

Syllabus for PH 121 Critical Thinking

Canadian Nazarene College
Critical Thinking, PH 121 (U of C Phil 275)
Fall Term 1999, Tuesday/Thursday 11:15-12:30 p.m.
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I. Course Description and Objectives

Simply stated, this is a 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--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 employed. 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, sermons, 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 portable CD player. This course is designed to offer resources and to teach techniques to help you distinguish the good arguments from the bad ones.

Course Objectives

1. understanding of the concepts, problems, and methods of logic.
2. knowledge of techniques for critically analysing and evaluating arguments.
3. improved general skills of thinking clearly and critically about different problems; to improve learning skills and to develop resources for creative problem solving and decision making.

4. 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?

II. Course Schedule

WEEK	TOPIC	READING
Sept. 7	Introduction to the Course	
Sept. 9	"Know Thyself"	BF 1
Sept. 14	Critical Thinking I	BF 2
Sept. 16	Critical Thinking II Quiz	BF 2 (handouts)
Sept. 21	Critical Thinking III	BF 2 (handouts)
Sept. 23	Use Your Memory	
Sept. 28	Truth, Knowledge, & Opinion	BF 3-5
Sept. 30	"Mine-is-Better" Thinking Quiz	BF 6
Oct. 5	Resistance to Change & Conformity	BF 7-8
Oct. 7	Stereotyping	BF 10
Oct. 12	MID-TERM EXAM	
Oct. 14	Oversimplification & Hasty Conclusions	BF 11 & 12
Oct. 19	Unwarranted Assumptions	BF 13
Oct. 21	Informal Fallacies	BF 14 (handouts)
Oct. 26	Cont.	BF 14 (handouts)
Oct. 28	Cont. Quiz	BF 14 (handouts)
Nov. 2	Cont.	BF 14 (handouts)
Nov. 4	Cont.	BF 14 (handouts)
Nov. 9	Being Observant	BF 17
Nov. 16	Deductive Logic: Categorical Propositions	Handout
Nov. 18	Categorical Syllogisms Quiz	Handout
Nov. 23	Disjunctive & Hypothetical Syllogisms	Handout
Nov. 25	Syllogisms in Ordinary Reasoning	Handout
Dec. 2	Review	

III. Course Requirements

A. Reading

The majority of assigned reading for this course is found in the textbook:

Beyond Feelings: A Guide to Critical Thinking, by Vincent Ruggiero

Other readings/assignments will be handed out in class.

“Genius is the art of non-habitual thought.”

William James

B. Critical Thinking Journal

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**. Many of your classroom assignments and take-home assignments are to be completed in your CT Journal. Suggestion: when you are reading a chapter in the text or a handout from class, 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. The Journal will also be the place to answer specific assigned questions—in class I will call these “questions for your Journal.” There are two main purposes for making the Journal a formal part of a course in critical thinking: first, it will greatly enhance your thinking and problem-solving abilities (a very valuable transferable skill); and second, it will improve your written communication skills. I will collect the Journals at the end of most Thursday classes; I will read them carefully but will not normally write any comments. They will be returned on the same day by 4 p.m. They can be collected on the shelf beside the faculty mailboxes. Conscientiously completing Journal entries will be worth 20% of your final grade.

Worth Pondering...“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*

C. Quizzes

There will be **4 quizzes** covering material from the lectures, readings, and assignments. Each quiz is worth 5% of the final grade. See schedule for quiz dates.

D. Mid-Term Examination

This exam will be given in class on October 12th. It is worth 20% of the final grade. Details will be discussed in class.

E. Final Examination

This examination will cover all material from the Fall Term and will be worth 40% of the final grade. This examination (2 hours in length) will include a variety of question-types, and will be based completely on material covered by the class lectures and assigned readings. It is, therefore, highly advisable to attend class regularly and to take careful and extensive notes.

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

F. Late or Incomplete Term Work Policy

Assignments are expected on the day that they are due. No term work can be submitted for credit after the last day of classes. My policy for accepting late term work (i.e. work due before the end of any term) is as follows: (1) Should you have a problem with a particular due date, please speak to me well in advance of that date and I will evaluate each application for time extension on its merits; (2) any assignment turned in after the due date (with permission) may not be returned within a reasonable amount of time, and may have very little by way of reader's comments; (3) students should be aware that there are very few instances where an assignment extension will be deemed justified.

G. Class Attendance and Preparation

All students in this class are expected to attend classes regularly and to prepare for lectures and discussions (usually in the form of assigned reading and writing). Students unable or unwilling to attend regularly or undertake this preparation cannot expect to do well in the course and should consider other options. The college's official attendance policy is as follows: "After three unexcused absences per term the professor reserves the right to require a student to withdraw from the class. A late arrival to class equals .5 absence."

IV. Office Hours

Should you wish to see me about any questions or concerns that you have, I will be available to see you in my office Wednesday and Thursday afternoons, 2:30-5:00 p.m. **Please make an appointment if you need to see me at another time.** To arrange a meeting, or should you need to talk to me about an urgent matter, either speak to me directly after class, or you can leave a message in my voice mail box (571-2550, ext.29) or on e-mail: Terry.Fach@cnaz.ab.ca