

**PHIL 251:10 – (3)**  
**Critical Thinking**  
**Fall, 2011**

Instructor: Doug Al-Maini

Office: NH717

Office Hours: Monday, 10:15-12:00; Wednesday 9:15-11:00; Friday, 10:15-11:00

Email: dalmaini@stfx.ca

**Course Description:**

The ability to reason has often been proposed as the fundamental and unique quality that makes humans human. But what is this process we call reasoning, and how do we use it? In this course we will attempt to generate a more explicit and comprehensive awareness of what critical thinking consists of in both its methods and its aims. We shall be discussing the topic of meaning, learning how to assess arguments in terms of validity and soundness, and developing the skill of applying our reasoning expertise in practical situations. We will also learn how to identify common fallacies of reasoning, both why they are fallacies and how to avoid them. Finally, we shall investigate the relationship between truth and good argumentation.

**Schedule:**

WEEK	TOPIC	READINGS
1	Introduction to Course; 4 kinds of Arguments	Handouts
2	Truth Functional Argumentation	Handouts
3	Types of Sentences and their Role in Arguments	Chapter 2
4	Clarifying Meaning	Chapter 3
5	Theories of Truth	Chapter 6
6	Assessing Relevance	Chapter 7
7	Assessing Adequacy	Chapter 8
8	Inductive Reasoning	Chapter 10
9	Scientific Reasoning	Chapter 11
10	Moral Reasoning	Chapter 12
11	Back to Truth Functional Reasoning	Chapter 9
12	Irrational Techniques	Chapter 14

In the application of the skills covered in this class, we shall look over and evaluate various media that present examples of both good and bad arguments. We will regularly be assessing opinion pieces that appear in periodicals, political speeches, and advertisements. The instructor will provide photocopies as required. We will also engage in class discussions on some of the issues that this sample material raises. Careful analysis of the reasoning process probably got its start in Western civilization due to an increasing political relevance of public argumentation, and we will attempt to emulate this development of verbal skills through the implementation of an analysis of reason.

**Evaluation:**

There will be two essays (each worth 20%), a midterm examination (also worth 20%), and a final exam (worth 40%). The midterm will review the material from the text that we cover in class.

**Assignments: Essays should be roughly 3 pages in length.**

1) The first essay will be an argumentative piece responding to the question, “What shape is the earth?” Students are required to defend the thesis that the earth is a sphere, and the argumentation they come up with supporting that thesis must be their own. Students will be required to hand in an argument outline two weeks before the essay is due, a format that we shall go over in class and which is described in the handout, “The Logic of Essays”.

2) In the second assignment, students will be responsible for providing a critique of George Orwell’s essay, “Pleasure Spots”. A copy of the essay will be supplied by the instructor. Here you will be responsible for formulating your own outline of the essay’s argument, then a question relevant to Orwell’s analysis, and an outline answering that question two weeks before the essay is due.

**Technical Considerations for Written Assignments:**

1) All written assignments must be typed (black ink, please) and double-spaced on pages with at most 1 inch margins. No extra line spaces between paragraphs. Indent the first line of a paragraph. Printing on both sides of a sheet of paper is quite acceptable.

2) Please no title pages. Also no “Works Cited” or “Bibliography” pages referring to one work; do bibliographic references in a footnote if you must. Please no enormously large-fonted things like titles, names, dates, course numbers, student numbers, phone numbers, or due dates that take up half a page of space. Your title, name, and student number at the top of the first page is quite sufficient. Please visibly number any multiple-page assignments. If for some reason you must hand in the assignment to the office, please include my name at the top of the assignment as well.

3) No duo-tangs, folders, binders, or paperclips. Loose sheets are acceptable, but do remember to number them.

4) Under no circumstances will emailed assignments be accepted. Please hand in your assignments at the start of class on the day they are due.

5) The final page of this outline is the evaluation form that will be used in the assessment of your writing. This evaluation form provides the clearest explanation of my requirements for an essay. Please, study it carefully before you write your work.

6) The late policy is a deduction of 3% per day that the assignment is handed in late. This course outline lets you know when assignments are due, and you have been given plenty of time to complete them. Consequently last minute excuses for not completing assignments on time will be met with marked skepticism, not to say cynicism.

7) Many of the above requirements are arbitrary demands on my part, but they really do facilitate the assessment of your work. Please follow them!

8) Plagiarism is completely unacceptable. If you make use of an idea that is not of your own devising, you must cite the source of that idea. Failure to properly cite sources may result from removal from the course and expulsion from the school. Students are obliged to keep a copy of their assignments.

**Required Text:**

William Hughes, *Critical Thinking* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996).

**EVALUATION FORM**  
**(Late assignments will not receive comments)**

Style:

Grammar: Are the sentences understandable? Are there any spelling mistakes? Is the diction clear and concise? Can the thought behind each sentence easily be grasped? /10

Organization: Do the ideas logically follow each other, or were they haphazardly strewn together? Is there evidence of the student having constructed an argumentative outline? Is the structure of the argumentation explicitly stated and easily perceived? /10

Content:

Argument Outline: /10

Thesis: Does the assignment give an answer to a question or problem put forward? Is the answer more than a simple “yes” or “no”? Is the answer insightful, being an interpretive idea itself? Is the thesis explicitly stated? /10

Arguments: Are there arguments presented in the paper? Are the arguments interesting or banal? Are the arguments incisive or superficial? Do the arguments explicitly outline broad premises that act as guides to understanding and reveal the unquestioned perspectives adopted in the paper? /20

Originality: Does the student provide input into the conceptual debates the text engages in? Is there evidence of insight on the student’s part into the topic? Are there any new ideas being explored in the assignment? Is the student able to go beyond ideas raised in class discussion? /20

Evaluation: Does the student give a fair summation of the ideas contained in the texts used? Are passages from the text cited? Does the use of these ideas meaningfully contribute to the thesis of the essay, or is the use of material a mere addendum to the main arguments of the paper? /20

/100