

Syllabus for PH 121 *Critical Thinking*

Canadian Nazarene College

Fall Term 1997

Instructor: Terry Fach

I. About this class...

Simply stated, this is a course on logic. Logic is concerned with reasoning. Its concern is to distinguish good reasoning from bad, or better from worse. Logic is both an art and a science. As a science logic investigates, develops, and systematizes principles and methods that can be used to distinguish between correct and incorrect reasoning. But as an art or craft, logic can be equated with "logical ability" and includes a whole family of related skills that have many applications. Among those applications are problem solving, weighing evidence, constructing arguments for or against a disputed proposition, detecting mistakes in reasoning (including one's own), and clarifying issues.

This course will study both formal and informal logic. Formal logic deals with arguments in formal systems where deductive and inductive standards are employed. Most of this course will focus on informal logic. Informal logic aims to apply the techniques of logic to ordinary language argumentation (e.g. the kind that appears in newspaper editorials, sermons, advertising, and political campaigns). The informal logic approach focuses on the realm of real-life argumentation--arguments that people formulate for practical purposes in their lives.

All of us are consumers of arguments. Groups and individuals constantly vie for your adherence to their way of seeing things, for your acceptance of their view of what is true, important, or worth doing. We are, whether we realize it or not, consumers of beliefs and values, no less than of products. Which raises an important question: how good are your buying habits? Some arguments are damaged goods, and buying a bad argument might, depending on the situation, do you a lot more harm than buying a defective CD player. This course is designed to offer resources and to teach techniques to help you distinguish the good arguments from the bad ones.

"Philosophy is like the measles. It must be caught from someone who is already infected. To learn to philosophize, you must try your luck arguing with a live philosopher.."

- Elmer Sprague, *What is Philosophy?*

II. Course Goals

1. an improved *understanding* of the concepts, problems, and methods of logic.
2. a knowledge of techniques for critically analysing and evaluating arguments.
3. improved general skills of *thinking clearly and critically* about different problems; to improve *learning skills* and to develop resources for creative *problem solving* and *decision making*.
4. an improved ability to *communicate* both orally and in writing.

III. Course Requirements

A. Reading

The majority of assigned reading for this course is found in the textbook:

Beyond Feelings: A Guide to Critical Thinking, by Vincent Ruggiero

It is likely that other readings will be assigned and will be either handed out in class or put on "reserve" in the library.

B. Critical Thinking Journal

All students need to purchase a notebook (**bound** or **spiral** notebook, please) to use as a *Critical Thinking Journal*. One of the goals of this course is to help you develop and improve your thinking skills. One of the proven ways to achieve that goal is to **write**. When you are reading the text (or anything else for that matter) *write down your observations, ideas, and questions*. It is always helpful to go back and reflect on what you have written so that you can perhaps *elaborate* on the observations, or *challenge* some of your earlier ideas. The Journal will also be the place to answer specific assigned questions--in class I will call these "questions for your Journal." There are two main purposes for making the Journal a formal part of a course in critical thinking: *first*, it will greatly enhance your thinking and problem-solving abilities (a very valuable transferrable skill); and *second*, it will dramatically improve your written communication skills. I will collect the Journals at the end of most Thursday classes and will read them carefully. They will be returned by Friday morning (after chapel at the latest). They can be collected on the shelf beside the faculty mailboxes. **Faithfully completing Journal entries will be worth 10% of your final grade.**

C. Mid-term Quizzes

There will be 2 mid-term quizzes covering material from the lectures and reading. Each Quiz is worth 20% of the final grade. The material which the quiz covers will be discussed in class. The dates of these quizzes are:

Quiz #1: October 7, 1997

Quiz #2: November 4, 1997

D. Final Examination

This examination will cover all material from the Fall Term and will be worth 40% of the final grade. This examination (3 hours in length) will include both short-answer questions and longer essay-type questions, and will be based completely on material covered by the class lectures and assigned readings. It is, therefore, highly advisable to attend class regularly and to take careful and extensive notes.

Worth Pondering..."I have never yet written anything, long or short, that did not surprise me. That is, for me at least, the greatest worth of writing, which is only incidentally a way of telling others what you think. Its first use is for the **making** of what you think, for the discovery of understanding, an act that happens only in language."

-Richard Mitchell, *The Gift of Fire*

IV. Breakdown of Final Grade; Grading Criteria

	Total %	Grade
Critical Thinking Journal	10%	
October 7 Mid-term Quiz	25%	
November 4 Mid-Term Quiz	25%	
Final Examination	40%	
TOTAL	100%	

It goes without saying that some of the grading done in a course like this depends on the critical judgement of the marker. That does not mean that the standards of good writing and argumentation are entirely a matter of individual preference. Part of what you will learn in a class like this one is the set of standards used by academics teaching in this discipline. If you have questions about what lies behind the assignment of a particular grade, or if the comments on an assignment leave you uncertain as to what you would need to do to improve it, please consult me and I will be happy to discuss the matter with you.

The following chart matches letter grades with a brief description and percentages:

A+	Exceptional	90% and above
A	Excellent	80-89
B+	Very Good	75-79
B	Good	70-74
C+	Satisfactory	65-69
C	Adequate	60-64
D	Marginal	50-59
F	Failure	49% and below

V. Other Matters

A. *Late or Incomplete Term Work Policy*

Assignments are expected on the day that they are due. No term work can be submitted for credit after the last day of classes. My policy for accepting late term work (i.e. work due *before* the end of any term) is as follows: (1) Should you have a problem with a particular due date, please speak to me *well in advance of that date* and I will evaluate each application for time extension on its merits; (2) any assignment turned in after the due date (with permission) may not be returned within a reasonable amount of time, and may have very little by way of reader's comments; (3) students should be aware that there are *very few* instances where an assignment extension will be deemed justified.

B. *Class Attendance and Preparation*

All students in this class are expected to attend classes regularly and to prepare for lectures and discussions (usually in the form of assigned reading and

writing). Students unable or unwilling to attend regularly or undertake this preparation cannot expect to do well in the course and should consider other options. The college's official attendance policy is as follows: "After three unexcused absences per term the professor reserves the right to require a student to withdraw from the class. A late arrival to class equals .5 absence."

C. Baseball Caps, etc.

As a minimal standard of classroom decorum, please do not wear baseball caps (or hats of any kind) to class. Also, CNC has declared that no food or drink will be allowed in the classrooms.

D. Office Hours

Should you wish to see me about any questions or concerns that you have, I will be available to see you in my office Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, 2:30 - 4:30. Please make an appointment if you need to see me at another time. To arrange a meeting, or should you need to talk to me about an urgent matter, either speak to me directly after class, or you can leave a message in my voice mail box (571-2550, ext.29) or on e-mail: tfach@cadvision.com

All wish to possess knowledge, but few, comparatively speaking, are willing to pay the price. (Juvenal)