

## **PHL 239 H5F: Critical Reasoning**

**Instructor:** Etye Steinberg, [etye.steinberg@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:etye.steinberg@mail.utoronto.ca)

**Lectures:** Mondays and Wednesdays, 9-10 (online)

**Office hours:** Tuesday, 3-4 (online)

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### **Course description:**

We confront arguments and lines of reasoning constantly in our lives – parents tell us why we should study this or that, political activists and politicians advocate for some policy over another, professors try to explain why we need to read a certain paper or submit a particular assignment, scientists explain why they believe their experiments support the conclusions they've reached, and more. Critical reasoning skills are some of the most important skills that an undergraduate degree has to offer. They allow us to approach scenarios like those mentioned above and recognize arguments (and whether there are such), detect whether they are good or bad arguments, improve and strengthen weak arguments, and create good and strong arguments on our own. Acquiring and developing these skills will help you in your other courses and work at university, in your decision making in other areas in your life that require argument evaluation, and in your career – be it philosophical or otherwise.

### **Course objectives:**

In this course you will learn to:

- Distinguish between different types of arguments
- Analyze arguments into their premises, conclusions, and structure
- Identify common argumentative fallacies
- Evaluate arguments: are they strong? Are they valid? Do they rely on plausible assumptions?
- Construct arguments on your own using terminology that you will learn in the course
- Recognize and extract arguments from a text – in philosophy and elsewhere

### **Required Text:**

William Hughes and Jonathan Lavery, *Critical Thinking*, Canadian 7<sup>th</sup> edition (2015), Broadview press. ISBN: 9781554811991/1554811996. The book is available at the UTM Bookstore in hardcopy, and you can also purchase an e-book (for [cheaper on the publisher's website](#)). A copy of this text is available on short term (2 hour) reserve at the UTM Library. Please note that new editions of the text come with a passcode for electronic resources that may be useful to you but are *not required*. If you buy a used edition, you can, *if you wish*, purchase the passcode separately here: <https://broadviewpress.com/product/student-website-passcode-critical-thinking-online/>

## **Evaluation:**

20%	Online participation
10%	Online quizzes and surveys
10%	Discussion boards; office hours; lecture attendance and participation (2 per week)
45%	Home exercises
5%	Ex.1: Argument reconstruction [300 words], October 5
15%	Ex.2: revised ex.1+assessment [600 words]+reflection [100 words], October 28
25%	Ex.3: revised ex.2+response [1000 words]+reflection [200 words], November 25
35%	Final Writing Assignment

## **Home exercises explained:**

- When the course begins, you will select one (1) topic from a list I will provide.
- Throughout the course, you will write one full assignment about this topic, in stages.
- Each exercise represents a further stage of the full assignment, and builds on:
  - The previous exercise
  - The comments you received on the previous exercise
- For each exercise, you will need to:
  - Revise what you wrote before, according to the comments you received
  - Add the relevant stage
  - Explain your revisions (in a separate paragraph)
- You get graded for the quality of the submission *and* for the quality of the revision.
  - A grading rubric will be posted online for each exercise.

## **Lectures explained:**

- Each week, I will upload a set of slides. I will also upload some (4-8, ~5 minutes each) recordings of me explaining the slides.
- These slides/recordings will cover ALL THE MATERIAL for that week.
- Students must review these slides/recording BEFORE lecture.
  - This is why, on Mondays, we will meet only for one (1) hour rather than two (2), despite what the course timetable states.
- In the online lecture, we will focus more on DISCUSSING rather than learning the material.

## **Important Dates:**

- September 9: classes begin
- October 5: Ex.1 due
- October 28: Ex.2 due
- November 11: last day to drop F course from academic record
- November 25: Ex. 3 due
- December 8: classes end
- TBD: Final exam

**Schedule:**

Date	Topic	To Do / Sections from textbook
1. Sep 9	Introduction; Reasoning and Critical Thinking	• 1.1-1.4, 1.6
2. Sep 14	Meaning and Definitions	• 2.3, 2.6-2.10
3. Sep 16	Getting Clearer on Meaning	• 3.1-3.3
4. Sep 21	Meaning: Continued	• 3.4-3.9
5. Sep 23	Reconstructing Arguments	• 4.1-4.6
6. Sep 28	CANCELLED	
7. Sep 30	Writing in Philosophy (1)	• TBD
8. Oct 5	Assessing Arguments	*** <i>Exercise 1 due</i> *** • 5.1-5.3
9. Oct 7	Assessing Truth	• 6.1-6.8
10. Oct 19	Writing in philosophy (2) – how to revise?	• TBD
11. Oct 21	Relevance (and related fallacies)	• 7.1-7.5
12. Oct 26	Assessing Adequacy	• 8.1-8.6, 11.1, 8.7
13. Oct 28	Inductive Reasoning (1)	*** <i>Exercise 2 due</i> *** • 10.1-10.2
14. Nov 2	Inductive Reasoning (2)	• 10.3-10.6
15. Nov 4	Inference to the Best Explanation	• 11.7-11.8
16. Nov 9	Deductive Reasoning	• 9.1-9.6
17. Nov 11	Arguing back	• 14.1-14.5
18. Nov 16	Irrational Persuasion: Bad arguments	• 15.1-15.10
19. Nov 18	Argument Writing and Assessment	• 17.1-17.4
20. Nov 23	Writing in philosophy (3)	• TBD
21. Nov 25	Moral Reasoning (1)	*** <i>Exercise 3 due</i> *** • 12.1-12.4
22. Nov 30	Moral Reasoning (2)	• 12.5-12.11
23. Dec 2	Critiquing the Media	• 16.1-16.4
24. Dec 7	Legal Reasoning	• 13.1

