

PHIL010: Critical Thinking
A SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDE

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Overview

This document provides some additional information for the web version of PHIL010 - Critical Thinking. It will be periodically updated and distributed throughout the semester. For a list of updates, see [Updates](#).

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Updates

8/15/14: First draft completed.

8/24/14: First draft distributed via ANGEL.

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Welcome Note

Welcome to PHIL010 Critical Thinking,

My name is David W. Agler and I will be your instructor and helpful guide through this course. I am a lecturer in the Philosophy department at PSU University Park, and I regularly teach symbolic logic, critical thinking, and other introductory philosophy courses. I have taught Critical Thinking in the classroom and several other classes online (including this course).

To get started, I encourage everyone to take the time to work through the **Course Home Page**, the **Syllabus**, **Navigation Intro**, and the **Course Introduction** found in the **Lessons** Tab. The syllabus is very detailed and contains information about course readings, assignments, and what you can hope to gain from taking this course.

A couple notes that I think it is worth drawing your attention to:

Library Reserves: Some of the readings are not found in the textbook but through e-reserves through the library. To access these, you will click on **Student Resources**, then **Library Reserves**, and then **Preview Activated Link**. I encourage you to download these readings and save them in a folder on your computer (perhaps titled PHIL010_CriticalThinking) as you will need them in the future.

How to Contact Me: The best way to contact me is through email. You can do this by clicking on the **Communicate**

tab in ANGEL. I am currently teaching another online course through World Campus and so plan to spend a lot of time by the computer and you should expect a response from me within 48 hours. If you don't hear back from me within 48 hours, don't hesitate to write me again.

About the Course Content: I did not design this course. In skimming through the lessons, there were some parts that I thought were really insightful and some parts that I think could use more clarification. If you have similar feelings, don't hesitate to post a question on the message board or write me.

My Role as Instructor: My role in this course is to facilitate you through the readings and online materials, to clarify any questions you may have about those items, and to grade any work you submit.

Best wishes and don't hesitate to write me with any questions or concerns you may have. David W. Agler

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Resources

4.1 ANGEL

ANGEL is the hub for this course. There you will find links to the **Syllabus**, **Course Lessons**, **Activities** (or the Assessments for the Course), some additional readings (see **Student Resources** then click **Library Reserves**, and finally a way to check your **Grade**.

4.2 Critical Thinking Websites

If you wish to supplement the texts for this course, there are a number of Critical Thinking Websites listed below. In addition, here is a link to the handouts I use when I teach the residential version of this course: [David Agler - Critical Thinking Webpage](#).

1. The Critical Thinking Community:
<http://www.criticalthinking.org/>
2. "Informal Logic" in Stanford Encyclopedia:
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/logic-informal/>
3. Hardest Logic Puzzle:
<http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/logic/hardest.php>
4. Creative Play Grows Critical Thinking in Children:
<http://phys.org/news/2012-04-creative-critical-children.html>
5. Critical Thinking and Business Decisions:
<http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/226484>
6. Critical Thinking Academy: <http://www.criticalthinkeracademy.com>

com/

7. Critical Thinking, Logic, and Creativity:

<http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/>

8. Beyond Critical Thinking:

<http://chronicle.com/article/Beyond-Critical-Thinking/63288/>

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Rubrics

5.1 Lesson 3: Argument Summary

The Argument Summary is a simplified version of the Homework Assignment described at the beginning of Lesson 3. Your task is to do the following:

1. identify the basic parts of the argument:
 - (a) its conclusion (or central claim),
 - (b) the premises or statements that purport to support the conclusion
2. briefly comment on the argument you have laid out.

Here is the Lesson 3 assignment presented in a step-by-step manner:

1. Select a short piece of writing (approximately 250 words) from a news source, e.g. a letter-to-the-editor or a short editorial (op-ed)
2. State the conclusion of the author (the author's thesis or central claim) as precisely as possible.
3. Isolate each of the premises of the article (the author's reasons) that purport (or claim) to support the conclusion. State each premise in the form of a single sentence.
4. Put the premises into the sequence that is most logical, i.e. in a way that the author would have liked to have done him or herself.
5. Comment on the argument in a short paragraph. State whether you think the argument is cogent and whether it could be im-

proved in any way. Explain your reasoning.

