



## Reasoning and Critical Thinking

PHIL 1230A, Section 550, Summer Evening of 2026 | Online | May 4-June 12 [6 Weeks]

Dr. Jonathan P. Marsh [jmarsh26@uwo.ca](mailto:jmarsh26@uwo.ca)

Zoom Sessions: Tu and Th at 6:30 pm (see comment box at the bottom of this page)

Weekly Virtual Office Hours: TBA

### Description

We humans are, in the familiar ancient slogan, “rational animals”. Yet there are systematic problems with the way we reason — rooted in unconscious biases, fallacies, illusions, inconsistencies, misinformation and a multitude of intellectual vices.

The goal of this course is to help us get better at mitigating these cognitive shortcomings and, in turn, enhance our ability to reason. We pursue this aim with an eye towards forming more accurate beliefs and making better decisions.

Prerequisite(s): None

Antirequisite(s): PHILOSOPHY 1000E, PHILOSOPHY 1200

### Methods

Teaching methods will involve pre-prepared slides, with brief recordings, and online class discussions and exercises.

### Text

There is no textbook for this course. All readings will be made available.

### Technical Requirements



Stable internet connection

(Chromebook devices may not allow access to PowerPoint voice recordings!)



Computer with Microsoft Office



Working microphone



Working webcam

(for participating in Zoom meetings etc.)




**Privacy:** To respect the privacy and confidentiality of all members of PHIL 1230A, videos, photos, or voice/face recordings, during any of our online classes, are strictly prohibited except where (i) recording is an approved accommodation and (ii) you’ve received the instructor’s written permission — as the class must be notified, in full confidentiality, when recording is taking place.



This fully online course will contain a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous learning methods. All synchronous (i.e., live Zoom) sessions will take place at the Tuesday and Thursday start times above. Zoom meetings will never last a full 3 hours. As an alternative, students will be given material to prepare for those sessions, asynchronously, at their own discretion. A **weekly schedule** (with Zoom links) will be made available. **Lastly, if you are working outside of Huron’s local time zone, and are unable to attend our Zoom meetings, please see the red note below (p. 2).**

## Aims

By the end of term, every committed student will know how to do four things:

1. categorize, diagram and assess arguments from virtually any discipline,
2. spot and, to some extent, mitigate common forms of human irrationality (e.g., biases, fallacies and inconsistencies), and the various harms they can cause,
-  3. look for good sources of information and distinguish these from bad sources
4. employ various techniques and principles for rationally updating their beliefs (SKILLS)(KNOWLEDGE, 1-4),

Students will also get opportunities to

5. construct intellectual rules or guidelines that improve their thinking and/or decision-making (PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT).

## Evaluative Requirements

Assignments	Values	Due Dates	Corresponding Aims
• 1. Active and Informed Participation	20 %	Weekly	1-5 (above)
• 2. Rationality Podcast (in groups)	20 %	June 2 (recorded on May 28)	2,4 & 5
• 3. Reflection Assignment	20%	June 9	2, 4 & 5
• 4. Final Exam	40 %	June 11	1,2 & 3

**Participation:** Good philosophy requires conversation. Consequently, in addition to prepared materials/slides/recordings that you will review on your own time, this course contains weekly live sessions which will take place over Zoom. A successful participation grade requires taking active measures to advance the discussion. These include:

- (i) knowing and thoughtfully engaging the relevant materials (viz., the readings and/or prep slides listed on your weekly checklist),
- (ii) applying the tools and virtues associated with critical thinking,
- (iii) submitting written answers (1-2 sentences) Forum Qs, which will be released during the session. Forum Qs must be accessed—and answers must be submitted—within the small classroom window that is provided. No exceptions.
- (iv) respecting the College’s conduct rules and any course-specific policies (including our strict **no recording policy** (which helps protect student privacy and confidentiality)).

*Note: if you are working outside of Huron’s local time zone, and are unable to attend our live online sessions (e.g. if our classes for you would take place at 2 AM), please email me by May 14 by simply writing “[Opt-Out Request for Online Participation](#)” in the subject title. I would be pleased to fully accommodate you. Also, I will post slides corresponding to the tutorials.*



**Podcast:** For this assignment, you will work, virtually, in small groups, including a moderator, that your instructor will assign. After receiving instructions and a group number, each group will record a video (or audio) podcast, over Zoom and submit it for a grade by the due date. Detailed instructions will be provided.

**Reflection assignment:** This short reflection will deal with cognitive bias and/or common fallacies. Instructions be provided prior to the deadline.

**Exam:** To take place on **June 11, 2026**, at 6:30 PM. Students will have 2 hours to complete — and properly submit — the exam, unless they formally qualify for extra time; in that case, it will automatically be provided. As this exam will be “open book”, and written from home, its purpose is to test the student’s understanding of course material and procedural knowledge of course techniques etc. As answers to such questions cannot be unreflectively pasted from the PowerPoint slides, advanced preparation is strongly recommended. The exam will likely have a mixture of longer answer questions and shorter questions, though nothing that a student could cut-and-paste from the slides. More details will be provided during our review session.

### ***Grading Information and Explanation of Grades***

Each assignment will be accompanied by grading criteria and clear instructions. Students will be evaluated in accordance with how well they follow them. What follows is a university wide grade explanation:

A+	90-100	One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level
A	80-89	Superior work which is clearly above average
B	70-79	Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory
C	60-69	Competent work, meeting requirements
D	50-59	Fair work, minimally acceptable
F	below 50	Fail

**Class-specific policy on AI (e.g., Chat GPT) use:** Use of Chat GPT or other AI services, including Grammarly, Grok, Gemini, Claude etc., is strictly prohibited in all assessments, including essays and examinations. Unauthorized use of AI will be subject to academic discipline. Cheating-detection software(s) will be employed.

### Course Map

**Please note:** the schedule below is approximate and may be revised during the semester.

**See our course website for weekly checklists.**

#### **Unit 1. Groundwork**

##### Week 1

- 1.1. "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters"
- 1.2. Writing Your Book of Beliefs

#### **Unit 2. Obstacles to Reasoning Well**

- 2.1. Inconsistencies

##### Week 2

- 2.2. Biases

##### Week 3

- 2.3. Vices
- 2.4. Fallacies

#### **Unit 3. Reasoning & Argumentation**

##### Weeks 4 & 5

- 3.1. The Nature, Purpose & Appropriate Domains of Argumentation
- 3.2. Argument Mapping
- 3.3. Constructing & Evaluating Arguments

#### **Unit 4. Social Dimensions of Rationality & Irrationality**

##### Week 6

- 4.1. Testimony & Trust [Novices & Experts]
- 4.2. Echo Chambers & Epistemic Bubbles

#### **Unit 5. Rational Choice (time permitting)**

- 5.1. Decisions Under Ignorance / Decisions Under Uncertainty
- **Final exam June 11 [Final day of class]**

