



How to Reason and Argue: An Introduction to Critical Thinking

PHIL 105.001 SSII 2026

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



Course Information

Credit Hours: 3

Pre or Co-Requisites: None

Target Audience: All undergraduates interested in the topic.

Meeting Pattern: N/A

Instructional Format: Remote, mostly asynchronous.

Zoom Room: 505 983 0640

Instructor Information

Name: Jackson LeViness (he/him)

Email Address: jdlev@unc.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays 9:00-11:00am. *** If you would like to meet but are unable to make this time, email me (at least 48 hours beforehand) and we'll figure out an alternative time! ***

Zoom Room ID: 505 983 0640



Course Content

Course Description

A course on how to identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments by other people and how to construct arguments. We will consider what makes an argument good or bad, how conclusions are supported by premises, and how arguments can be clarified, reconstructed, and evaluated. We will also attend to the less formal difficulties that



often shape inquiry: unclear concepts, hidden assumptions, misleading contrasts, disputed standards of evidence, and familiar forms of faulty inference.

The aim of the course is not to teach students what to think, nor to provide a set of techniques for winning disputes. It is to develop a more disciplined relation to reasons: to see more clearly what is being claimed, what is being assumed, what follows, and what remains unresolved. These skills are central not only to philosophy, but to reading, writing, discussion, and judgment across academic, professional, and everyday life.

Course Texts & Materials

All assignments and assigned readings will be made available on our Canvas site.

Class Expectations

Students should expect to spend roughly 9-12 hours per week on assignments for this course.

Course Goals & Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

All our philosophy courses aim at the acquisition and nurturing of basic philosophic skills. One of the main goals of our philosophy curriculum is to instill and enable the development of skills that are distinct to philosophy, but which are foundational to all forms of knowledge.

These basic philosophical skills involve being able to:

- Think critically;
- Deploy philosophical concepts and terminology correctly, in either a historical or contemporary setting;
- Represent clearly and accurately the views or argument of particular philosophers, in either a historical or contemporary setting;
- Identify the premises and conclusion(s) of a philosophical argument and assess both its validity and soundness;
- Apply a philosophical theory or argument to a new topic, and being able to draw and defend reasonable conclusions about that topic;
- Develop an argument for a particular solution to a philosophical problem in either a historical or contemporary setting;
- Write clearly, precisely, and persuasively in defense of a philosophical thesis;
- Participate in respectful, critical, and reflexive dialogues about difficult philosophical positions;
- Read, interpret, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different philosophical texts and the philosophical positions presented in them.

IDEAs in Action General Education Curriculum

PHIL 105 satisfies either FC-KNOWING or FC-QUANT.



FC-KNOWING

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Recognize and use one or more approach(es) to developing and validating knowledge of the unfamiliar world.
2. Evaluate ways that temporal, spatial, scientific, and philosophical categories structure knowledge.
3. Interrogate assumptions that underlie our own perceptions of the world.
4. Employ strategies to mitigate or adjust for preconceptions and biases.
5. Apply critical insights to understand patterns of experience and belief.

Questions for Students

1. What norms and expectations do I take for granted?
2. What categories and concepts frame my assumptions, experiences, and beliefs?
3. What practices of investigation or inquiry best challenge those assumptions and expectations?
4. How can I consider whether my beliefs might be wrong?

FC-QUANT

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Summarize, interpret, and present quantitative data in mathematical forms, such as graphs, diagrams, tables, or mathematical text.
2. Develop or compute representations of data using mathematical forms or equations as models, and use statistical methods to assess their validity.
3. Make and evaluate important assumptions in the estimation, modeling, and analysis of data, and recognize the limitations of the results.
4. Apply mathematical concepts, data, procedures, and solutions to make judgments and draw conclusions.
5. Synthesize and present quantitative data to others to explain findings or to provide quantitative evidence in support of a position.

Questions for Students

1. What is the role of mathematics in organizing and interpreting measurements of the world?
2. How can mathematical models and quantitative analysis be used to summarize or synthesize data into knowledge and predictions?
3. What methodology can we apply to validate or reject mathematical models or to express our degree of confidence in them?

