

# Syllabus for PH 125 Introduction to Philosophy

**Canadian Nazarene College**

**Winter Term, 1999**

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## **I. About this class...**

Most people have little or no idea of what philosophy's subject matter is all about. Many take their first impression of philosophy from what they have heard other people say, and often these are not flattering comments. Is the study of philosophy just "a bunch of head-games"? Will it be dangerous for someone with strong religious beliefs? Will it deal with topics that have relevance for the practical matters of our lives?

In the coming weeks we will consider these questions and others as we investigate both the history of western philosophy as well as some traditional philosophical problems. The lectures, class discussion, and assigned readings will show why some of these problems have resisted easy solution down through the ages. More importantly, they will help class members to develop valuable intellectual skills and resources, and to better orient their lives.

The examinations, quizzes, and written assignments are designed to encourage careful listening, reading, and reflection, and to measure the student's progress over the course of the term.

"Philosophy, when superficially studied excites doubt; when thoroughly explored it dispels it." (Francis Bacon)

## **II. Course Goals**

1. an improved understanding of the concepts, problems, and methods of philosophy.
2. An improved ability to think critically—and sensitively—about some traditional problems of philosophy.
3. Improved general skills of thinking clearly and creatively about different problems; to improve learning skills and to develop resources for problem solving and decision making.
4. An improved ability to communicate, both orally and in writing.
5. Increased self-confidence and self-knowledge through reflection, reading, and discussion.

## **III. Textbooks**

The required texts for this course are:

*Core Questions in Philosophy*, by Elliott Sober

*Sophie's World: A Novel About the History of Philosophy*, by Jostein Gaarder

It is likely that other readings will be assigned and will be either handed out in class or put on “reserve” in the library.

#### **IV. Course Requirements**

##### **1. Short Essays**

Two short essays will be assigned over the term. No research papers will be assigned in this course. Each short essay topic will be announced in class 1-2 weeks before it is due; each essay topic is based on an article or topic covered in lectures and readings. Although these shorter essays are to be no longer than three pages (typed or word-processed, 1.5 or double-spaced), it is expected that they will be very carefully written, with particular attention to style and argument quality. Each essay is worth 15% of the final grade. Further details will be discussed in class when essays are assigned.

**Due dates:** Essay #1: Feb. 25  
Essay #2: April 1

Important: Please turn in one copy of your essay (keeping one copy for yourself) to my mailbox no later than 5:30 p.m. on the day that it is due.

##### **2. Mid-Term Quizzes**

There will be two Quizzes covering material from the lectures and reading. Each Quiz is worth 10% of the final grade. Dates are as follows:

Quiz #1: Feb. 4  
Quiz #2: March 18

##### **3. Final Examination**

There will be a final examination in the April examination period worth 35% of the final grade. This examination will include both short-answer questions and longer essay questions, 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.

##### **4. Philosophy Journal**

All students need to purchase a notebook (bound or spiral) to use as a Philosophy Journal for the duration of the course. One of the goals of this course is to help you develop and improve your writing and thinking skills. One of the best ways to do this is to do some writing on a regular basis. When you are reading philosophy try writing down your observations, ideas, and questions. It is always helpful to go back and reflect on what you have written so that you can see how your thinking has changed, or so that you can elaborate and develop further your original ideas. The Journal will also be the place to answer specific questions assigned in class—I will call these “assignments for your Journal.” I will usually collect the Journals at the end of most Thursday classes and will read

them and return them by Friday noon (on the ledge by the faculty mailboxes, 5<sup>th</sup> floor). Faithfully completing Journal entries will be worth 15% 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)

### Final Grade Breakdown

Term work/exam	Total %	Score
Essay 1	15	
Essay 2	15	
Quiz 1	10	
Quiz 2	10	
Journal	15	
Final Examination	35	
TOTAL		

### 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.

96-100	A+	68-71	C+
91-95	A	63-67	C
86-90	A-	60-62	C-
82-85	B+	56-59	D+
75-81	B	50-55	D
72-74	B-		

## V. Other Matters

### 1. Late or Incomplete Term Work

Assignments are expected on the day that they are due. No term work can be submitted for credit after the last day of classes. Extensions will be considered depending on the merits of the excuse. Late work will be penalized at the instructor's discretion.

### 2. Class Attendance and Preparation

All students are expected to attend class regularly and to prepare for lectures and discussions. Students unable or unwilling to attend regularly or undertake this preparation cannot expect to do well in the course and should consider other options.

### 3. Office Hours

Should you wish to see me about any questions or concerns, I will be available in my office Wednesday and Thursday afternoons, 4 – 5:30 p.m. If you would like to arrange an appointment, simply speak to me after class, or contact me by phone or e-mail.

## APPENDIX A - 'SHORT ESSAYS'

Two 'short-essays' will be assigned over the course of the term.

Assignments should consist in a written response of no more than three pages (750 words) to the question(s) set. Responses should show acquaintance with relevant material in the textbooks and classroom discussions (if relevant). It may be necessary to consult other general works (e.g. readings placed on Reserve in the library, Reference works), but papers will normally require only modest amounts of research.

I strongly prefer that responses be typed or printed, 1.5 or 2 line spacing with reasonable margins. Neat handwriting may be accepted, with similar spacing. Essay writing conventions should be observed as appropriate; e.g., you should acknowledge sources of quoted or borrowed material. Style should be appropriate to what would appear in a *Globe and Mail* comment page, i.e. not merely conversational, but not unduly formal. Responses should be aimed at a reader who is intelligent and interested in the topic, but should not assume familiarity with academic theology or philosophy.

Papers will be graded mainly on (1) the clarity with which things are expressed (which includes everything from individual statements up to the overall progress of the reasoning), (2) the plausibility of assumptions, (3) the use and (where appropriate) the explanation of relevant concepts and distinctions, (4) the logical correctness of arguments. Errors in spelling and grammar will be marked, and will affect the grade where they affect clarity.