

Philosophy 1290: Critical Thinking

University of Manitoba
Winter 2011

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1 Course Description

As the title of this course's required textbook says, good reasoning matters. The ability to reason well has always been a valuable skill, but it has never been quite as important as it is in our day and age. We live in the so-called "information age." Marketers constantly vie for our attention, hoping to convince us to buy their product. Politicians hire small armies to carefully manage their image and message. Anybody with a computer and internet connection can make his or her opinions public. What all this means is that it is as hard as it's ever been to make the right decisions about what to do and what to believe. Having the ability to reason well doesn't make one's life easier, since it doesn't decrease the sheer amount of information one has to process daily, but it does put one in a better position to know what to believe, or not to believe, on the basis of that information. Acquiring the ability to reason well is the focus of this course.

Being able to reason well requires the ability to recognize an argument when it is made and then to distinguish good arguments from bad ones. Thus, a large portion of this course will be devoted toward developing an understanding of what arguments are and how they function and then learning about the features that separate good arguments from bad arguments. Since this course is about acquiring and honing a certain kind of skill, tests and assignments will require you to apply the techniques and knowledge presented in the text and in lecture. And since many different professions require the ability to present an argument in written form, this course will have a significant written component.

2 Course Objectives

I have several objectives for this course.

1. Upon completion of this course you should be able to recognize an argument, analyze it into its component parts, and evaluate it.
2. This course should improve your ability to clearly and effectively present and defend your own arguments in writing.

3 Course Textbook

There is one required textbook for this course.

- Groarke, Leo A. and Christopher W. Tindale. 2008. *Good Reasoning Matters! A Constructive Approach to Critical Thinking*. Fourth Edition. Oxford University Press.

It can be obtained wherever you like to buy your books. Any additional readings, if there are any, will be distributed by me.

4 Course Evaluation

Course evaluation will consist of unannounced in-class quizzes, a writing project, and two exams (a midterm and a final). Your course grade will be determined as follows:

Graded Component	Percentage of Course Grade
Unannounced In-class Quizzes	15%
Writing Project	30%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	35%

4.1 Unannounced In-class Quizzes

At several points during the semester, there will be an unannounced, in-class quiz. The quizzes will test material that has been covered recently in the course either in lecture or in the textbook. The quizzes will together make up 15% of your course grade.

If you miss a quiz, you will given no credit for it. However, if you notify me of your absence in advance—the best way to do this is via email—your course grade will not be negatively affected; when I calculate the unannounced quiz portion of your course grade at the end of the semester, I will disregard all of the quizzes for which you notified me in advance of your absence.

4.2 Writing Project

At the end of the semester, you will submit a 3–5 page essay in which you will make a case for a thesis of your choice. You will pick a view or claim that you would like to defend and then, applying the principles and techniques that have been presented in class, make a case for it. At various points in the semester (see the schedule in section 5) you will have the opportunity to submit an outline and a draft of your project and receive feedback on it. I will not grade the outline, but I will grade the draft. The grade you receive on your draft, however, will not be considered final unless it is the only draft you submit. If you submit a final draft when the writing project is due, I will take the best grade of the two drafts. Although you are not required to submit an outline or first draft, I *strongly* encourage you to do so. When grading your writing project at the end of the semester, I will expect a polished essay that satisfies the assignment’s requirements. If your essay is found lacking in either regard because you elected not to submit an outline or draft in advance, you will not be happy with the grade you receive.

4.3 Exams

Approximately two-thirds of the way through the course, on March 10th, there will be a midterm exam that will be worth 20% of your course grade. The exam will occur instead of a lecture during the regulary scheduled time. It will test all of the material covered in the course up to that point. At the end of the course, during the exam period, there will be a 2-hour final exam. The exam will test all of the course material and will be worth 35% of your course grade.

5 Schedule

This schedule is tentative and I reserve the right to make changes to it.

01/06	Preliminaries
01/11 – 01/27	Understanding Arguments Groarke and Tindale, chapters 1–4
02/01 – 02/03	Evaluating Arguments: An Introduction Groarke and Tindale, chapters 5–6
02/08 – 03/08	Evaluating Deductive Argument Schemes: A Foray into Propositional Logic Groarke and Tindale, chapters 9–10
02/17	Writing Project Outline Due
03/10	Midterm Exam
03/15 – 04/07	Evaluating Inductive Argument Schemes Groarke and Tindale, chapters 11–14
03/22	Writing Project Draft Due
04/05	Writing Project Due
TBA	Final Exam (Time and Location TBA)

6 Late Assignments and Missed Quizzes and Exams

Barring exceptional circumstances, late assignments will *not* be accepted and missed exams will *not* be rescheduled. If you will be away on the day an assignment is due, it is your responsibility to make alternate arrangements and ensure that your assignment is submitted on time. Likewise, if you have a scheduling conflict with an exam, it is up to you to contact me well in advance to make alternate arrangements. If you only come to see me after the fact or the day before, I may not be able to accommodate you. See section 4.1 for more on missed reading quizzes.

If you have a legitimate reason (e.g., family or medical emergency) to be granted an extension on an assignment or to have an exam rescheduled, I will do my best to accommodate you. However, it is, again, your responsibility to contact me in a timely manner. Decisions regarding extensions and reschedulings will be made on a case by case basis, and you should not assume that I will agree with you regarding the accommodation-worthiness of your situation. I reserve the right to deny a request for an extension or rescheduling and I also reserve the right to ask you for evidence (e.g., a doctor's note) of your need for accommodation.

7 Plagiarism and Cheating

Passing off someone else's work as your own is a serious academic offense. You are welcome to use other sources to help you understand the material and you are encouraged to bring the ideas and work of others to bear on the material we cover in this class. However, when the ideas of others appear on work you submit in this course, you must give credit where credit is due. You must cite your sources. If you don't know how this is done properly, it is up to you to find a style guide and learn how to do it. In this case, ignorance is not an excuse. If you are unsure about what counts as plagiarism or cheating in an academic environment, or if you don't know what the consequences of academic dishonesty can be, I suggest you consult the university's policy on academic integrity. You can find it in section 8 of the General Academic Calendar at

<http://webapps.cc.umanitoba.ca/calendar11/Academic%20Regulations.pdf>

If this doesn't answer all of your questions, don't hesitate to direct them my way.