	D-

CSUS doesn't assign A+ grades. The department discourages grade inflation and fixed grading curves. To earn a grade better than a C will require better than satisfactory performance. The course grade distribution is not predetermined, but will reflect actual performance of the students in the class.

The remainder of this section details the components of the semester grade. “Semester points” are out of a total of 100 points available for the semester grade. The grade calculations described below can be seen and performed in the scoring worksheet in SacCT under “Course.”

Discussion (Dn) – 10 semester points

Class discussion contributes significantly to students' understanding of the material. Discussion credit is available for students' preparation for and productive use of class time, as reflected in (1) answers to in-class questions on the material, and (2) contribution to class discussion of relevant questions, comments, or whiteboard work.

At intervals during class meetings, I will display multiple-choice questions on the material, a total of 50 over the semester. Students must use Top Hat service (as described below under “Policies and Procedures”) to submit their answers. The questions are scored in five groups of ten, with each of the five groups giving a score on a 100-point scale, calculated as follows: ten points for each correct answer, two points for each incorrect answer, and four points for answering “Don't Know.” (Thus, since each question has four answer choices, purely random guessing is statistically the same as answering “Don't Know,” and any answer is better than no answer.)

Students also receive one score on a 100-point scale, covering the whole semester, for contributions to class discussion, calculated as follows: ten points for each class meeting in which the student made one or more contributions, up to a maximum total score of 100 for the semester. (Thus, students are rewarded for contributing to multiple discussions, but contributing repeatedly to the same discussion doesn't increase the benefit.)

Each student's semester score for discussion is calculated as follows: of the six scores described above (five for answering questions and one for contributions to discussion), the lowest is dropped, and the remaining five are each worth two semester points. (Each of the 100-scale scores is divided by 50 to generate semester points.)

Module Exams (X#) and Homework (H#) – 50 semester points

Instead of one big midterm exam, there will be six module exams. These exams will be administered during class meeting time as indicated in the schedule worksheet in SacCT under "Course." Students will not need to bring a blue book, Scantron form, or other paper to these exams, unless otherwise informed.

The homework is intended to build upon students' learning, as well as to provide structure to students' questions for best use of our class time. Accordingly, multiple submissions will be accepted for homework assignments, so that students can attempt the homework before class discussion, prepare questions to bring to class meetings, and attempt the homework again afterward. The homework score for the semester is the average of each student's ten highest scoring homework assignment scores.

Each student's semester score for module exams and homework is calculated as follows: of the seven scores described above (six for module exams and one for homework average), the lowest two are dropped, and the remaining five are each worth ten semester points. (Each of the 100-scale scores is divided by ten to generate semester points.)

Essay Project (EV) – 20 semester points

Students will be assigned an argumentative essay, to be graded on both content and mechanics. The essay project includes three scaffolding steps to help students prepare the groundwork for their essays, each conducted via in-class group discussion and exercises: (1) the Essay Argument Analysis (EAA), (2) the Essay Argument Critique (EAC), and (3) the Essay Outline and Thesis (EOT). Students will also have the opportunity to submit two versions of their essay, with my comments provided upon request after timely submission of the first version (not to be considered a "rough draft"), for use in revising or rewriting for submission of the second version. Only the higher of the two version scores counts toward the semester grade.

Students are advised not to underestimate the value of the opportunity afforded by the structure of this essay project, nor to underestimate the likely cost of putting inadequate effort into the essay. Competent philosophical writing requires more precision than what many students have yet experienced, even in other classes' college-level writing. Students waiting until the day before the essay is due to start are likely to find the task more complex and challenging than they expected; the risk of a serious hit to the semester grade is high, and the temptation to cheat (making matters even worse) may be high as well.

The CSUS philosophy department provides useful links on [general writing guidelines](#), [how to write a critical analysis](#), and [essay grading standards](#). Students who need individual assistance with writing mechanics should consider contacting the [University Reading and Writing Center](#) well ahead of deadlines.

Each student's semester score for the essay is calculated as follows: of the two version scores, the lower is dropped, and the remaining score is worth 20 semester points. (The 100-scale score is divided by five to generate semester points.)