Recurring Capacities

Every focus capacity course includes the following activities:

- **Writing**, totaling at least 10 pages in length or the intellectual equivalent
- **Presenting** material to the class, smaller groups, or the public through oral presentations, webpages, or other means
- **Collaborating** in pairs or groups to learn, design, solve, create, build, or research



These elements – referred to as “recurring capacities” – will help you repeatedly practice crucial skills for future study, life, and career success.



Course Assignments & Assessments

Assignment Descriptions

Syllabus Quiz — 5%

This quiz checks your understanding of the basic structure, expectations, assignments, and policies for PHIL 105. Read the syllabus before beginning. You may consult the syllabus while taking the quiz. The purpose is to make sure you know how the course works, where to find important information, and what is expected of you in a remote, mostly asynchronous summer course.

Class Participation / Lecture Responses — 20%

Because this course is primarily asynchronous, regular engagement will be measured through timely completion of readings, lecture videos, short written responses, and required individual Zoom conferences. Students should expect to meet individually with me over Zoom approximately two to three times during the semester. These meetings will be used to discuss progress in the course, clarify difficult concepts, and prepare for later assignments.

For the purposes of this course, participation consists of three main components:

1. Completing the assigned reading for the relevant module.
2. Viewing the lecture video or other instructional material posted on Canvas.
3. Submitting a brief written response to the module.

Lecture responses will vary slightly depending on the topic, but they will typically ask students to do one or more of the following: identify a main claim from the reading or lecture, reconstruct a short argument, raise a question, identify a possible objection, explain a cognitive pitfall, or describe a real-world implication of the material. When responding to lecture videos, students may be asked to refer to a time-stamped moment in the lecture.

These assignments are designed to ensure regular engagement with the course material and to give students repeated low-stakes practice with central critical-thinking skills.

Recurring capacity satisfied: Writing. Across the semester, these responses will total approximately **4–5 pages of writing**.



Critical Thinking Skill Exercises — 30%

Students will complete a series of short critical-thinking exercises throughout the semester. These exercises are designed to test and develop specific skills introduced in the readings and lecture materials. Topics may include:

1. Distinguishing arguments from non-arguments.
2. Identifying premises, conclusions, and implicit assumptions.
3. Reconstructing arguments in standard form.
4. Evaluating deductive validity and invalidity.
5. Assessing inductive strength, evidence, and probability.
6. Identifying fallacies, cognitive biases, and other reasoning pitfalls.
7. Evaluating causal claims and distinguishing correlation from causation.
8. Comparing objections, replies, and alternative explanations.

Some exercises will be completed as short written answers, while others may involve structured worksheets, argument maps, formal reconstructions, or annotated examples.

Recurring capacity satisfied: Writing. These assignments will include approximately **6–7 pages of writing or intellectual equivalent**.

Discussion Days / Peer Engagement — 15%

Several times during the semester, students will be assigned to work with a peer or small group for structured asynchronous discussion. These discussion activities will replace the kind of informal exchange that would normally occur in a face-to-face critical-thinking course.

For each discussion day, students will usually complete two tasks:

1. Submit one or more substantive questions, examples, objections, or reconstructions based on that week's material.
2. Respond to a partner or group member in a way that clarifies, challenges, improves, or extends their analysis.

These assignments are not meant to be informal “reaction posts.” They should show serious engagement with the relevant critical-thinking skill. For example, students might help a partner clarify an argument reconstruction, test whether an argument is valid, identify an unstated premise, or propose a better explanation of a causal relationship.

Recurring capacities satisfied: Writing and collaboration. These discussion assignments require students to collaborate in pairs or small groups to learn, analyze, and improve critical-thinking work. They will total approximately **2–3 pages of writing or intellectual equivalent**.



