

PHIL 2003: Critical Thinking



0.5 credit. Assessment of reasoning and the development of cogent patterns of thinking. Reference to formal logic is minimal. Practice in criticizing examples of reasoning and in formulating one's own reasons correctly and clearly. Open to first-year students.

Winter 2022
Tuesdays & Thursdays
4:05—5:25 p.m.

Dr. David Matheson
Department of Philosophy
3A49 Paterson Hall
613-520-2600 ext. 1928
david.matheson@carleton.ca

Overview & objective

Critical thinkers are skilled at distinguishing good and bad reasons for belief. Critical thinkers don't just believe whatever they are prompted to believe; rather, they consider the reasons they've been given for belief, and believe when those reasons are good but withhold belief when those reasons are bad.

The main objective of this course is to introduce you to important principles of good and bad reasons for belief, so that you can be a critical thinker in whatever walk of life in which you find yourself. To accomplish this objective, we will consider the nature of arguments as reasons for belief and how to identify them, the assessment of arguments, the relevance of insights about probability to this assessment, and well-known fallacies of argumentation. We will also consider good and bad reasons for belief in relation to such things as expert disagreement, conspiracy theories, and moral matters, and the relationship between creativity and critical thinking.

Lecture videos & email consultations

In lieu of classroom lectures, I will post lecture videos on Brightspace and make myself available during the scheduled class times (T&Th, 4:05—5:25) for email consultations about these videos. You may of course email me at other times with course-related questions. But if you want to email me questions about the lecture videos in particular, it will be best to do so during these scheduled class times. I will answer the questions as promptly as I can during those times, on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Please keep in mind that the lecture videos are not for broader consumption. Don't share them with anyone outside of the course. You are not permitted to post them online. Nor are you permitted to submit them to crowdsourced platforms like www.coursehero.com.

Lecture slides & exercise sets

You don't need to buy a textbook for this course; all of the material you will be expected to learn will be drawn from my lecture videos.

This makes it imperative that you watch all of the lecture videos and take good notes about them. To help you with the notetaking, I will post the lecture slides that appear in videos. I recommend that you use these slides as the basis of your own notes—editing and supplementing them as you see fit while you watch the associated videos.

I will also post various exercise sets, corresponding to the weekly lecture videos, to help ensure that you are grasping the material we discuss in the course. The solutions to the exercise sets can be found at the end of the sets.

Evaluation

There is no final examination for this course. However, throughout the term you will be expected to take three tests, all delivered on Brightspace. In keeping with the main objective of the course, the purpose of these tests is to ensure that you have an adequate grasp of the principles of good and bad reasons for belief that we discuss in the course.

The tests will consist of both multiple-choice and short-answer questions. You will have one hour to complete each test. The first will be worth 25% of your overall grade, the second 35%, and the third 40%. The first test will be on January 27 at 4:05—5:05 p.m. The second test will be on March 3 at 4:05—5:05 p.m. The third test will be on March 29 at the same time. Note that despite the asynchronous nature of this course, you are required to be available for these test times.

The tests are cumulative in the sense that each of them will test you on material we've covered since the beginning of the course. The focus of the second two tests, however, will be on what we've covered since the previous test.

Schedule

Jan 11&13	<i>Reasons & arguments</i>	The importance of good reasons for belief • arguments as reasons for belief • propositions as the elements of arguments
Jan 18 & 20		Detecting reasons for belief by identifying arguments • simple & complex arguments • arrow diagrams • deductive & nondeductive arguments
Jan 25 & 27	<i>Assessing premise truth</i>	Trustworthy & untrustworthy sources • confirming & conflicting evidence • the method of counterexamples Test 1: Jan 27

Feb 1 & 3	<i>Assessing deductive arguments</i>	Deductive validity & logical form • valid & invalid forms
Feb 8 & 10	<i>Assessing nondeductive arguments</i>	Nondeductive logical strength • common types of nondeductive argument
Feb 15 & 17		Inference to the best explanation • competing explanations and how to assess them
Feb 22 & 24		Winter break
Mar 1 & 3	<i>Probability</i>	The relevance of probability to assessing arguments • basic insights from the probability calculus Test 2: March 3
Mar 8 & 10	<i>Fallacies of argumentation</i>	Begging the question • appeal to inappropriate authority • hasty generalization • <i>ad hominem</i> • <i>post hoc</i> • distinction without a difference
Mar 15 & 17	<i>Expert disagreement</i>	The necessity of trusting experts • the prevalence of expert disagreement • whether a layperson can have good reason to believe one disagreeing expert over another
Mar 22 & 24		Layperson heuristics for dealing with expert disagreement
Mar 29 & 31	<i>Conspiracy theories</i>	The nature of conspiracy theories • why the consideration of conspiracy theories can help us become better critical thinkers • some real-world conspiracy theories Test 3: March 29
Apr 5 & 7	<i>Moral matters</i>	Whether it possible to think critically about moral matters • arguments for particular

		moral propositions • arguments for general moral principles
Apr 12	<i>Creativity and critical thinking</i>	The nature and value of creativity • methods of creativity • the happy relationship between creativity and critical thinking

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2021-22)

Assignments:

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. There will be NO hard copies placed in the essay box this coming year.

Evaluation:

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

Deferrals for Final Exams:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in [Section 4.3 of the Undergraduate Calendar](#)). Visit the [Registrar's Office](#) for further information.

Plagiarism:

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. ([Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations](#))

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term:

- *Pregnancy or religious obligation:* write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the [EDC](#) website.
- *Academic accommodations for students with disabilities:* The [Paul Menton Centre](#) for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.
- *Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per [Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy](#).
- *Accommodation for Student Activities:* Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

Important Dates:

Sept. 8	Classes start.
Sept. 22	Last day for registration and course changes for fall term and fall/winter (two-term) courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Oct. 11	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 25-29	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 26	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, before the official examination period.
Dec. 10	Last day of fall term classes. <i>Classes follow a Monday schedule.</i> Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for a fall term course.
Dec. 11-23	Final examinations for fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 23	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 10	Classes begin.
Jan. 24	Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.
Jan. 31	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Feb. 21	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 22-25	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 29	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.
Apr. 12	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. <i>Classes follow a Friday schedule.</i> Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.
Apr. 13	No classes or examinations take place.
Apr. 14-28	Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 15	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 28	All take-home examinations are due.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:
www.carleton.ca/philosophy
 520-2110

Registrar's Office:
www.carleton.ca/registrar
 520-3500

Academic Advising Centre:
www.carleton.ca/academicadvising
 520-7850

Writing Services:
<http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/>
 520-3822

MacOdrum Library
<http://www.library.carleton.ca/>
 520-2735