

CRITICAL THINKING

PHIL010.004 • Spring 2013 • TR 9:45–11 • 217 Hammond Bldg
PHIL010.003 • Spring 2013 • TR 11:15–12:30 • 015 Tyson Bldg

David W. Agler, PhD

Office Location: 228 Sparks & 244 Sparks
Office Hours: TR 8–9AM

e: dwa132 [a t] psu.edu
w: www.davidagler.com

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Critical thinking is the use of reason to distinguish good arguments from bad arguments in real-life situations. This ability includes an array of different skills, e.g. being able to identify arguments from non-arguments, determining what is relevant to a conclusion, and developing a vocabulary for talking about and evaluating arguments. While all of us can and do think critically, none of us are perfect reasoning machines. We often succumb to our biases when we shouldn't, rely on the testimony of authorities who are not genuine authorities, or uncharitably cast our political or intellectual opponents as fools when their views are actually quite sophisticated. The primary purpose of this course is to help you develop the critically thinking skills you already possess. To achieve this, this course includes an analysis of language, inductive and deductive reasoning, and a discussion of how to evaluate arguments effectively in everyday situations. At the end of this course, you should be able to (1) distinguish the functions of language and its capacity to express and influence meaning, (2) identify, analyze, and evaluate a variety of different types of arguments (inductive and deductive), and (3) recognize common fallacies.

COURSE OVERVIEW

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Waller, Bruce N. 2012. *Critical Thinking: Consider the Verdict*. 6th ed. Pearson: Boston.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

1. Course Handouts: <http://davidagler.com/teaching/criticalthinking.html>

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- **Critical Reading Skills:** Students will learn certain fundamental features of language needed for argument analysis. By the end of this course, students should be able to distinguish various uses and features of language that influence meaning and shape argument.
- **Argument Identification Skills:** Students will learn how to identify arguments from non-arguments as well as classify different types of arguments, e.g. inductive, deductive, valid, invalid, strong, weak, etc.
- **Critical Thinking Skills:** Students will develop a general set of thinking skills that allow them to critically analyze and assess a variety of arguments in real life situations. They will learn how to use these skills to determine whether the reasons used to support a conclusion are relevant, whether certain arguments are properly supported, and when and where certain fallacies are committed.
- **Dialogue & Oral Expression:** Students will engage in respectful conversation with classmates and develop their capacity to clearly articulate and use critical thinking concepts.

COURSE WORK

- **Participation & Attendance (10%):** Regular attendance is strongly linked to success in this course. Since the course is a combination of lecture and seminar format, regular and active participation is required. Although it is not essential that you have mastered the text, you are expected to have read the assignment before attending class and have made notes for which passages, terms, or arguments you think are important.
 - *Participation* is assessed by using a variety of factors, including (but not limited to): the quality of your questions and answers, respectful dialogue with your classmates and instructor, your willingness to participate in class exercises, etc.

- *Attendance* is assessed through the use of *Attendance Sheets* distributed periodically throughout the semester. Missing class without notifying your instructor in advance will result in the loss of one percentage point.
- **Three Sets of Homework Exercises (15%):** Homework exercises are assigned throughout the semester. Each will be collected on the day you the exam that corresponds with the homework, e.g. *Homework Exercises #1* is due the day you take *Exam #1*. Homework is reviewed for completeness. *Completeness* is defined as putting forward a solid attempt on *every* exercise assigned. Thus, it is necessary that you answer every homework question but not necessary that you answer every exercise correctly. The specific problem set will also be distributed via ANGEL.
- **Three Quizzes (30%):** Three short quizzes are scheduled throughout the semester. In order to do well on the quizzes, it is sufficient that you have developed a basic familiarity with the assigned reading and the material discussed in class. Quizzes do not require a mastery of the material.
- **Three Exams (45%):** Three exams are scheduled periodically throughout the semester. In order to do well on the exams, it is necessary that you have developed a basic familiarity with the assigned reading and the material discussed in class. However, exams require a level of understanding of the material that goes above basic familiarity. A review sheet will be distributed for each exam.

COURSE POLICIES

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

The general principles and policy relating to cheating and plagiarism, which are enforced in this class, can be found in the Penn State policy on academic misconduct. *Academic Integrity*: Academic dishonesty encompasses a wide range of activities, whether intentional or unintentional, that includes, but is not limited to: all forms of fraud, plagiarism, and any failure to cite explicitly all materials and sources used in one's work. Sanctions for these activities include, but are not limited to, failure in a course, removal from the degree program, failure in a course with an explanation in the permanent transcript of the cause for failure, suspension, and expulsion. If you are unclear about whether you or someone you know is engaging in academic misconduct, read the following: [University Statement on Academic Integrity](#). For more information, see [PSU Academic Integrity](#), [PSU ITS](#), [Plagiarism Tutor](#), [Turnitin](#), [PSU Teaching & Learning with Technology](#)

GRADING SCALE & ROUNDING POLICY

Grades will be rounded up from the *second* decimal point, e.g. 90.95 rounds up to 91.0 while 90.94 rounds down to 90.90. In the event that eLION does not allow for a particular grade (e.g. D+), you will simply be given the letter grade (e.g. if you have a D+ then you will receive a D, and if you have a C-, you will receive a C).