Concept Explanation Video — 10%

Each student will record one brief video explanation, approximately **4–6 minutes** in length, explaining a key critical-thinking concept from the course. I will provide a list of possible concepts, which may include validity, soundness, inductive strength, fallacies, cognitive bias, causal reasoning, argument reconstruction, charitable interpretation, burden of proof, or inference to the best explanation.

Each explanation must be pitched to a specific audience, such as a younger student, a friend unfamiliar with philosophy, a public audience, or a student encountering the topic for the first time. Students should use an example, analogy, diagram, or short case to make the concept clear.

These assignments will be evaluated on:

1. Clarity of explanation.
2. Accuracy of the critical-thinking concept.
3. Appropriateness for the chosen audience.
4. Effective use of an example, analogy, or case.
5. Overall organization and presentation.

Recurring capacities satisfied: Presentation and writing. This assignment requires students to present course material through a recorded oral explanation. Students will also submit a brief outline or script, totaling approximately **1 page of writing or intellectual equivalent**.

Final Presentations — 20%

In lieu of a traditional final exam, the final examination will take the form of a **final presentation**. Students will analyze an argument, public controversy, advertisement, opinion piece, policy debate, scientific or causal claim, social media exchange, or other suitable example of reasoning. Your goal is not simply to agree or disagree with the argument, but to explain how it works and evaluate how well it is supported.

This is an individual assignment. You are not expected to coordinate with other students.

Format Requirements

Your presentation must:

- be recorded
- be approximately **6–8 minutes** long
- include a clear visual component, such as slides, a handout, annotated images, or another visual aid
- identify the source of the argument you are analyzing
- be organized clearly enough that I can follow each part of your analysis

You should submit both your recorded presentation and your visual materials, or a PDF/exported version of those materials.



Required Content

Your presentation should do the following:

1. Briefly introduce the argument and its source.
2. Identify the argument's main conclusion.
3. Identify the most important premises or supporting reasons.
4. Explain what kind of reasoning the argument uses.
5. Evaluate the argument's strengths and weaknesses.
6. Discuss at least one objection, alternative explanation, missing assumption, or possible reply.
7. Conclude with your overall assessment of the argument.

The visual component should support your presentation, but it should not replace your explanation. Your grade will be based primarily on the quality of your argument analysis and your use of course concepts.

The Final Applied Argument Presentation is due **Monday, July 27 at 3:00pm**.

Recurring capacities satisfied: Writing and presentation. This assignment requires students to collaborate in groups, present material to the class, and submit written or intellectually equivalent presentation materials. Together, the written components will total approximately **3–4 pages of writing or intellectual equivalent per student**.

Assessment

Assessment	Final Grade (%)	Recurring Capacity Contribution
Syllabus Quiz	5%	N/A
Class Participation / Lecture Responses	20%	Writing: approximately 4–5 pages
Critical Thinking Skill Exercises	30%	Writing: approximately 6–7 pages or intellectual equivalent
Discussion Days / Peer Engagement	15%	Writing: approximately 2–3 pages or intellectual equivalent; Collaboration
Concept Explanation Video	10%	Presentation; Writing: approximately 1 page or intellectual equivalent
Final Presentation	20%	Presentation; Writing: approximately 3–4 pages or intellectual equivalent
Total	100%	Approximately 16–20 pages of writing or intellectual equivalent



Grading Scale & Schema

Late Work

For weekly assignments, the due dates listed in the course schedule are recommended pacing dates. Unless otherwise stated, the official deadline for all assignments assigned during a given week is Friday at 11:59pm. Work submitted after the official Friday deadline will be treated as late.

Because this is a condensed summer course, late work will generally not be accepted. The pace of the course makes it difficult for students to fall behind and still complete the remaining work successfully, and many assignments are designed to prepare students for subsequent assignments.

That said, I will be reasonable about granting extensions when students communicate with me in advance. Requests for extensions should ordinarily be made at least **48 hours before** the assignment deadline. Extension requests should briefly explain the situation and propose a reasonable alternative deadline. I cannot guarantee that every request will be granted, but I will consider timely and reasonable requests in good faith.

