



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.

Early Summer Term, 2021
Mondays & Wednesdays
6:05—8:55 p.m.

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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.

Video lectures & email consultations

In lieu of classroom lectures, before each scheduled class time on Mondays and Wednesdays I will post video lectures to Brightspace. I will then make myself available during the class times for email consultations about these video lectures.

You may of course email me at other times with course-related questions. But if you want to email me questions about the video lectures in particular, please do so during the scheduled class times. I will answer these questions as promptly as I can during those times, on a first-come, first-serve basis. To keep things manageable, questions emailed during the scheduled class times should be about the lectures of the past two weeks.

Finally, please keep in mind that my video lectures 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 video lectures.

This makes it very important that you watch all of the video lectures and take good notes about them. To help you with the notetaking, I will post the lecture slides that appear in my video lectures. 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 video lectures.

I will also post various exercise sets, corresponding to the weekly video lectures, 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

You will be required to take two major tests in this course, both delivered on Brightspace. The first test will focus on what we've covered in the course to date, and it will be worth 40% of your overall course grade. The second test will be cumulative and worth the remaining 60% of your overall grade. Both tests will consist of multiple-choice (and perhaps a few short-answer) questions aimed at gauging your understanding of, and skills in relation to, the principles discussed in the course. Because the tests are based on what I discuss in the video lectures, your best study guides for the tests will be the notes you take about those videos.

The first test will be at 6:05—7:05 p.m. on May 19. The second will be at 6:05—7:25 p.m. on June 9. Per the Registrar's Office regulations, you are required to be available at these times despite the asynchronous nature of the course, and note that *I am unable to reschedule test times due to conflicts with personal schedules.*

There is no final examination for this course.

Schedule

May 10	<i>Reasons & arguments I</i>	The importance of good reasons for belief • arguments as reasons for belief • propositions as the elements of arguments
May 12	<i>Reasons & arguments II</i> <i>Assessing premise truth</i>	Detecting reasons for belief by identifying arguments • simple & complex arguments • arrow diagrams • deductive & nondeductive arguments Untrustworthy & trustworthy sources • conflicting & confirming evidence • the method of counterexamples

May 17	<i>Assessing deductive arguments</i>	Deductive validity & logical form • valid & invalid forms
May 19	Test 1: 6:05—7:05 p.m.	
May 24	Statutory holiday	
May 26	<i>Assessing nondeductive arguments I</i> <i>Assessing nondeductive arguments II</i>	Nondeductive logical strength • common types of nondeductive argument Inference to the best explanation • competing explanations and how to assess them
May 31	<i>Probability</i> <i>Fallacies of argumentation</i>	The relevance of probability to assessing arguments • basic insights from the probability calculus Begging the question • appeal to inappropriate authority • hasty generalization • the genetic fallacy • <i>ad hominem</i> • <i>post hoc</i> • distinction without a difference • the gambler's fallacy
June 2	<i>Expert disagreement I</i> <i>Expert disagreement II</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 Layperson heuristics for dealing with expert disagreement
June 7	<i>Conspiracy theories</i> <i>Moral matters</i>	The nature of conspiracy theories • why the consideration of conspiracy theories can help us become better critical thinkers • some real-world conspiracy theories Whether it's possible to think critically about moral matters • arguments for particular moral propositions • arguments for general moral principles

June 9	Test 2: 6:05—7:25 p.m.	
June 14	<i>Creativity and critical thinking I</i>	Creativity as creative thinking • the value of creativity
June 16	<i>Creativity and critical thinking II</i>	Methods of creativity • the happy relationship between creativity and critical thinking

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Summer 2021)

Assignments:

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically.

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:* 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. For more details, visit the [Equity Services website](#).
- *Academic accommodations for students with disabilities:* If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. For more details, visit the [Paul Menton Centre website](#).
- *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. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support
- *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:

<p>+</p> <p>May 6 Classes start.</p> <p>May 13 Last day for registration and course changes for <u>early</u> summer courses.</p> <p>May 20 Last day for registration and course changes for <u>full</u> summer courses.</p> <p>May 21 Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from <u>early</u> and <u>full</u> summer courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.</p> <p>May 24 Statutory holiday, University closed.</p> <p>June 11 Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade for <u>early</u> summer courses before the official examination period.</p> <p>June 18 Last day for <u>early</u> summer classes. Classes follow a Monday schedule. Last day for handing in term work, subject to any earlier course deadline. Last day for academic withdrawal from <u>early</u> summer courses.</p> <p>June 19-20 No classes or examinations take place.</p> <p>June 21-27 Final examinations.</p> <p>June 27 Take-home examinations for <u>early</u> summer courses are due.</p>	<p>July 1 Statutory holiday, University closed.</p> <p>July 2 Late summer courses begin and full summer courses resume.</p> <p>July 9 Last day for registration and course changes for <u>late</u> summer courses.</p> <p>July 23 Last day to withdraw from <u>late</u> summer courses with a full fee adjustment. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.</p> <p>Aug. 2 Civic holiday, University closed.</p> <p>Aug. 9 Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade for <u>late</u> summer and <u>full</u> summer courses before the official examination period.</p> <p>Aug. 16 Last day of <u>late</u> and <u>full</u> summer term classes. Last day for handing in term work, subject to any earlier course deadline. Last day for academic withdrawal from <u>late</u> summer and <u>full</u> summer courses.</p> <p>Aug. 17-18 No classes or examinations take place.</p> <p>Aug. 19-25 Final examinations.</p> <p>Aug. 25 Take-home examinations for <u>late</u> or <u>full</u> summer courses are due.</p>
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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