

# CARLETON UNIVERSITY

## PHIL 2003: Critical Thinking

### Course Syllabus Fall Term 2017

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Professor  
Ken Ferguson

kenneth.ferguson  
@carleton.ca  
(613) 520-2110  
3A54 Paterson H.

Office Hours:  
TBA

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Class Time

Tues/Thursday:  
10:05 – 11:25

Location:  
TBA

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Critical thinking may be defined, roughly, as the systematic evaluation of beliefs (claims, theories, decisions) by rational standards. No skill is more important to success, whether in university, in one's chosen profession, or simply in making reasonable, well informed decisions in the course of everyday life, than the ability to think critically and logically. It is therefore appropriate that one of your courses should be devoted to improving your critical thinking skills. This is the course.

Unfortunately, there is no mechanical set of rules that can be applied to produce good critical thinking. (If there were, you probably wouldn't need this course.) There are, however, a number of informal methods, techniques and procedures which are very helpful in this task. Extended practice in the use of these techniques will enable you to recognize when an argument is being presented, identify precisely what the premises and conclusion of the argument are, spot any fallacies it happens to commit, and provide an overall evaluation of the argument. As a result of working with these techniques, you should be able to greatly improve your reasoning and critical thinking skills.

## REQUIRED TEXT

A course pack, with the title *Philosophy 2003: Critical Thinking*, has been prepared by the Instructor.

This course pack can be purchased at **Haven Books**, located at 43 Seneca Street, (613) 730-9888. Additional readings will be online.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There will be two in-class tests, each worth 30% of the overall grade, and a final exam worth 40% of the grade. The final will be held during the exam period. More details will be provided later about the content of these exams, but, in general, the questions on them will be similar to those assigned in class as homework.

## HOMEWORK

Practice doing exercises is essential to success in this course. Homework exercises will therefore be assigned for (almost) every class. Although they will not be graded, students are strongly urged to do them on their own before they are done in class.

## ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance will not be taken, as it is not feasible in a class of this size. However, regular attendance in class is very important and students are fully responsible for material they miss due to absence.

## OUTLINE OF TOPICS

(Note: See CuLearn for a more detailed list of Topics and Readings.)

### I. Barriers to Critical Thinking

### II. Analyzing and Reconstructing Arguments

- a) Claims, reasons, arguments
- b) Premises and conclusions
- c) Logical indicators
- d) Recognizing arguments
- e) The logical structure of arguments
- f) Dependent versus independent support
- g) Structure diagrams

### III. Evaluating Sources of Belief

- a) A priori knowledge
- b) Background belief and Information
- c) Testimony – relying on experts
- d) Personal experience and observation

### IV. Informal Fallacies & Other Errors

- a) Cognitive Biases
- b) Informal fallacies?
- c) Illicit Rhetorical Devices

### V. Deductive Reasoning

- a) Concept of validity
- b) Distinction between deductive and inductive arguments
- c) Inference rules and deductions

### VI. Critical Thinking and the Media

- a) Influences over the media
- b) Bias and slanting in the media
- c) The problem of fake news

### VII. Explanation and Conspiracy Theories

- a) Inference to the best explanation
- b) Criteria for evaluating explanations
- c) What are conspiracy theories?
- d) What's wrong with conspiracy theories?

### VIII. Scientific Reasoning and Pseudoscience

- a) Scientific methods of inquiry
- b) Theory testing and evaluation
- c) Nature of pseudoscience
- d) Fallacies of evidence

### IX. Inductive Reasoning

- a) Induction by Enumeration
- b) Sampling and statistics
- c) Arguments from analogy
- d) Causal Reasoning
- e) Mill's methods and causal fallacies

### X. Moral and Legal Reasoning

## Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2017-18)

### **Assignments:**

Unless specifically told otherwise by their instructors, students:

- must not use a plastic or cardboard cover or paper clips
- must staple the paper (there is a stapler on the essay box)
- must include the following:
  - student name
  - student number
  - course number and section
  - instructor's name
- No assignments will be accepted after the last day for handing in term work – see dates in next column.
- Assignments handed in through the essay box (just inside the glass doors, Paterson Hall, Floor 3A) must be dropped into the box by **4:15** on a regular business day in order to be date-stamped with that day's date. Assignments handed in after 4:15 or on a non-business day will be stamped as having been handed in on the next business day.
- Students are required to keep copies of their assignments. If your paper is lost at any point, you will be considered not to have submitted it if you cannot produce a copy immediately on request.

### **Deferrals for Final Exams:**

If you miss a final examination (formally scheduled or take-home) because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply for a deferral. You must apply within 3 working days after the scheduled date of your formally scheduled exam or within 3 working days after the due date of a take-home exam. Visit the Registrar's Office for more information:

<http://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationsoftheuniversity/acadregsuniv2/#2.5>

### **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. <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

### **Academic Accommodation:**

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

**Pregnancy 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 Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

**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 Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

**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](mailto: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 scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (*if applicable*). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC

website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (*if applicable*) at <http://www2.carleton.ca/pmc/new-and-current-students/dates-and-deadlines/>

You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

### **Important Dates:**

Sept. 6	Classes start.
Sept. 19	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.
Oct. 9	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 23-27	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 24	Last day for summative or final examinations in Fall term courses before the official examination period.
Dec. 8	Last day of Fall term classes. <b>Classes follow a Monday schedule.</b> 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. 10-22	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. 22	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 8	Classes begin.
Jan. 19	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.
Feb. 19	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 19-23	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 27	Last day for summative or final examinations in Winter term or two-term courses before the official examination period.
Mar. 30	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 11	Last day of two-term and Winter term classes. <b>Classes follow a Friday schedule.</b> 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. 14-26	Final examinations for Winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 26	All take home examinations are due on this day.

### **Addresses:**

Department of Philosophy:	3A35 Paterson Hall <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/philosophy">www.carleton.ca/philosophy</a> 520-2110
Registrar's Office:	300 Tory <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/registrar">www.carleton.ca/registrar</a> 520-3500
Academic Advising Centre:	302 Tory <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/academicadvising">www.carleton.ca/academicadvising</a> 520-7850
Writing Services:	4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Library <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/">http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/</a> 520-3822
MacOdrum Library	<a href="http://www.library.carleton.ca/">http://www.library.carleton.ca/</a> 520-2735