Emergencies, serious illness, family crises, and other genuinely unforeseeable circumstances may prevent students from requesting an extension 48 hours in advance. In such cases, students should contact me as soon as they reasonably can. I will handle these situations on a case-by-case basis.

Work that is inaccessible, unreadable, submitted in the wrong format, or otherwise impossible to evaluate may be treated as not submitted unless the issue is resolved promptly.

Grading Scale

Numeric Grade (%)	Letter Grade
93.5 and above	A
89.5 – 93.4	A-
86.5 – 89.4	B+
82.5 – 86.4	B
79.5 – 82.4	B-
76.5 – 79.4	C+
72.5 – 76.4	C
69.5 – 72.4	C-
66.5 – 69.4	D+
59.5 – 66.4	D
59.4 and below	F

Table a: Grading Scale Table



AI Use for PHIL 105

This course permits **assistive AI use only**. AI tools may be used for non-content-generating tasks, such as grammar checking, proofreading, formatting, organizing notes, improving the readability of writing the student has already produced, or helping manage workflow. AI tools may not be used to generate new intellectual content for assignments.

The reason for this policy is that the central work of this course is learning how to think critically: identifying arguments, reconstructing reasoning, evaluating validity and strength, recognizing cognitive pitfalls, assessing causal claims, and explaining concepts clearly. These are the skills being assessed. If an AI tool performs that reasoning for a student, then the submitted work no longer demonstrates the student's own critical-thinking ability.

Permitted uses of AI include:

1. Checking spelling, grammar, punctuation, or sentence clarity.
2. Formatting a document, outline, bibliography, or slide deck.
3. Organizing notes or materials that the student has already created.
4. Helping a student make their own writing clearer without changing the substance of the ideas.
5. Generating study schedules, reminders, or other planning aids.

Prohibited uses of AI include:

1. Generating answers to reading responses, discussion posts, skill exercises, or final project materials.
2. Reconstructing arguments, identifying premises or conclusions, evaluating validity, identifying fallacies, or assessing causal reasoning on the student's behalf.
3. Writing scripts, outlines, slides, explanations, objections, replies, reflections, or presentation content for submission.
4. Producing examples, analogies, objections, or interpretations that the student then submits as their own.
5. Rewriting AI-generated content in order to disguise its origin.

For example, a student may use AI to proofread a paragraph they have already written explaining the difference between validity and soundness. A student may not ask AI to explain the difference between validity and soundness and then submit that explanation, or a lightly revised version of it, as their own work. Similarly, a student may use AI to format a slide deck for the final presentation, but may not use AI to generate the group's argument reconstruction, analysis, examples, objections, or conclusions.

Students are responsible for all work they submit. If AI use is permitted for an assistive purpose, the student must still make sure that the final submission accurately represents their own understanding and reasoning. When in doubt about whether a particular use is allowed, students should ask before submitting the assignment.



Course Schedule

The schedule below gives the general structure of the course. Specific readings, lecture videos, examples, and assignment prompts will be posted on Canvas.

Note on Recommended Pacing and Official Due Dates

The dates listed in the weekly schedule indicate the recommended day for completing each assignment. Because this is a condensed summer course, students are strongly encouraged to follow this pacing so that they do not fall behind. However, unless otherwise stated, the official deadline for all assignments assigned during a given week is Friday at 11:59pm. For example, assignments listed for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday of a given week should be completed by Friday at 11:59pm of that same week.

Assignments with separately stated deadlines, such as the final presentation, follow the deadline listed for that assignment.