A: 91–100%;	C+: 79.0–79.9	F: 0–59.9
A–: 90.0–90.9	C: 71.0–78.9	INCOMPLETE
B+: 89.0–89.9	C–: 70–70.9	DROP
B: 81.0–88.9	D+: 69.0–69.9	
B–: 80–80.9	D: 60.0–68.9	

LATE WORK

If you are planning on turning in any of the above assessments late, you will need to clear this with the instructor *before* the day and time of the assessment. If the instructor is not informed that you will be taking the test late, a grade reduction of one letter grade is incurred for every day the test is late. So if the due date is Tuesday at 3p.m. and you email me on Tuesday at 3.01p.m., you will lose a letter grade. You will not lose an additional letter grade until 3.01p.m. the next day (i.e. Wednesday).

STUDENT GUIDANCE AND DISABILITY

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the campus disability liaison as soon as possible: (name, office, telephone, email). For additional information, check the university web site for [Disability Services](#). If you are in need of psychological counseling, please do not hesitate to contact Penn State's [Counseling & Psychological Services](#) (phone: 814-863-0395). For any problem related to your studies, university policies and procedures, do not hesitate to seek the help of the [Student Affairs Services](#), your

Academic Advisor, or arrange a meeting with your instructor who will help you obtain assistance through one of the above, or another, agency.

USE OF ANGEL AND EMAIL COMMUNICATION

Please check the webpage on the [ANGEL](#) website regularly. Many helpful resources are available there and on my professional website: www.davidagler.com.

If you have a question about the course, its content or assignments, I encourage you to go through the following three step process:

- (1) Check the syllabus
- (2) Check ANGEL
- (3) Email me

I encourage you to contact me with any concerns you may have about the course. The best way is to get a hold of me is through email at dwa132@psu.edu. If you do email me, I encourage you to use the following practices:

- Use your Penn State account
- Include your full name
- Use a clear subject line, e.g. P120 Question
- Try to phrase your question as clearly as possible, including any information you think might be helpful.
- Address your intended recipient, e.g. Dear David
- Use e-mail for short questions that require short answers.

Students are responsible for activity on their computer accounts so only send emails pertinent to the course or to your academic development.

TUTORING, DROP PROCEDURES, AND INCOMPLETES

Students who simply stop attending class, for whatever reason, without officially withdrawing from the course, will receive the grade of F. If you expect a refund, be aware that the date the withdrawal form is processed by Penn State registrar's office determines the amount of refund. Consult the Register site for [drop procedures](#). Consult the Handbook for taking an [Incomplete \(D/F\)](#). Before considering dropping the course or taking an incomplete, you might consider getting additional help from your academic advisor or from the following useful links: [Information Literacy Tutorial](#), [University Learning Center](#), [Writing Center](#)

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

A number of factors figure into creating a healthy classroom environment. In order to facilitate such an environment, I ask you to obey the following: (1) the use of cell phones in any capacity is prohibited (please turn ringers/buzzers off, no text-messaging during class), (2) please do not begin to 'pack up' your belongings before your instructor has *explicitly* dismissed you, (3) please come to class rested, sleeping in class is strictly prohibited, (4) please do not do other work in class. If you are incapable of performing (1)–(4) or are disruptive in class, you will kindly be asked to leave the classroom.

CHALLENGE EXAMINATION

For some courses, students may request a [challenge examination](#) as a substitute for completing the usual requirements of a course. If the examination is successfully completed the credits received are described as "credits by examination" ([policy 42-50](#)).

COURSE SCHEDULE

Jan 8–Feb.7	Part I: Argument Terminology, Ad Hominem Arguments, & the Strawman Fallacy Chapter 1: Introduction Chapter 2: A Few Important Terms <i>Quiz #1</i> Chapter 3: Ad Hominem Arguments Chapter 4: The Strawman Fallacy <i>Exam #1 & Homework Exercises #1</i>
Feb.7–March 21	Part II: Informal Analysis Chapter 5: What’s the Question? Chapter 6: Relevant and Irrelevant Reasons <i>Quiz #2</i> No Class March 5 & 7 (Spring break) Chapter 7: Analyzing Arguments Chapter 8: The Burden of Proof <i>Exam #2, Homework Exercises #2</i>
March 21–April 25	Part III: Language that Deceives, More Fallacies, and Authorities & Testimony Chapter 9: Language and Its Pitfalls Chapter 10: Appeal to Authority <i>Quiz #3</i> Chapter 12: Some Distinctive Arguments and Potential Pitfalls Chapter 16: The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth <i>Exam 3, Homework Exercises #3</i>

Printed, Distributed, & Uploaded: 1/8/2013