

Introduction to Philosophy



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Office Hours: W 10-12 AM

Office Hours

My office is Room 547 in the Philosophy Department, which is located at 106 Somerset in New Brunswick. Office hours are 10-12 AM Wednesday mornings. If you need to meet at another time, send me an e-mail and we'll try to work something out.

Textbooks

Note that, in most cases, we'll only be reading selections, not whole books. That said, I don't want to downplay the fact that you really will have to do a lot of reading in this class. If that's a problem, reconsider your course selection!

Doing Philosophy: An Introduction Through Thought Experiments by Theodore Schick and Lewis Vaughn (This one, unfortunately, you'll have to buy, but everything else will be made available as a PDF. If you want to share with a friend or borrow a copy and photocopy the sections we'll be reading—see the schedule, below—then good for you! I certainly don't want to make you spend more on textbooks than you already are!)

Time, Change, and Freedom: An Introduction to Metaphysics by Nathan Oaklander and Quentin Smith

No Fate But What We Make by Ryan Lake

Critical Reasoning: A User's Manual by Chris Swoyer

Violence: Six Sideways Reflections by Slavoj Žižek

"The Principle of Alternate Possibilities" by Harry Frankfurt (Article)

"Existentialism as a Humanism" by Jean-Paul Sartre (Article)

Logic and the Paradoxes of Self-Reference (Handout)

Grading Scale:

85-100	A
80-84	B+
70-79	B
65-69	C+
55-64	C
50-54	D
0-49	F

Electronic Devices and Class Participation

Philosophy is not a spectator sport. You can only learn how to construct and refute philosophical arguments by doing it, so class participation is extremely important in a philosophy class. I reserve the right to lower your semester grade by a full letter grade if you fail to participate in class discussions. On a related note, non-life-saving electronic devices are not allowed. If you need to take notes, you can do it twentieth-century-style, with pen a paper.

A Word About Grade Grubbing

This is already a very generous grading scheme. Please don't embarrass both of us by trying to bargain, beg, wheedle, or argue your way into a higher grade because you "need" it for a scholarship, or to get into law school, or whatever. It won't work, and my opinion of you will be lowered.

Grading Scheme

Quizzes: 40% (5 points each, lowest grade automatically dropped)
Papers: 40% (Ten points each)
Final Exam: 20% (20 points possible)

Yes, There's A Final Exam, and You Have To Be There For It!

You have this information on the first day of class. Make your plans for the end of the semester accordingly. School ends at the end of finals week, not on the last day of class. The only circumstances under which I can imagine offering a makeup final on an alternate date would be a **severe** medical or psychological breakdown, documented and brought to the attention of the Dean before you even talk to me. "I have plane tickets" won't cut it.

Some important stuff about quizzes, papers, absences, etc.:

Never, ever ask any instructor, "Are we doing anything important today?" A few seconds of thought should suffice for you to realize that it's a bizarre and insulting question.

Similarly, "I have something to do for another class" is never a legitimate excuse for missing this class. I hope you don't disrespect any of your other instructors by telling them that you have to miss their classes to prepare work for mine either!

Attendance isn't graded in this class, and you're all adults. You're free to make whatever cost/benefit decisions you need to make about whether to be in class. This is part of why I automatically drop your lowest quiz grade, so I don't have to be in the business of evaluating excuses. If you're sick on a quiz day, that can be the one you miss. Papers can be turned in late, but two points will be automatically deducted per day of lateness. As discussed above, the Final Exam is pretty much set in stone.

How Quizzes Work:

Quizzes will be five questions long. No more than two questions per quiz will be review questions from material covered in previous quizzes. In all cases, four questions will be multiple choice, true/false, or short answer, and one will be a long answer question. You will have a total of 15 minutes to finish the quiz.

How the Papers Work:

You will get detailed guidelines, possible questions, etc., two weeks before each paper is due. The latest you can run an optional rough draft by me is ten days before the paper is due. If you do so, I'll try to give you some helpful comments to point you in the right direction, but please don't expect me to hold your hand and tell you exactly what you need to change to get a perfect grade. That's not how college works.

How the Final Exam Works:

The final exam will basically be a twenty-question quiz. The main difference will be that only a maximum of three questions will be about the material covered since Quiz 9. The other seventeen questions will be “review.” Fifteen questions will be multiple choice, true/false, or short answer, and one will be a long answer question. You will have a total of one hour to finish the final exam.