6. Finally, include a copy of the original argument with your submission.¹

Sample Summary: To give you some idea of what is expected, here is a sample argument and summary:

Argument “In the last election “character” was obviously the deciding factor, because the public’s need for a strong, decisive leader overshadowed concerns for practical, policy-based governance. This trend in voter-attitudes was already clear in the previous election. Al Gore lost because he was characterized as an elitist intellectual. The events of 9/11 only made the situation worse. And so it is no surprise that Senator Kerry’s presidential bid failed.”

Summary and Commentary Conclusion: Kerry’s presidential bid failed because character was the deciding factor in the election. Reason 1: Gore lost his presidential bid because of his perceived weaknesses of character. Reason 2: The events of Sept. 11, 2001 increased the public’s preference for strong, decisive leaders. Reason 3: Kerry offered practical, policy-based governance, while the public now more than ever wanted a strong, decisive leader.

Commentary: Overall, I agree with this argument, but I think that it oversimplifies the matter. First, I believe that Al Gore lost because of his association with the previous Clinton administration. People simply wanted a change. Also, the author assumes here that Kerry offered “practical, policy based governance” – what does this mean, exactly? And the author also implies that Bush did not offer this!

The Lesson 3 Submission for PHIL010 - Critical Thinking is graded as follows:

¹The goal of this assignment is to reconstruct an argument in the most accurate and precise way. While you are not asked to improve the author’s argument nor put words in the author’s mouth, you should try to restate the author’s words in a way that actually make their claims clearer and removes any filler. For example, if the author is vague about some point, you may be able to clarify what the author means by drawing on some assumptions they are likely to be making.

1pt you provided an article for analysis (approximately 250 words)

1pt stated the thesis of the argument as precisely as possible

1pt separated the article's premises/reasons in the best, most logical sequence (be sure to state these premises precisely)

2pt gave your reaction to the piece while considering the question of whether or not the argument was cogent or what could have been improved.

5.2 Lesson 4: Language Analysis

The Language Analysis assignment asks you to show that you can recognize and discuss the ways that authors use words so as to support (even if unjustifiably) their conclusion of their argument. This assignment is worth 5% of your final grade. Here is a step-by-step overview of the assignment:

1. Choose one short piece of writing—approximately 250 words in length—from a news or opinion source, e.g. letter-to-the-editor, a short editorial, or some short piece of writing (this piece of writing should be different from the writing you used in Lesson Three)!
2. Include a copy of the piece of writing you analyzed with your submission.
3. Go through your writing selection and *italicize* examples of strongly connotative language, e.g. words that are strongly emotive or indicate that one is prejudging an issue.
4. Go through the writing selection and **bold** any words whose definitions play a critical role in the writing selection's argument.
5. In a short commentary, discuss the author's use of language.
 - (a) In your own words, clearly state the author's thesis.
 - (b) In around 100-150 words, describe your initial reaction to the piece.
 - (c) Explain why the author chose one set of words over another and state whether the author's choice of words was to his/her advantage or was stated in a neutral way.
 - (d) State whether the author's use of language prejudices the outcome and jeopardizes his/her argument.

This assignment is worth 5% of your final grade and is graded as follows:

- 1pt provided an article for analysis
- 1pt bolded any loaded language
- 1pt stated the thesis of the argument as clearly as possible
- 2pt gave your reaction to the piece while considering the questions about the author's use of language

5.3 Lesson 5, Figurative Language

The Analogy Exercise assigns you with (i) finding an argument that makes use of analogy, a metaphor, or a simile, and then (ii) evaluating the role that the figurative language plays in the overall effectiveness in the argument.

Here is a step-by-step guide to the assignment:

1. Find an article that contains some instance of figurative language and include a copy of the original article with your submission (please provide a citation if the article does not clearly indicate its source).
2. Clearly and precisely state the author's overall thesis.
3. State the analogy, metaphor, or simile being used. Here is where you will want to be as detailed as possible. Please indicate what two (or more) things being compared and what similarity or key difference the author thinks those two things have.
4. Finally, in a paragraph, evaluate the role that this instance of figurative language played in the argument. How similar / different are the two things the author is comparing and does their similarity / difference make the argument more or less effective? Keep in mind that you might agree with the author but think the use of figurative language is unconvincing or disagree with the author but find their particular use of figurative language strongly compelling. Finally, consider if there was any way in which the author could improve the figure of speech? For example, you might suggest a different figure of speech or indicate that, in this particular case, the author should have adopted more literal language. Explain why.

