

Critical Thinking
San Francisco State University
Dr. Michael Sudduth

Philosophy 110 (1987)
Summer 2015
MW 1:15pm–5:15pm (HUM 129)

Contact Information
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Course Description

Critical thinking may be described very generally as a reflective habit of the mind directed towards understanding, examining, and assimilating information. As such, it involves a variety of mental operations: asking questions, uncovering assumptions, making conceptual distinctions, and drawing inferences. Most importantly, the activity of critical thinking helps produce well-grounded opinions, that is, opinions supported by evidence or reasons. This process of supporting opinions with evidence or reasons is called *argument*. Critical thinking involves the making and evaluation of arguments.

A course in critical thinking is designed to articulate criteria for evaluating arguments and to help students cultivate skills of good reasoning. In this course, we will focus primarily on the structure of arguments and criteria for evaluating arguments. What is an argument? How is it distinguished from other uses of language? When is a reason for believing something a good reason? When not? Students will apply course concepts through a series of practical exercises designed to help develop the habit of good reasoning.

Value of a Critical Thinking Course: (i) improves reading comprehension, (ii) brings clarity to writing, (iii) increases effectiveness in communication, and (iv) helps people make informed decisions in everyday life.

Course Objectives: (i) understand the structure of arguments, (ii) understand criteria for evaluating the quality of the premises of arguments, (iii) understand criteria for the evaluation of the relationship between the premises and conclusion in deductive and inductive arguments, and (iv) successfully apply the criteria in (ii) and (iii) to the evaluation of actual arguments.

Required Course Text: Trudy Govier, *A Practical Study of Argument*, 7th edition (Wadsworth, 2010) [ISBN-13: 978-0-495-60340-5] Note: You must have the 7th edition of the text, or the enhanced 2014 edition.

An eBook version of the course text is also available at <http://www.cengage.com/us/>. Enter book information in search box, and set search menu option to “Higher Education” catalogue. You may also purchase eChapters.

Assignments and Grading

Participation (20%): Be actively involved in the class. Be prepared to respond to questions about homework exercises. Ask questions related to course readings and textbook exercises.

Homework Exercises (20%): Logic exercises and some brief (one to two-page) writing assignments.

Exams (60%): There will be three exams: September 18, October 23, and December 11. Exams are worth 20% each and consist of true/false and multiple-choice questions. Some exams will require work outside class.

All assignments have a point value, and there are 500 points possible in the class. I use the following grade scale for individual assignments and for calculating final grades.

Grade Scale
90–100% = A
80–89% = B
70–79% = C
60–69% = D
0–59% = F

Final Grade Point Scale
450–500 = A
400–449 = B
350–399 = C
300–349 = D
0–299 = F

Point Values for Assignments
Exams = 100 points each (300 total)
Participation = 100 points
Homework = 100 points

A Guide to Success in the Class

(1) While I do not grade on attendance, consequences of absences, especially if they are frequent, are very serious. We cover a significant amount of material each week in class. You will fall behind if you miss class. Habitual absences and/or tardiness will lower your participation grade. It will also adversely affect your homework and performance on exams. If you miss an exam, you are not entitled to take the exam in a subsequent class. If you are late for an exam, you may be penalized. If you are excessively late for an exam, you may forfeit taking the exam.

(2) If you are absent or tardy to class, it is your responsibility to determine what assignments have been given or collected. It is always a good idea to notify me by email if you anticipate missing a class or as soon as it is possible to notify me concerning an absence. Subject line of all correspondence should be: Critical Thinking Summer 15. Please include your full name and course information in all correspondence. My email address for correspondence is: msudduthsfu@gmail.com.

(3) Keep up with homework assignments. Although we go over assignments in class, it is absolutely necessary that you prepare for this by working exercises yourself. It's best to work on exercises each day or every other day, rather than try to complete all exercises in one or two sittings. Homework must be typed. Exception: ch. 8. Corrections may be in pen or pencil for any assignment. Homework may be collected in any given class. Homework should be properly completed by carefully following directions for each assignment. Make sure your homework is current and ready to be submitted in any given class. Homework should also be properly organized (with individual assignments properly labeled and your name on each page). Make sure all pages are stapled together.

(4) Respect the classroom as a learning environment. Do not speak or otherwise distract when the professor or students are speaking. This includes the disruptive use of cell phones, iPods, and other electronic devices.

(5) Special Circumstances: I wish to make this course as accessible as possible to students with disabilities or medical conditions that may affect any aspect of course assignments or participation. You are invited to communicate with me at the outset of the course or at your discretion about any accommodations that will improve your experience of or access to the course.

(6) Academic dishonesty on any assignment or exam will result in a zero for the assignment and may result in an F for the course.

Proposed Course Calendar: Monday June 8, 2015–July 8, 2015

June 8 (Monday): Class Orientation and Anatomy of Arguments (Govier, chapter 1)

June 10 (Wednesday): the Anatomy of Arguments (Govier, chapter 2)

June 15 (Monday): the Anatomy of Arguments concluded and **Exam #1**

June 17 (Wednesday): Acceptability of Premises (Govier, chapter 5)

June 22 (Monday): Relevance of Premises (Govier, chapter 6)

June 24 (Wednesday): **Exam #2** and Introduction to Inductive Arguments (Govier, chapter 9)

June 29 (Monday): Causal Inductive Arguments (Govier, chapter 10)

July 1 (Wednesday): Conclusion to Inductive Reasoning, and Intro to Deductive Arguments

July 6 (Monday): Deductive Arguments (Govier, chapter 8)

July 8 (Wednesday): Deductive Arguments and **Exam #3**

Note: Specific page numbers and exercises will be announced in class.