



**PH 121 *Critical Thinking* (3)
Fall 2000**

Instructor: Terry Fach

Office Hours: Wed 8-11am

Class Times: T/Th 11:15-12:30

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Location: Room #1

Required Texts:

Vincent Ryan Ruggiero, *Beyond Feelings: A Guide to Critical Thinking*, 5th ed

Course Description:

Simply stated, this is course about how to think. More specifically, it is a course on how to think *better*, and so is concerned with logic. Logic is concerned with reasoning—how to distinguish good reasoning from bad, or better from worse. Logic is both an art and a science. As a science, logic investigates, develops, and systematizes principles and methods that can be used to distinguish between correct and incorrect reasoning. But as an art or craft, logic can be equated with “logical ability” and includes a whole family of related skills that have many applications. Among those applications are problem solving, weighing evidence, constructing arguments for or against a disputed proposition, detecting mistakes in reasoning (including one’s own), and clarifying issues.

This course will study both formal and informal logic. Formal logic deals with arguments in formal systems where deductive and inductive standards are used. Most of our time in this course is spent on informal logic. Informal logic aims to apply the techniques of logic to ordinary language argumentation (e.g. the kind that appears in newspaper editorials, advertising, speeches, and political campaigns). Informal logic focuses on the realm of real-life argumentation—arguments that people formulate for practical purposes in their lives.

All of us are consumers of arguments. Groups and individuals constantly vie for your adherence to their way of seeing things, for your acceptance of their view of what is true, important, or worth doing. We are, whether we realize it or not, consumers of beliefs and values, no less than of products. Which raises an important question: how good are your buying habits? Some arguments are damaged goods, and buying a bad argument might, depending on the situation, do you a lot more harm than buying a defective CD walkman. This course is designed to offer resources and teach techniques to help you distinguish the good arguments from the bad ones.

Course Objectives

The specific learning objectives of this course are:

- An understanding of the concepts, problems, and methods of logic
- Knowledge of techniques for critically analysing and evaluating arguments
- Improved general thinking skills of thinking clearly and critically about different issues
- Improved learning skills relating to problem-solving and decision-making
- Improved ability in oral and written communication

“Philosophy is like the measles. It must be caught from someone who is already infected. To learn to philosophize, you must try your luck arguing with a live philosopher.”

Elmer Sprague, *What is Philosophy?*

Course Schedule*

DATE	TOPIC	READING
Sept. 7	“Know Thyself”	BF 1
12	Critical Thinking I	BF 2
14	Critical Thinking II	BF 2
19	Critical Thinking III	BF 2
21	How good is your memory?	handout
26	Truth & Knowledge	BF 3-5
28	“Mine-is-Better”	BF 6
October 3	Conformity & Resisting Change	BF 7-8
5	Face-Saving & Stereotyping	BF 9-10
10	No class	
12	Oversimplification & Hasty Conclusions	BF 11-12
17	Unwarranted Assumptions	BF 13
19	Informal Fallacies	BF 14 & handouts
24	Continued	BF 14 & handouts
26	Continued	BF 14 & handouts
31	Continued	BF 14 & handouts
Nov'ber 2	Continued	BF 14 & handouts
7	Problems in Combination	BF 15
9	Clarifying the Issues	BF 18
16	Deductive Logic: Categorical Propositions	handouts
21	The Categorical Syllogism	Handouts
23	continued	Handouts
28	Venn Diagrams	Handouts
30	Disjunctive & Hypothetical Syllogisms	Handouts
Dec. 5	General Review	
7	Specialised Review	

* We will do our best to stay on this lecture/reading schedule, though there may be slight adjustments along the way. These will be indicated in class.