This assignment is worth 5% of your final grade and is graded as follows:

1pt provided an article for analysis

1pt stated the thesis of the argument as clearly as possible

1pt precisely stated the analogy/metaphor/simile (1pt), and

2pt identified the figure of speech and its role in the argument by articulating whether you think the comparison is weak/strong, in what ways the comparison is similar or dissimilar, how the figure of speech might be improved, and the figure of speech's overall effectiveness

5.4 Lesson 6, Fallacy Analysis

Here is your assignment step-by-step:

1. Choose editorials, opinion pieces or letters-to-the-editor from a local or national newspaper or other publication. Your best choices for this exercise are the editorials available free from several on-line newspaper sources (Boston Globe, New York Times, Washington Post, etc.), also including local papers. Other sources might be used (editorials from magazines or on-line opinion sources) but newspaper editorials tend to be shorter and more easily obtained.
2. Please cut and paste or type each editorial or letter, in its entirety, into your submission, so that I can read the original.
3. Find a total of **3 different fallacies** in these selections. If you choose a longer, more complex editorial or letter, you might be able to find a couple (or even all three) fallacies in the same piece – if so, that is fine. But if you choose several shorter pieces, each with only a fallacy or two, that is fine as well.

NOTE: You should identify three and only three different kinds of fallacy. Do not submit three fallacies of the same kind (e.g. three ad hominem fallacies) or submit more than three fallacies (e.g. ten different fallacies).
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4. Underline or boldface each fallacy, and write its name in square brackets [] immediately after it.

5. Once you have identified your articles and fallacies, you should then provide a description and analysis of each author's fallacy. At the top of your analysis list the piece's title (if any), the author, the source, and the date it appeared. Then compose a short paragraph in which you explain the error in the clearest possible terms. Precisely where and how does the author's argument go wrong?

NOTE: Keep in mind that this process of hunting for fallacies is often an art as well as a science: many times an author's reasoning is so muddy that you first have to interpret what you think they mean to say, and then you have to criticize their (purported) reasoning. Try to be fair and objective – in your analysis you should give the best interpretation you can of the author's words and ideas, taken in context. But also be aware that sometimes the author may be committing several fallacies at once, or that a particular passage may be interpretable in different ways.

Here is an abbreviated rubric for the Lesson 6, Fallacy Analysis assignment:

3pt provided an article for analysis

3pt found a total of 3 different fallacies by boldfacing the fallacy and writing its name in square brackets immediately after it

4pt analyzed each fallacy by explaining it in its clearest possible terms and then explained how the each fallacy influenced the argument as a whole

5.5 Lesson 7

The Lesson 7 Submission for PHIL010 - Critical Thinking is not graded, but as it is a proposal for the Lesson 9 Assessment, it will be helpful for you to have a clear sense of how the Lesson 9 Assessment will be graded. See the Lesson 9 Rubric in Section [5.6](#).

5.6 Lesson 9

The Lesson 9 Submission for PHIL010 - Critical Thinking is graded as follows:

- 3pt** a description of key editorial aspects of the source (e.g. who produces it, its history, its intended audience, etc.)
- 3pt** an identification of who writes for the source (e.g. names, affiliations of authors, authors from different viewpoints, etc.)
- 1pt** appropriate writing & sample of sources attached
- 3pt** range of topics and the types of topics considered
- 5pt** an assessment of the source's semantic profile (e.g. use of language, does it present opposing viewpoints, impartial or clearly biased, etc.). Take back up your assessment with reasons, examples, and short citations.

Note that if your paper is not the appropriate length (**1500** words), you will lose a point for every 100 words for which your paper falls short.

5.7 Lesson 10, Alternative Media Proposal

The Lesson 10 Alternative Media Proposal for PHIL010 Critical Thinking is not graded. Be sure to check the Lesson 12 folder for more details and see Section 5.8 for the Lesson 12 rubric.

5.8 Lesson 12, Media Analysis

In a short paper, written in a standard essay format and of 1800 words, you will analyze a medium of persuasive discourse other than the printed word. These alternative media could include visual messages, such as magazine advertisements; mixed media messages such as one might find in a commercial or on a website; or televised spectacles such as a political campaign event, a publicity stunt, or a protest action. This paper is worth 15% of your final grade.

