

PHIL 141: Critical Thinking

Fall 2023 Rm. 8.522; T and Th: 10:30 – 11:45am

Instructor

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This syllabus is subject to revision at the discretion of the instructor.

Course Description

We are constantly being given reasons to do and believe things: buy a product, support a cause, accept a job, judge someone innocent or guilty, judge that fairness requires us to do some household chore, and so on. Assessing the reasons for doing or believing these things calls upon us to think carefully and accurately. This course will help you improve your skills at giving and assessing reasons.

Course Aims and Outcomes

Although the course will give you a solid introduction to informal logic, the understanding of this material is not an aim in itself but a means of realizing a diverse set of skills, most of which fall under three headings:

1. Identifying Flawed Reasoning

Students who complete this course will be able to apply methods and principles for identifying flawed reasoning. They will be able to apply criteria for formal and informal fallacies, for scientifically improper cases of explanation and prediction, and for cognitive biases that lead to these errors. For this purpose, students will work through a number of exercises to make the application of these skills habitual.

2. Using Tools for Effective Thinking

Students will be able to apply methods and principles for identifying good reasoning. They will gain skill in identifying deductive argument forms, and scientifically proper predictions and explanations. Again, working through exercises will help develop such skills.

3. Fostering a "Critical" Attitude

Students will be able to analyze and explain how human beings often think poorly and how conclusions are often motivated by nonrational forces. They will acquire a more "critical" attitude toward the ideas of family members, peers, culture (incl. its traditions, authorities, and institutions)—plus a greater sensitivity to the fallibility of their own minds. Students will not become argumentative for its own sake (that can be unproductive). Rather, they will increasingly *check for themselves* that the reasons for a claim are adequate. At the same time, students will remain open to learning new information from others, especially experts—although they will always strive to understand for themselves the reasons for/against a claim.

Course Assignments:

1. *Participation* is worth 10% of the final grade. How much should you participate? Well, if you don't participate *at all*, don't expect to get a passing grade for participation! Yet you can earn an 'A' here without talking at every chance. Indeed, *quality matters much more than quantity* and you certainly should avoid dominating the discussion. NOTE WELL: There are other ways to participate, including:

-Posting on the discussion board on Moodle or replying to someone else's post.

- -Emailing me or visiting our office hours with questions/comments
- -Sharing videos, websites, or other content that is relevant to the course (email me first).
- 2. *Homework* is due three times during the semester (see the schedule below). These are graded satisfactory/unsatisfactory and are collectively worth 18% of your final grade.
- 3. In-class Quizzes occur four times during the semester (see the schedule below). While completing the quizzes, you may use your own <u>hard copies</u> of the readings and notes, <u>but no phones/computers</u>. The first quiz is worth 10% of your final grade. The other three are each worth 15%. The latter three quizzes mostly consist of the the same type of exercises (respectively) as on the three homeworks. If you can do the exercises from the homeworks and have absorbed the readings, you will be well prepared for the quizzes.
- 4. *Essay* on Hume's "Of Miracles" is due at the end of the term (5 pages max). Further instruction will be provided later. The essay is worth 17% of the final grade.

Course Policies:

- Attendance Policy: After your second unexcused absence, 20% of your participation grade will be deducted. After your *third* unexcused absence, 50% of that grade will be deducted. After your *fourth* unexcused absence, you will receive a 0 for participation. After your *fifth* unexcused absence, you will receive a failing grade for the entire course.
- The answer keys to homeworks will be posted after the due date/time has passed. For this reason, no late homeworks are accepted, PERIOD.
- MAKE-UP QUIZZES. If you are absent for a quiz, you are allowed ONE opportunity for a make-up quiz, which will be administered on Reading Day, just before finals week. (I'll email you later with details.) Any further missed quizzes will receive a grade of zero.
- During class, do not use your laptop/phone for anything other than class work. Please resist the temptation to check your email/texts or visit random websites. (If you are shopping for new clothes online, that will distract everyone sitting behind/beside you.) Logic requires a LOT of concentration, and distractions can be quite harmful.

