

**CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING
(Philosophy 05)**

Spring 2017

Instructor: Deirdre Frontczak
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Office Hours: Monday, 10-11 online or by appointment
Thursday, 9:15 – 10:15 Emeritus 1516

Required Texts: Bassham, Gregory et al., *Critical Thinking: A Student's Introduction* (5th Ed.). NB: This text is also on reserve in Doyle library.

Recommended: Barnet and Bedau: *Contemporary and Classic Arguments*

Course Description:

What is a sound argument? What makes one argument “better” than another?
Is it possible to make claims for validity that go beyond personal feelings or preferences,
and that merit our consideration for reasons that stand on their own?

This course is designed to provide you with concepts and distinctions that you need to recognize sound (or weak) arguments, and to analyze the reasoning process presented in a broad range of contexts – for example, editorials or commentary, speeches, political rhetoric, essays, papers, or scholarly texts. It is also intended to give you tools to strengthen your own writing and speaking, to reflect on your assumptions and critique your own views, and to present sound and compelling arguments – not only in class, but in everyday life and work.

Course Objectives:

The course will enable students:

- to distinguish between fact and opinion
- to differentiate between valid and invalid reasoning, and to identify standard fallacies in written and spoken communication
- to understand basic principles of reasoning, such as induction and deduction
- to observe the ways that their own experiences, interests and beliefs influence their own thinking, and to appreciate the value of considering complex issues from a broad range of perspectives
- to analyze and discuss ideas presented in discourse, and to present compelling written arguments for their views
- to develop their own skills of reading, writing and speaking consistent with the principles of sound reasoning and reflection.

Course Methodology

To maximize the value of in-class time, lectures will be kept brief, and will focus on clarifying or expanding material or exercises already presented in assigned texts, and prepared in homework assignments. Class time will focus primarily on:

- Assigned discussion exercises and/or topics for each week
- Small group / paired discussion of news or argument analyses prepared by students (typically, in written assignments)
- Large group discussion of arguments / essays assigned as reading for that week. (Note: Some assignments will require viewing films, online or televised material. Appropriate links and/or resources will be provided.)

To ensure the full value of the course for all participants, it is expected that students will keep up with readings, materials and written exercises, and maintain regular attendance.

Grading

Class participation and attendance	15%
Biweekly writing assignments / exercises	40%
Tests (3)	25%
Final Paper / Project	20%

Note: Tests are designed to confirm your understanding and retention of basic principles of reasoning. They will parallel homework and in-class assignments.

Writing Assignments and Exercises

To offer practice in application of critical reflection, interpretation and argumentation, your routine assignments will require one of the following:

- gathering and analysis of information on a given topic
- clarification and explanation of key themes, concepts and terms
- reflective analysis of an article, essay or argument of their choosing
- reconstruction of assumptions, arguments and conclusions in an extended article outlining of the reasoning you would present to advocate for a particular position or concept (note: a template will be provided)

Attendance and Late Work Policies:

“Good attendance” means no more than 3 unexcused absences. If you acquire more than this number, your absence(s) will be a factor in determining your final course grade. If you are absent, any assignments due and submitted by email will be considered on time. Late work will not be accepted except in case of emergency or by prior agreement with the instructor; and in either case, this agreement must be documented in an email message to me, even if we discuss it in my office or in class. There will be no exceptions.

SOME NOTES ABOUT CLASS DISCUSSIONS:

Since this class involves a good deal of student interaction, it is necessary that we agree to follow some basic guidelines of mutual respect. Many of the topics covered in this course are likely to promote strong emotions. In such an environment, conversations can become passionate and even volatile. We should keep in mind that the principle aim of such discussions is to increase our understanding of the concepts, principles and skills pertaining to the evaluation of issues as well as to foster a respectful understanding and tolerance of each other's perspectives. The classroom must be an environment of free intellectual exchange if this endeavor is to prove successful. Hence, the following will be expected of all students.