The Medium: The medium should have a strong visual component. Ideally, it would also be clearly delimited and reasonably concise; that is, you should know where it begins and where it ends, and you should be able to select a coherent portion that can be fully analyzed in the time you have to complete this assignment. A single print advertisement will suffice for this assignment, as will a short commercial, or a 20-30 second news report, with video clip, of a political or marketing event.

You should also be careful to choose a piece that is complex enough

to sustain an analysis of this type. (But you should also keep in mind that many instances of visual communication are far more complex than they appear to be on the surface!)

The Lesson 12 Alternative Media Analysis Submission for PHIL010 - Critical Thinking is graded as follows:

1pt you picked a persuasive piece other than the printed word (e.g. visual message, advertisement, video, commercial, publicity stunt, protest, tv media coverage of an event)

3pt you give a detailed description of the non-print medium. For example, if you use a single image, you articulate in full what you see and go into how the image laid out. Alternatively, if it is a video, your articulate its length, the sequence of events, the people involved, etc.

4pt you give a detailed description of who produced, created, or owns the message / non-print medium by (1) articulating what general objectives that person has and (2) give an account of the likely audience for the non-print medium (you will need evidence for your claims here).

5pt articulate why the message maker created the specific non-print media in the way they did – how do the specific elements of the media aim to accomplish those media maker’s goals? For example, if they are selling a product, how is that product being sold (e.g. by appealing to emotion, by appealing to reason)? You will want to be specific about how the descriptive parts of the media are used to accomplish the message-maker’s goals.

2pt You offer up a conclusion (and reasons to support your claim) about this non-print medium. Is it successful or unsuccessful? Why or why not?

Note that if your paper is not the appropriate length (**1500 words**), you will lose a point for every 100 words for which your paper falls short.

5.9 Lesson 13, Issue Analysis Proposal

The Lesson 13 Issue Analysis Proposal for PHIL010 Critical Thinking is not graded. Be sure to check the Lesson 15 folder for more details and see Section 5.10 for the Lesson 15 rubric.

These are some quick comments concerning your Lesson 13 Issue Analysis Proposa for PHIL010 Critical Thinking. For more inform, please check the Lesson 15 Assignment.

5.10 Lesson 15, Issue Analysis

The Lesson 15 Issue Analysis Paper Submission for PHIL010 - Critical Thinking is graded as follows (please use the following format for your paper):

1	Introduction
2pts	picked a topic that is of personal and public interest,
3pts	have a clear statement of the PRECISE question you will try to answer and identify whether it is one of fact, of definition, of cause and consequence, of value, or of procedural/proposal.
2.	Body of Paper
3pts	accurately represent the different opinions on this topic, e.g. identified what people say, why they are saying it,
3pts	accurately represent the sources for these different opinions and give reasons for why one source is more credible than another
2pts	clearly state your position on this topic after considering the different opinions
3pts	clearly state your reasons for why someone ought to accept this claim and give reasons that an impartial and undecided reader would be likely to find convincing. A reader who, for example, would not accept a claim just because it is your opinion.
3	Conclusion
2pts	you contain a conclusion that concisely restates the answer to the question you proposed at the beginning of the paper and briefly summarize the paper.
	Other
2pts	The paper is clearly written, contains appropriate citations, and is the appropriate length (2000 to 3000 words)

Table 5.1 – Lesson 15: Issue Analysis Paper

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Grades

6.1 Points Per Assignment

Lesson	Assessment	Points
3	Argument Summary	5
4	Language Analysis	5
5	Analogy Exercise	5
6	Fallacies Exercise	10
8	Quiz 1: Basic Concepts	5
9	Source Analysis	15
10	Quiz 2: Cat. Syllogisms	5
11	Quiz 3: Enthymemes/Fallacies	5
12	Alternative Media Analysis	15
14	Quiz 4: Editorial Analysis	10
15	Issue Analysis	20
	Total	100

Table 6.1 – Points Per Assignment

6.2 Grading Scale

Percent	Grade
95-100	A
90-94.9	A-
87.7-89.9	B+
83.33-87.6	B
80-83.32	B-
75-79.9	C+
70-74.9	C
60-69.9	D
below 60	F

Table 6.2 – Grading Scale