Week 1: Introduction and Arguments

Date	Topic(s)	Recommended Assignment Pacing
M June 22	Syllabus	Syllabus Quiz
T June 23	What Is Critical Thinking?	Reading Response #1
W June 24	What is an Argument?	Reading Response #2
R June 25	Arguments, Explanations, and Non-Arguments	No written assignment due
F June 26	Premises, Conclusions, and Argument Identification	Skill Exercise #1

Week 2: Deductive Arguments

Date	Topic(s)	Recommended Assignment Pacing
M June 29	Reconstructing Arguments	Reading Response #3
T June 30	Validity and Soundness	Reading Response #4
W July 1	Validity and Soundness	Discussion Day #1



Date	Topic(s)	Recommended Assignment Pacing
R July 2	Missing Premises and Charitable Interpretation	Skill Exercise #2
F July 3	HOLIDAY - no class	-

Week 3: Inductive Reasoning, Evidence, and Explanation

Date	Topic(s)	Recommended Assignment Pacing
M July 6	Deductive vs. Inductive Arguments	Reading Response #5
T July 7	Evidence, Probability, and Strength	Reading Response #6
W July 8	Generalizations, Samples, and Weak Evidence	Discussion Day #2
R July 9	Inference to the Best Explanation	No written assignment due
F July 10	Evaluating Inductive Arguments	Skill Exercise #3

Week 4: Fallacies, Biases, and Causal Reasoning

Date	Topic(s)	Recommended Assignment Pacing
M July 13	Fallacies and Bad Reasoning Patterns	Reading Response #7
T July 14	Cognitive Biases and Motivated Reasoning	Reading Response #8
W July 15	Causal Claims and Correlation	Discussion Day #3
R July 16	Alternative Explanations and Evidential Standards	Concept Explanation Video
F July 17	Pitfalls in Statistical and Evidential Reasoning	Skill Exercise #4

Week 5: Applied Critical Thinking and Final Presentations

Date	Topic(s)	Recommended Assignment Pacing
M July 20	Testimony, Expertise, and Disagreement	Reading Response #9
T July 21	Objections and Replies	No written assignment due
W July 22	Final Presentation Guidelines	Draft Presentation Materials



Date	Topic(s)	Recommended Assignment Pacing
R July 23	Final Presentation Guidelines	Submit Topics for Approval

*****Final Presentations Due: Monday, July 27th by 3pm*****

Table b: Weekly calendar with modules, readings, assignments, and due dates.



Policy Statements

Academic Policies

University Class Attendance Policy

University Policy: As stated in the University's [Class Attendance Policy](#), no right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

1. Authorized University activities: [University Approved Absence Office \(UAAO\)](#) website provides information and [FAQs for students](#) and [FAQs for faculty](#) related to University Approved Absences
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy/short-term military service, as required by law and approved by the [University Compliance Office](#) , or in the case of short-term military service, the Dean of Students
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [University Compliance Office](#).

Code of Conduct

All students are expected to adhere to University policy and follow the guidelines of the UNC Student Code of Conduct. Additional information can be found at <https://studentconduct.unc.edu/>.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Policy

All Carolina students are expected to follow these AI guidelines:



1. AI should help you think, not think for you. You may be able to use these tools to brainstorm ideas, research topics, and analyze problems, but you must decide what's appropriate and accurate.
2. Engage responsibly with AI. You must evaluate AI-generated outputs for potential biases, limitations, inaccuracies, false output, and ethical implications. Do not put personal or confidential data into these tools.
3. The use of AI must be open and documented. You should declare, explain, and cite any use of AI in the creation of your work using applicable standards (e.g., APA, MLA, course guidelines). Understand that you are ultimately 100% responsible for your final product.
4. Follow specific AI guidelines in this syllabus. If you are unsure, check with me. Guidance offered in this syllabus would be referenced should an issue be referred to Student Conduct for alleged academic misconduct.
5. **The AI Policy for this course is Assistive Use Only. Please see my guidelines in the section entitled "AI Use for PHIL 105".**

Syllabus Changes

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

Acceptable Use Policy

By attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, you agree to abide by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill policies related to the acceptable use of IT systems and services. The Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) sets the expectation that you will use the University's technology resources responsibly, consistent with the University's mission. In the context of a class, it's quite likely you will participate in online activities that could include personal information about you or your peers, and the AUP addresses your obligations to protect the privacy of class participants. In addition, the AUP addresses matters of others' intellectual property, including copyright. These are only a couple of typical examples, so you should consult the full [Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy](#), which covers topics related to using digital resources, such as privacy, confidentiality and intellectual property.