- > Relatedly, *please do not be late* and *remember to mute your phone*.
- If you have special needs because of a disability (psychological or physical), I am very happy to arrange accommodations. But please contact me about such arrangements ASAP.
- Throughout the course, I will simply assume that you are keeping up with the readings and videos. I will not be giving you reminders; you are responsible for reviewing the course materials according to the schedule given below.
- Discussions *must* proceed in a respectful and well-mannered fashion. <u>This course can be difficult</u>, and no one should be made to feel stupid. Relatedly, taking an aggressive tone is inappropriate. It usually signals that the goal is to "win" a dispute, rather than to co-operate in the mutual pursuit of understanding. I reserve the right to remove you from the classroom if you violate these basic norms of courtesy.
- Be forewarned that the majority of the feedback on your work will be critical. But *please* do not take any of these criticisms personally! Loads of critical feedback is simply how academic philosophy operates. And my intent is *certainly* not to belittle or discourage you, but to sharpen your writing/thinking skills.
- The NU Student Code of Conduct is in effect for this class. See <u>https://nu.edu.kz/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/NU-Student-Code-of-Conduct.pdf</u>. Plagiarism is sometimes unintentional—visit the following tutorial from Cornell University to learn how to recognize plagiarism: <u>https://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/exercises.cfm</u>. You will be held responsible for plagiarism regardless of whether it was intentional—so it is in your interest to learn how to recognize it!
- The use of artificial intelligence (A.I.) for completing your assignments is strictly prohibited. Uploading or viewing answers from Course Hero or other websites is also strictly prohibited. I will prosecute violations.

Percentage	Letter Grade	G.P.A. scale
95-100	A	4.0
90-94.9	A-	3.67
85-89.9	B+	3.33
80-84.9	В	3.0
75-79.9	B-	2.67

70-74.9	C+	2.33
65-69.9	С	2.0
60-64.9	C-	1.67
55-59.9	D+	1.33
50-54.9	D	1.0
<50	F	0.0

> The grading scale at Nazarbayev University (as set by the Registrar) is as follows:

General Advice:

- I suggest using HARD COPIES of the reading materials. Studies show that we learn better by reading hard copies versus reading a computer screen.¹
- Some students find logic to be especially difficult. I thus recommend getting an *early start* on the homeworks and getting a *logic buddy* as well. However, logic buddies must not simply divide up the homework exercises and share answers. Rather, you should complete all exercises individually, and then get together to *compare* your work. When discrepancies arise, you can then figure out the right answer together, which is often *highly* effective in learning logic.

¹ See, e.g., Clinton, V. (2019). Reading from paper compared to screens: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Research on Reading* 42(2): 288-325.

Schedule [Items listed inside square brackets are optional]

WEEK ONE	
Aug. 15	Intro to the Course. Buddha, "Kālāma Sutta;" Graham, "What You Can't Say" (excerpts); <i>2 Handouts</i> : Pessimism about Arguments; Making Distinctions
Aug. 17	Psychological Obstacles. Vaughn, ch. 4 of <u>The Power of Critical</u> <u>Thinking</u> (excerpts); <i>2 Videos</i> : Muller, "The Science of Thinking;" Shepherd, "Three Kinds of Bias that Shape Your Worldview;" Huemer, "Why_People are Irrational about Politics;" <i>Handout</i> : Cognitive Biases; <i>7</i> <i>Videos</i> : Laurie Santos on Cognitive Biases; <i>4 Handouts</i> : What is the Ideal Setting for Inquiry?; Suspending Judgment; S.L.O.W. Decision Tool; A Curious Way to Avoid Bias; [<i>Video</i> : DeLaplante, "Cognitive Biases;" <i>Handout:</i> Defense Mechanisms; Kenyon & Beaulac, "Critical Thinking Education and Debiasing"]
WEEK TWO	
Aug. 22	<u>First Quiz (Intro Material & Psychology)</u>
Aug. 24	Argument Types. <i>3 Handouts</i> : Five Types of Argument; Premise and Conclusion Indicators; How to Criticize Different Types of Argument.
WEEK THREE Aug. 29, 31	Argument Types (cont')
WEEK FOUR	
Sept. 5, 7	Symbolizing Arguments. Bergmann et al., ch. 2 of <u>The Logic Book</u> (excerpt); <i>Video</i> : "Crash Course in Formal Logic: Propositional Logic" <i>Handout</i> : Necessary versus Sufficient Conditions
WEEK FIVE	
Sept. 12, 14	Argument Forms. Howard-Snyder et al., ch. 1 of <u>The Power of Logic</u> (excerpts); <i>2 Handouts</i> : Famous Forms; Formal Fallacies
WEEK SIX	
Sept. 19, 21	Real-World Arguments. Vaughn, "Diagramming Arguments" and "Assessing Longer Arguments." [<i>Handout:</i> Reconstructing Arguments]
	Thurs. Sept. 21: Homework on Arguments due at the START of class.
WEEK SEVEN	
Sept. 26	<u>Second Quiz (Arguments)</u>
Sept. 28	Informal Fallacies. 2 Handouts: Pseudo-Deductions; Fallacies of Unwarranted Promises: 2 Videog: Julianna Chung, "Ad Haminami"
	Ioseph Wu "Straw Man Fallacy" <i>Movie</i> 12 Angry Men (excerpt)
WEEK EIGHT	(choop)
Oct. 3, 5	NO CLASS (Fall Break)