**Policies:**

**1) Submission:** Home exercises must be submitted through Quercus. DO NOT EMAIL SUBMISSIONS.

**Deadlines: October 5, October 28, November 25. All by 23:59pm.**

**\*\*\* *Late submissions will be penalized 5% per day, including weekends* \*\*\***

Conditions that can justify an extension/accommodation include, for instance:

- Medical/accessibility: please inform me in advance.
- Emergency: inform me as soon as possible.
- Students who wish special academic consideration for health reasons must submit a completed [Verification of Illness form](#).
- Other grounds? Submit relevant supporting documentation.

Examples of circumstances that do not justify an extension include:

- Extra-curricular activities
- Employment obligations
- Deadlines in other courses.

Paper submission through Quercus will go automatically through Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com services are described on the Turnitin.com web site. You can find the guide for student use here:

<http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching/academicintegrity/turnitin/guide-students.htm>

**2) Accessibility Services:**

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and [Accessibility Services](#). The earlier you notify me of any potential accessibility issues, the more help I can provide.

**3) E-mail Policy:**

This course has many students (more than 200 students!). Answering everyone's emails promptly is a difficult task. To make sure that your emails receive timely responses, please adhere to the following guidelines.

- You should email me about extensions and accommodations.
- Other emails should be used for quick clarificatory questions, for instance about administrative issues (e.g. "the syllabus says that the paper is due on Wednesday, but

with Thursday's date – which one is it", "I can't make it to your office hours – is there another time we can meet").

- Alternatively, use emails for brief and simply questions about the material (e.g. "Mill talks about the greatest happiness principle – does he mean \*my\* happiness or \*everyone's\* happiness").

I will **not** answer the following types of emails:

- Emails with questions that are answered in the syllabus or the assignment instructions (e.g. "how much is attendance worth", "when is the 3<sup>rd</sup> paper due", "what did I miss last week", "how do I get an extension", "how long should my paper be", "when are your office hours"). If you have this sort of question, read the syllabus or assignment instructions. You will probably find an answer there.
- Emails with substantive questions about the material (e.g. "what is Kant's view", "why does Aristotle think that a virtuous life is a happy life", "what is an argument"). Substantive philosophical questions are better answered in person – either in class, or office hours. Who knows – maybe other students also have a similar question, or maybe we will have an interesting discussion following your question!

#### **4) Academic Integrity:**

Academic integrity is a core value of academic work and research. Without abiding to rules of academic integrity, research becomes worthless. If an experiment's results are forged, then that experiment cannot be useful in future work; if a paper does not properly cite its sources, then the continuous thread of knowledge is torn. This applies to the work of everyone taking part in the project of academia: from full time faculty members publishing papers in peer-reviewed journals, through graduate students and research assistants taking their first steps in research, and all the way to first year undergraduate students writing short essays.

The University of Toronto treats cases of academic misconduct very seriously. Academic integrity is a fundamental value of learning and scholarship at UofT. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that your UofT degree is valued and respected as a true signifier of your individual academic achievement.

The University of Toronto's [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic misconduct, the processes for addressing academic offences, and the penalties that may be imposed. You are expected to be familiar with the contents of this document. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

In papers and assignments:

- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement.
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
- Making up sources or facts.
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment (this includes working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work).

On tests and exams:

- Using or possessing any unauthorized aid, including a cell phone.
- Looking at someone else's answers.
- Letting someone else look at your answers.
- Misrepresenting your identity.
- Submitting an altered test for re-grading.

Misrepresentation:

- Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including (but not limited to) doctor's notes.
- Falsifying institutional documents or grades.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following the procedures outlined in the [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#). If you have any questions about what is or is not permitted in this course, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you have questions about appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information from me or other available campus resources like the [Academic Skills Centre](#), or the [U of T Writing Website](#). **These are great resources not just for learning about academic integrity, but also for acquiring further tools for academic writing and research – I strongly encourage you to check these out!**