Additionally, consult the [Safe Computing at UNC](#) website for information about data security policies, updates, and tips on keeping your identity, information, and devices safe.

Data Security & Privacy

UNC-Chapel Hill is committed to fulfilling its responsibilities of transparency as a state-sponsored institution of higher learning, protecting certain types of information, and using information Carolina collects only for appropriate purposes. Consult the [UNC-Chapel Hill Privacy Statement](#) for additional information.



Grade Appeal Process

If you have any concerns with grading and/or feel you have been awarded an incorrect grade, please discuss it with me as soon as possible. If we cannot resolve the issue, you may talk to our director of undergraduate studies or department chair.

Services & Student Support Policies

University Compliance Office (formerly Equal Opportunity and Compliance) - Accommodations

University Compliance Office (UCO) Accommodations Team ([Accommodations - UNC Compliance](#)) receives requests for accommodations for disability, pregnancy and related conditions, and sincerely held religious beliefs and practices through the University's Policy on Accommodations. UCO Accommodations team determines eligibility and reasonable accommodations consistent with state and federal laws.

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)

UNC-Chapel Hill is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body. The [Heels Care Network](#) website is a place to access the many mental health resources at Carolina. CAPS is the primary mental health provider for students, offering timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services. Go to the [CAPS website](#) or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health building for an initial evaluation to learn more. Students can also call CAPS 24/7 at 919-966-3658 for immediate assistance.

Title IX Resources

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made [online to the UCO](#) or by contacting the [University's Title IX Coordinator](#), Elizabeth Hall, or the [Report and Response Managers](#) in the University Compliance Office (UCO) (formerly the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office). Please note that I am designated as a Responsible Employee, which means I must report to the UCO any information I receive about the forms of misconduct listed in this paragraph. If you'd like to speak with a confidential resource, those include Counseling and Psychological Services, the University's Ombuds Office, and the [Gender Violence Services Coordinators](#). Additional resources are available at [safe.unc.edu](#).

Policy on Non-Discrimination

As set out in the University's [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](#), the University is committed to providing an environment where all members of our community can learn, work, and thrive. Consistent with these principles and applicable laws, it is therefore the University's policy not to discriminate on the basis of age, color, disability, gender, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation or veteran status as consistent with



the University's [Policy on Prohibited Discrimination, Harassment and Related Misconduct](#). No person, on the basis of protected status, shall be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to unlawful discrimination, harassment, or retaliation under any University program or activity, including with respect to employment terms and conditions. The University will consider only relevant factors such as individual abilities and qualifications in admissions, hiring, disciplinary action, and all other decisions and will apply consistent standards of conduct and performance.

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (email reportandresponse@unc.edu or see additional contact info at safe.unc.edu) or the [University Compliance Office](#). Please note that I am designated as a Responsible Employee, which means that I must report to the UCO any information I receive about harassment or discrimination. If you'd like to speak with a confidential resource, those include Counseling and Psychological Services and the University's Ombuds Office.

Undergraduate Testing Center

The College of Arts and Sciences provides a secure, proctored environment in which exams can be taken. The Center works with instructors to proctor exams for their undergraduate students who are not registered with UCO and who do not need testing accommodations as provided by UCO. In other words, the Center provides a proctored testing environment for students who are unable to take an exam at the normally scheduled time (with pre-arrangement by your instructor). For more information, visit the [testing center website](#).

Learning Center

Want to get the most out of this course or others this semester? Visit [UNC's Learning Center](#) to make an appointment or register for an event. Their free, popular programs will help you optimize your academic performance. Try academic coaching, peer tutoring, STEM support, ADHD/LD services, workshops and study camps, or review tips and tools available on the website.

Writing Center

For free feedback on any course writing projects, check out UNC's Writing Center. Writing Center coaches can assist with any writing project, including multimedia projects and application essays, at any stage of the writing process. You don't even need a draft to come visit. To schedule a 45-minute appointment, review quick tips, or request written feedback online, visit [UNC's Writing Center online](#).