Final Exam (XF) – 20 semester points

The final exam will be comprehensive; students should study consistently throughout the semester rather than relying on cramming at the end. Students will not need to bring a blue book, Scantron form, or other paper to the final exam, unless otherwise informed. The final exam is worth 20 semester points. (The 100-scale score is divided by five to generate semester points.)

Philosophy Event Write-ups (PhW) – extra credit

As described below under “Policies and Procedures,” there is only one opportunity for extra credit in this course: attending one or two approved philosophy events and submitting a write-up of each, worth up to one semester point each. Some events that don’t mention philosophy in their title or description (or in the credentials of their speakers) might nonetheless be worth counting as philosophy events, if they are substantially philosophical in emphasis. Students should carefully read the instructions, and ensure that events they plan to attend are included in the approved event list; both documents are in SacCT under “Course.”

I offer extra credit for philosophy events for both the benefits of participation in extracurricular activities generally and the opportunity for practical exercise of philosophical astuteness. I strongly encourage students to participate in a variety of the extracurricular activities on offer at university and college campuses and in surrounding areas – speaker events, performances, exhibits, clubs, recreational activities, and more. Higher education is a great opportunity for personal growth and development of self-understanding, and to exploit that opportunity fully requires not only taking care of business in the classroom but also exploring and experimenting outside the classroom.

Policies and Procedures

Reading and Preparation for Class Meetings

Students are expected to do *all* of the assigned reading *before* the first class meeting for which it’s assigned, and to come to class prepared to ask questions and discuss the material. Class meetings are conducted with the assumption that students have done the reading. Students should anticipate that careful and repeat reading will be needed for adequate understanding, and are encouraged to jot down questions while reading and to bring them to class meetings.

Conduct of Discussion

Doing philosophy involves the open and critical discussion of ideas. Even the expression of a mistaken idea may be useful in advancing understanding, and no idea is so good as to be above challenge or exempt from justification. Good discussion requires an environment in which all participants feel safe and valued. *People deserve respect; ideas do not.* Harassment, personal attacks, and contemptuous behavior will not be tolerated. Any student with concerns about classmates’ behavior should inform me as soon as practical.

Doing philosophy also requires concentration and careful thought. Accordingly, students should take care to minimize distractions, to themselves and to others, in class meetings. We will try to keep the rules casual about arrival and departure, use of electronics, and classroom procedure, but I reserve the prerogative to implement further rules if needed.

Staying Informed

Students are responsible for attending class meetings (and obtaining notes from other students for class meetings missed), for regularly checking campus email, for referring to this syllabus regularly and carefully following the class schedule in SacCT under “Course,” and for familiarity with the layout of the course’s SacCT site.

Use of Technology

Each student is responsible for bringing to class a working device capable of and prepared for use with Top Hat service: either an Internet-connected device (Android, Apple iOS, or Windows) or a text messaging device (such as a basic phone with cellular service). Students are responsible for purchasing a Top Hat subscription and for understanding and troubleshooting the use of Top Hat service. The Top Hat join code for this course is **272715**. Top Hat’s “Success Center” includes helpful links on [creating your account](#), [submitting answers via text messages](#), and other topics.

Each student is responsible for maintaining reliable regular access to SacCT and campus email, for understanding and troubleshooting their use, and for verifying successful electronic submission of work. Students encountering technical difficulties are advised to make alternative arrangements (such as the use of a friend's computer or an on-campus computer lab) and/or to communicate with [campus technical support personnel](#) as needed.

All written work submitted by students outside of class is scanned via Turnitin service. Turnitin compares each written submission with an extensive worldwide database of class submissions, links, and publications, and displays possible matches and a "similarity score." It does not determine whether plagiarism has occurred; that determination is made upon a thorough assessment for which the similarity report is merely a tool. Turnitin is very good at detecting patterns of text even when deliberately obscured. Students need not include names or other identifying info in their submissions – Turnitin stores submissions anonymously, and links to my students' accounts are accessible only to me. Submissions are retained in Turnitin's database for future comparisons.

Video or audio recording of any portion of our class meetings is not permitted, except in accordance with properly documented disability accommodations or as may be required by law.

Late Work and Missed Exams

All assignments, with one exception discussed below, are generally scored at zero if not submitted by their due dates. Exams are generally scored at zero if not taken during the class meetings in which they are scheduled.