Schedule for the Semester

Note that this schedule may be revised as the semester goes on!

Reading for Monday, January 25th: *Time, Change, and Freedom*, Introduction by Quentin Smith & Dialogue 1

Quiz 1: Monday, January 25th

Reading for Wednesday, January 27th: *Critical Reasoning: A User’s Manual*, Chapter Two & *Time, Change, and Freedom*, Dialogue 2

Note on Readings from *Critical Reasoning: A User’s Manual*:

The exercises are optional and you don’t have to turn them in, although I would recommend you try at least a few per chapter for practice.

Quiz 2: Wednesday, January 27th

Reading for Monday, February 1st: *Critical Reasoning: A User’s Manual*, Chapter Three & *Time, Change, and Freedom*, Dialogue 3

Reading for Wednesday, February 3rd: *Time Change, and Freedom*, Dialogues 4 & 5

Quiz 3: Wednesday, February 3rd

Reading for Monday, February 8th: *Time, Change, and Freedom*, Dialogues 6 & 7

Reading for Wednesday, February 10th: *Time, Change, and Freedom*, Dialogues 8 & 9

Quiz 4: Wednesday, February 10th

Reading for Monday, February 15th: *Time, Change, and Freedom*, Dialogues 10 & 11

Reading for Wednesday, February 17th: N/A (First Paper Due)

Reading for Monday, February 22nd: *Doing Philosophy*, Beginning of Chapter 3
(Read both the introduction to the chapter and section 3.1)

Reading for Wednesday, February 24th: *Doing Philosophy*, Section 3.2 & *No Fate But What We Make*, Chapter One

Quiz 5: Wednesday, February 24th

Reading for Monday, February 29th: “The Principle of Alternate Possibilities” by Harry Frankfurt & “The Paradoxes of Time Travel” by David Lewis

Quiz 6: Monday, February 29th

Reading for Wednesday, March 2nd: *Doing Philosophy*, Beginning of Chapter 6
(Read both the introduction to the chapter and section 6.1)

Reading for Monday, March 7th: *Doing Philosophy*, Section 6.2

Reading for Wednesday, March 9th: N/A (Second Paper Due)

Reading for Monday, March 14th: N/A (Spring Break)

Reading for Wednesday, March 16th: N/A (Spring Break)

Reading for Monday, March 21st: *Doing Philosophy*, Section 7.1 & *Critical Reasoning: A User’s Manual*, Chapter Twelve

Reading for Wednesday, March 23rd: *Critical Reasoning: A User’s Manual*, Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen

Quiz 7: Wednesday, March 23rd

Reading for Monday, March 28th: *Doing Philosophy*, Section 6.3 & “Existentialism is a Humanism” by Jean-Paul Sartre

Reading for Wednesday, March 30th: *Tragedy and Philosophy*, Chapter One & Extract from Plato

Reading for Monday, April 4th: Extract from Aristotle and “What We Talk about When We Talk About Anne Frank” by Nathan Englander

Reading for Wednesday, April 6th: N/A (Third Paper Due)

Reading for Monday, April 11th: “Fearing Fictions” by Kendall Walton and SEP Article on the Paradox of Fiction

Reading for Wednesday, April 13th: *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Introduction and Chapter One

Quiz 8: Wednesday, April 13th:

Reading for Monday, April 18th: *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Chapters Two and Three

Reading for Wednesday, April 20st: *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Chapters Four and Five

Reading for Monday, April 25th: *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Chapter Six and Epilogue

Quiz 9: Monday, April 25th

Reading for Wednesday, April 27th: Handout on Logic and the Paradoxes of Self-Reference

Reading for Monday, May 2nd: N/A (Final Paper Due)

Final Exam: Section 05 Tuesday, May 3rd, 12 PM

Section 06 Wednesday, May 4th, 12 PM

Movie Schedule

We'll be watching three movies over the course of the semester. Please note that these aren't free or optional days. I show them because I think they'll be an interesting take off point for discussion. In each case, we'll stop them at a few points to talk about what we've seen and how it relates to various ideas discussed in the class. That said, the movies are in some ways a fun break in a class that includes some extraordinarily challenging material. Also, we'll have pizza. Here are the movies we'll be watching and the dates:

Monday, February 15th and Wednesday, February 17th: *Donnie Darko*

March 21st and March 23rd: *Waking Life*

Monday, April 18th and Wednesday, April 20th: *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*