- **Respect for Classmates:** At no time will abuse or personal attacks (verbal or otherwise) of any student be tolerated. Talking or whispering while others are speaking is not acceptable behavior. It is distracting and frustrating for those who want to follow what is going on.
- **Come Prepared for Discussions and Exercises:** It is vital that you come to class each day prepared to meaningfully engage in the class session. This means you should have completed all assigned tasks and readings and come prepared to ask questions, offer insights, or otherwise engage in the course materials.
- **Cell Phones, Food, Restroom Breaks, Backpack Zippers and other annoyances:** Either *turn your cell phone off before entering the classroom or leave it at home!* If you have a specific (e.g. medical) necessity for bringing a cell phone to class, please alert me of this in advance. Work related issues (however important to you) are *not* reasonable exceptions to this rule. Class duration is less than an hour; **leaving the room during class should, as far as possible, be minimized.** Make your food and restroom arrangements *before* coming to class. If you have a specific personal need to leave the room during class sessions, please alert me in advance. Other noises and disturbances should be kept to an absolute minimum.

OFFICE HOURS:

Students are strongly encouraged to use office hours or (if necessary) arrange appointments outside of scheduled office hours to get extra help or clarification on any class topic or assignment. You may email me at any time. I generally check my email once a day during the week and once during the weekend.

DISABILITY RESOURCES

All students are entitled to full access to all classroom and learning resources. Anyone with a disability that requires an accommodation should inform me at the start of the semester, so we can make appropriate arrangements. You are also encouraged to contact the Disability Resources Department (Analay Village, on the Santa Rosa campus) for additional information or advice.

FINAL NOTES:

1) **Keep this syllabus for the entire semester.** It contains information on how to reach me and will answer many of your questions later in the course.

2) **Communicate with me.** Asking questions, expressing thoughts and concerns about the course or just keeping track of your progress in the class are all good reasons to contact me. If you are unable to meet with me during my office hours, an appointment may be possible for an alternative time.

3) Though regular homework assignments may be handwritten, they should be legible and grammatically accurate. **All graded assignments must be typed unless otherwise noted.**

Week One: Chapter 1

SYLLABUS BY WEEKLY TOPIC

What is Critical Thinking and why does it matter?

Learning Objectives: Students understand the meaning and importance of critical thinking, and are able to recognize and identify many of the common obstacles to sound reasoning and reflection in our everyday thinking and discourse.

Week Two: Chapter 2

Introduction to Argument and Language Fundamentals

Learning Objectives: Students understand the expressive, informative and directive functions of language, and can differentiate argument from explanatory or expressive discourse, as well as the different categories of claims.

Reading: Socrates: *Crito*

Learning Objective: Students engage with Socratic dialogue as applied to principles of freedom, autonomy and social justice, and reflect on the value of critical thinking in individual life and society.

Paper Due Week 2: Commentary on the *Crito*

Week Three: Chapter 3

Composing an Argument I: Stating the Issue

Learning Objectives: Students gain practice in articulating an issue and presenting its various elements and controversies, through various discursive forms.

Deductive Reasoning I:

Learning Objectives: Students are introduced to the difference between deductive and inductive reasoning, and gain practice in identifying, constructing and testing simple categorical propositions.

Week 4: Reading: Declaration of Independence (summary / analysis)

Learning Objective: Students identify, analyze, evaluate and respond to basic deductive and inductive argument forms.

Paper Due Week 4: Response to Jefferson

Week 5: Chapter 4

Language and Structure: The importance of clarity in the spoken and written word

Learning Objectives: Students see that thinking resides in language, and is aided by clarity and precision. They grasp the threat of ambiguity to sound argument; they distinguish fact from opinion; and they grasp the basic structure of an argument.