“Genius is the art of non-habitual thought.”
(William James)

Course Requirements and Grading

A. Critical Thinking Journal (20%)

All students need to purchase a notebook to use as a Critical Thinking Journal. [Note: The CT Journal is a different notebook than the one that you take lecture notes in. Please use a bound or spiral notebook—loose leaf or torn out pages are not acceptable.] One of the goals of this course is to help you develop and improve your thinking skills. One of the proven ways to achieve that goal is to **write**. There are three main opportunities to use your Journal. First, when you are reading the text (or anything else for that matter) write down your observations, ideas, and questions. It is always helpful to go back and reflect on what you have written so that you can perhaps elaborate on the observations, or challenge some of your earlier ideas. Second, the CT Journal will also be the place to answer specific assigned questions--in class I will call these "questions for your Journal." Third, your Journal work will form the basis of class discussions in most classes. **Bring your Journal to class every day.**

There are two main purposes for making the Journal a formal part of a course in critical thinking: first, it will improve your thinking and problem-solving abilities (a very valuable transferable skill); and second, it will improve your written communication skills. **I will collect your Journal each time there is a Quiz (4 times per term)** and will read and evaluate your work and offer some brief comments. Evaluation of your Journal work will be based on (1) completeness (all questions answered); (2) effort demonstrated; and (3) quality of the answers. I will return your Journal at the beginning of the next class meeting time. Faithfully completing Journal entries will be worth 20% of your final grade.

“I have never yet written anything, long or short, that did not surprise me. That is, for me at least, the greatest worth of writing, which is only incidentally a way of telling others what you think. Its first use is for the making of what you think, for the discovery of understanding, an act that happens only in language.”

Richard Mitchell, *The Gift of Fire*

B. Quizzes (40%)

There will be 4 quizzes covering material from the lectures, readings, and assignments. Each quiz is worth 10% of the final grade. See Quiz schedule below:

Quiz #1: September 26

Quiz #2: October 19

Quiz #3: November 9

Quiz #4: November 28

C. Final Examination (40%)

This examination, during the December exam period, will cover all material from the Fall Term. The exam will include a variety of question-types (short and longer answers), and will be based completely on material covered by the class lectures, assignments, and readings. It is, therefore, highly advisable to attend class regularly, complete assignments, and to take careful notes.

Grading Criteria

It goes without saying that some of the grading done in a course like this depends on the critical judgement of the marker. That does not mean that the standards of good writing and argumentation are entirely a matter of individual preference. Part of what you will learn in a class like this one is the set of standards used by academics teaching in this discipline. If you have questions about what lies behind the assignment of a particular grade, or if the comments on an assignment leave you uncertain as to what you would need to do to improve it, please consult me and I will be happy to discuss the matter with you.

What follows is a rough guide to grading criteria used in this course:

An **A** essay or examination answer is free from most stylistic, technical and factual errors, demonstrates an excellent grasp of the subject matter, is exceptionally well-organized and well-argued, and exhibits a fair degree of originality (where that is required).

A **B** essay or examination answer is free from most stylistic, technical and factual errors, demonstrates a good grasp of the subject matter, is well-organized and well-argued beyond the level of mechanical repetition of text or lecture material and shows some promise of originality.

A **C** essay or examination answer contains some stylistic, technical or factual errors, demonstrates an average grasp of the subject matter, but in a repetitive and mechanical fashion, and exhibits some elementary organizational and argumentative ability but without any evidence of originality.

A **D** essay or examination answer contains excessive stylistic, technical or factual errors, fails to demonstrate a grasp of the subject matter in even a routine or mechanical fashion, is poorly organized and void of argument and originality.

The following chart matches letter grades with a brief description and percentages:

A+	Exceptional	96-100
A	Excellent	91-95
A-		86-90
B+	Very Good	82-85
B	Good	75-81
B-		72-74
C+	Satisfactory	68-71
C	Adequate	63-67
C-		60-62
D+		56-59
D	Marginal	50-59
F	Failure	49% and below

Important Notes

- The last day to withdraw from the class without academic penalty is November 10, 2000
- The last day to withdraw from this course and still receive a refund is September 29, 2000
- Class attendance policy: All students are expected to attend class regularly and to prepare for lectures and discussions. See the NUC Calendar for NUC's official attendance policy.
- Minimum Standards of Correctness: NUC has defined minimum standards for written work (see attached)