The one exception is as follows: version two of the essay may be submitted after its due date, but at a progressive scoring reduction stipulated in the instructions.

Students who, for some good reason, need an exception to any of the policies about late work and missed exams should request an exception in advance, with appropriate documentation, if possible. Exceptions are subject to my sole judgment of what counts as a good reason. (An exception is not needed for an essay version two to be accepted late, but would be needed to avoid the applicable scoring reduction.)

Extra Credit: Only One Opportunity

Students should not anticipate opportunities for extra credit, other than the philosophy event write-ups described above. Students are responsible for exerting sufficient effort for the assessments described above, which are designed to be a fair reflection of student performance.

I don't offer unplanned extra credit opportunities because it is effectively impossible to do so without breaching fairness. If I were to offer an extra credit opportunity to one student requesting it, I would have to offer it to all of my students, *but doing so still wouldn't make it fair*. Students make decisions throughout the semester about how to economize their coursework time, based on the course plans laid out in their courses' syllabi. Some of my other students will have chosen at various points to reduce time spent on other courses in order to make more time for work in this course. If they had known that I would offer an extra credit opportunity later in the semester, they could've relied on it to achieve the same grade in this course, while allocating their time to those other courses to earn better grades there. Those other students cannot get back the opportunities they've missed, whereas the student requesting the extra credit already made their choices about allocating time to their other courses during the semester, and now are trying to get a better grade in this course as well.

Unplanned extra credit opportunities also would tend to undermine the integrity of the course. What may seem like a fairly modest increase in semester grade, such as five semester points, actually represents a substantial chunk of the coursework. For example, five semester points is equivalent to half the credit on a module exam; if a student got a score of 40 on a module exam, adding five semester points would effectively raise its score to 90. Replacing an F with an A on a module exam, outside of the assessment mechanism, would represent a significant departure from the course plan laid out in the syllabus – it would write off the difference between failing to learn the material covered by that module exam and showing excellent knowledge of that material, through a mechanism not part of the original agreement as represented by the syllabus, among the students, the professor, and the institution. The integrity of the institution, and with it the value of the degrees it awards and the transcripts it certifies, depends on the integrity of the courses the institution offers. And the integrity of a course

depends on the meaningfulness of the grades issued in it, which would be undermined by the professor's willingness to write off a substantial chunk of the performance measurement in the original agreement.

Study Aids

I don't prepare study guides, but I do provide two very useful study aids: copies of the class meeting slides and review copies of the homework assignments ("homework reviews"). Both of these can be found in the applicable module folders in SacCT, but each homework review will not be accessible until after the due date of the for-credit homework assignment from which it's copied.

Disability Accommodations

Students needing disability accommodations should provide me the appropriate documentation from the [Office of Services to Students With Disabilities](#) as soon as practical.

Academic Integrity

Cheating, including plagiarism, is a serious offense. Students bear full responsibility for understanding and complying with [the university's policies on academic integrity](#).

Students should understand that plagiarism includes not only direct quotation without quotation marks or attribution, but also paraphrasing without attribution, or otherwise using the ideas of others (including me or fellow students) as though they were one's own. Note also that plagiarism can result from the careless error of copying another's ideas or words and forgetting to cite the source. Students are urged to protect themselves by developing the habit of citing all sources *immediately* upon copying or jotting down other people's words or ideas, even in an outline or rough draft that's not intended to be seen by anyone else.

Students should also understand that facilitating other students' cheating is itself a form of cheating. For example, if Student #1 gives a copy of their essay to Student #2, and #2 plagiarizes the essay, #1 may be accused of cheating. Students are urged to protect themselves by never risking their work being copied in this way. Note also that students can be penalized *after* leaving the class, including the rescinding of their recorded grades in the class, if they facilitate the cheating of students in later semesters.

A violation of academic integrity may result in a failing grade in the course, communication of the incident to the department chair, and the filing of a report to Student Affairs for possible administrative sanctions up to and including expulsion from the university.

Required Affirmation, Start of Semester

Each student is required to submit, in SacCT under "Course," an affirmation that they have read, understood, and accepted (1) [the university's policies on academic integrity](#) and (2) this syllabus. *IMPORTANT: Students are subject to receipt of a score of zero on any work submitted or exams taken prior to submission of this affirmation.*