Week 6: Supplemental material on language and clarity:

Video: *Masters of Persuasion* (or other, TBA) **Reading:** MLK Jr. “I Have a Dream”

Paper Due Week 6: Definitions, Parts 1 and 2

Week Seven: Chapter 5

Fallacies of Relevance and Context

Learning Objectives: Students understand the concepts of positive and negative relevance and irrelevance, and learn to assess the cogency of an argument based on the criteria of *consistency* and *relevance*.

Logical Fallacies II: Relevance (including Analogies, Generalization)

Learning Objectives: Students are familiar with the function and appropriate use of analogies, and can both assess their validity in discourse and employ analogies as a strategic element in constructing a compelling argument.

Week Eight: Chapter 6

Logical Fallacies II: Consistency and Acceptability (Sufficient Grounds)

Learning Objectives: Students will learn to identify a number of common fallacies that occur in arguments, and will gather examples of these fallacies in items found in the public media. They will gain practice in finding and identifying these fallacies in all sorts of statements, and will work with one another to critique their own written products.

Supplemental Video: (on manipulation of public media)

Fallacies in the Media project Due Week 9

Week Nine: Chapter 7

Constructing / analyzing an argument (ARG conditions)

Learning Objectives: Students are able to map basic elements of an argument (claims – stated and unstated; presuppositions; assumptions; conclusions) and to assess the logical credibility and validity of simple arguments.

Validity: Diagramming and Summarizing an Argument in Standardized Form

Learning Objectives: Students continue to define premises – those that are stated, and those that are implicit – and examine the validity of those background elements and their importance to the validity of subsequent claims. Students diagram argument structure showing major and sub-arguments, evidence cited, and how conclusions build on each of those elements.

Week Ten: Chapter 8

Analyzing and Evaluating an Argument

Learning Objective: Students apply basic principles of logic as they critically read through and analyze the text. They identify and assess premises and assumptions that underlie an argument, and assess rational structure and consistency, as well as conclusions and key gaps in the argument.

Supplemental Reading: Garrett Hardin: *Lifeboat Ethics* (analysis)

Week Eleven: Chapter 11

Inductive Reasoning I: Generalizations and Analogies

Learning Objectives: Students grasp the nature and value of inductive reasoning, and are able to assess the strength and validity of inductive arguments in support of various practical claims. Students grasp the use and relative validity of statistical data and analogies in constructing inductive arguments.

Inductive Reasoning II: Hypotheses and Causality: Science, polling and more

Learning Objectives: Students understand and are able to assess and construct arguments employing hypothetical constructs and causal assertions. Students appreciate the limitations and pitfalls of these methods and can evaluate the plausibility of conclusions and sources that rely on these forms.

Week Twelve: Chapter 12

Identifying, evaluating and using sources

Learning Objectives: Students compose and discuss an argument for their issue, consisting of a background or context, thesis, and key supportive arguments.

Week Thirteen: Chapter 13

Composing an Argument: Argument Construction / Presentation / Review

Learning Objectives: Students complete the composition and presentation of their arguments on a complex issue of their choice, and engage in discussion and critique of these presentations.

Students synthesize what they have learned individually and collectively, and are able to apply key principles to practical matters of their own lives and work. Students explore ways that critical thinking / writing / reflection are applied in their own writing and research, and practice integrating these methods into their own ongoing assignments.

Reading: MLK Jr: Letter from Birmingham Jail

Week Fourteen: *In Class*: Polish /deliver Team Presentations.

Week Fifteen: Composing a Written Argument: Argument Construction / Presentation / Review

Learning Objectives: Students complete the composition and presentation of their arguments on a complex issue of their choice, and engage in discussion and critique of these presentations.

Students synthesize what they have learned individually and collectively, and are able to apply key principles to practical matters of their own lives and work. Students explore ways that critical thinking / writing / reflection are applied in their own writing and research, and practice integrating these methods into their own ongoing assignments.

Week Sixteen: On Writing Well / Refine Individual Paper: peer reviews

Week Seventeen: Papers Due

Week Eighteen: Final Exam