WEEK NINE	
Oct. 10, 12	Rhetoric and Emotion. <i>3 Handouts</i> : Devious Rhetoric; The Appeal to Emotion; Are Emotions Relevant?; Earp, "Mental Shortcuts" [<i>2 Videos</i> : Ruth Chang, "Hard Choices: Cassidy, "Developing Wisdom"]
WEEK TEN	
Oct. 17, 19	Appeals to Authority. Vaughn, "Experts and Evidence;" 2 Handouts: Website Evaluation Checklist; Don't Just Leave Science to the Scientists [Plato, "Euthyphro" (excerpt)] Thurs Oct 19: Homework on Fallacias due at the START of class
WEEK ELEVEN	Thurs. Oci. 17. Homework on Tunucies une ut the START of cluss.
Oct. 24	Third Ouiz (Informal Fallacies & Rhetoric)
Oct. 26	Scientific Methods. <i>Video:</i> Cooke, "The Scientific Method is Crap;" Foresman et al., ch. 9 of <u>The Critical Thinking Toolkit</u> (excerpts) 2 <i>Handouts</i> : What Makes for a Good Scientific Theory?: The Bradford Hill Criteria [Gorski & Novella, "Clinical Trials of Integrative Medicine;" Susan Haack, "Correlation and Causation: The Bradford Hill Criteria in Epidemiological, Legal, and Epistemological Perspective"]
WEEK TWELVE	
Oct. 31; Nov. 1	Probability and Science. Foresman et al., ch. 6 of <u>The Critical Thinking</u> <u>Toolkit</u> (excerpts). <i>2 Handouts:</i> Probability; Significance Testing; [<i>Video:</i> Muller, "How We're Fooled by Statistics;" <i>Handout:</i> What <i>is</i> a Probability Anyway?]
WEEK THIRTEEN	
Nov. 7, 9	Thinking about Science. <i>Video:</i> "Limits of Science;" Hanson, "Seeing and Seeing As" (excerpts); Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (excerpt); <i>Handouts</i> : The Problem of Induction; Remarks on Scientism <i>Thurs.</i> , <i>Nov. 9: Homework on Science due at the START of class.</i>
WEEK FOURTEEN	, ,
Nov. 14	Fourth Quiz (Science)
Nov. 16	Dialectic: Objections & Replies. Hume, "Of Miracles" (excerpts);
WEEK EIETEEN	Handout: How to Address Objections [Plato, "In Praise of Dialectic"]
WEEK FIFTEEN	Applying It to Vour Writing Deserberg and 5 and 6 of The Practice of
1107.21,23	Philosophy (excerpts); Dennett, ch. 2 of Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking (excerpts); Handout: Advice on Writing

Essay on Hume due during Finals Week (exact date/time TBA).

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Critique as a Way of Life. [Forseman et al., "Meta-Narratives;" Baggini & Fosl, "Foucaultian Critique of Power;" Forseman et al., more excerpts from ch. 10 of <u>The Critical Thinking Toolkit</u>; Herman & Chomsky, Preface to <u>Manufacturing Consent</u>; Chomsky, Afterward to <u>Failed States</u> (excerpts); *2 Videos:* Ted's lecture on Gender; Ted's lecture on Race; *Handout*: Coping with Ecological Despair]

If you or your friends experienced sexual harassment, you can contact:

Advocacy and Conduct Office, DSS: student.support@nu.edu.kz

- Daniyar Kossumbayev, <u>daniyar.kossumbayev@nu.edu.kz</u>
- Assima Seitaliyeva, assima.seitaliyeva@nu.edu.kz

Or

Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs: loretta.odonnell@nu.edu.kz

Or

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