

PHILOSOPHY 251
CRITICAL THINKING
COURSE OUTLINE

Prof. C. Byrne

Office: Lane Hall A128

Office hours: 9:15 a.m. to 12:00 noon, Monday to Thursday, except during the A1–3 and B4–6 blocks, or by appointment (867-2119); cbyrne@stfx.ca.

Required text:

Jeff McLaughlin. *How to Think Critically: A Concise Guide*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2014.

Grading:

Class Assignments	20%
Mid-Term Test	30%
Final Examination	50%

Topics:

When we reason, debate, argue, or discuss things critically, we typically pay attention to three things: 1) the truth of the claims being made; 2) the consistency of the claims being made; 3) the strength of the inferences being drawn, that is, whether the conclusions follow from the premises. This course considers these three properties of critical thinking and various ways of testing for them. Thus, we consider topics from both informal and formal logic, that is, both the informal and formal ways we have for assessing arguments on the basis of these three properties. With respect to formal logic, we consider two kinds of argument: syllogisms (the original type of deductive argument examined by formal logic), and statement logic, also known as sentential or propositional logic. With respect to informal logic, we consider ambiguity in statements, requirements for good definitions, and ways of assessing the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence offered to support the claims that people make.

No electronic devices (e.g., laptop computers and cell phones) may be used in class, unless required for medical reasons.