

Bergen Community College  
Division of Arts & Humanities  
Department of Philosophy & Religion

**Course Syllabus**

**PHR-100 Reasoning**

**Basic Information about Course and Instructor**

Semester and year: Course Number: [e.g., PHR-100-001] Meeting Times and Locations:  Instructor: Office Location: Telephone: Departmental Secretary: [optional] Office Hours: Email Address:
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**Course Description**

**PHR-100 Reasoning** is an introduction to the theory and practice of critical thinking. Topics covered may include the qualities and attitudes of the critical thinker; the nature and importance of rationality; the weighing of evidence and the rationality of belief; common errors in reasoning (e.g., fallacies); the evaluation of concepts and definitions; the analysis and evaluation of arguments in ordinary language; argument diagramming; and reasoning about causes and probability. Examples will be drawn from the sciences, medicine, politics, ethics, philosophy, media, literature, and art.

3 lectures, 3 credits

General Education Course – Humanities Elective

**Student Learning Objectives:** As a result of meeting the requirements in this course, students will be able to

1. identify and summarize the qualities, attitudes, and goals of the critical thinker;
2. identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments occurring in natural language;
3. demonstrate knowledge of the principles of good reasoning;
4. detect and identify faulty and fallacious reasoning;
5. locate, evaluate, and use effectively information from a variety of relevant sources;
6. produce good arguments, using clear, logical, and concise language, both in speaking and in writing; and
7. participate actively in discussions of arguments and of the principles of effective reasoning.

In pursuit of the above goals, the course is based on reading a standard textbook in informal logic or critical thinking, in which basic information is learned and skills developed and practiced. The course concentrates on application instead of theory. Consequently, much class time is spent doing and

discussing exercises. The exercises are usually contained within the textbook, and may be provided in other workbooks and handouts.

**Learning Assessment**

The Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) in this course are intended to be aligned with as many of the college's General Education Goals as possible. They are also correlated with the overall Learning Goals of the Philosophy Program. In addition, student progress in reaching the course's SLOs is to be assessed through various means of assessment, such as the "Suggested Means of Assessment" listed below.

Student Learning Objective	Suggested Means of Assessment
1. identify and summarize the qualities, attitudes, and goals of the critical thinker;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essay examinations</li> <li>• Quizzes and objective tests</li> <li>• Writing assignments</li> </ul>
2. identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments occurring in natural language;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essay examinations</li> <li>• Quizzes and objective tests</li> <li>• Writing assignments</li> <li>• Graded class presentations</li> </ul>
3. demonstrate knowledge of the principles of good reasoning;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essay examinations</li> <li>• Quizzes and objective tests</li> <li>• Writing assignments</li> <li>• Graded class presentations</li> </ul>
4. detect and identify faulty and fallacious reasoning;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essay examinations</li> <li>• Quizzes and objective tests</li> <li>• Writing assignments</li> <li>• Graded class presentations</li> </ul>
5. locate, evaluate, and use effectively information from a variety of relevant sources;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing assignments*</li> <li>• Graded class presentations</li> </ul>
6. produce good arguments, using clear, logical, and concise language, both in speaking and in writing; and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essay examinations</li> <li>• Writing assignments</li> <li>• Graded class presentations</li> </ul>
7. participate actively in discussions of arguments and of the principles of effective reasoning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graded class discussions</li> </ul>

\*Writing assignments for the purpose of assessing student success on SLO 5 will include research and writing projects, possibly including term papers, in which a student identifies an information need, accesses and evaluates appropriate resources, and uses the information effectively and ethically for a specific purpose.

**Course Content**

PHR-100 is the first level course in a(n) (optional) three-semester sequence in logic, and it is essentially a course in informal (non-symbolic) logic and applied epistemology. However, it should be noted that this course is autonomous, and students are not required to take further courses in logic. Nonetheless, the course will provide a good foundation for further study in logic. PHR-103 Introduction to Logic has formal deductive logic – categorical (Aristotelian) and propositional (sentential) logic – as its centerpiece, and PHR-203 Intermediate Logic focuses on predicate logic, modal logic, and issues in philosophical logic. Consequently, those teaching PHR-100 should not present a formal deductive system as a way of analyzing arguments.

The following Sample Course Outline is a brief illustration of the kinds of topics that might be presented in this course:

### **Sample Course Outline**

- I. Analysis of Natural Language
- II. Analysis of Arguments
- III. Argument Evaluation and Applied Epistemology
- IV. Evaluation of Reasoning in Non-arguments
- V. Special Areas
  - A. Legal Reasoning
  - B. Moral Reasoning
  - C. Abductive Reasoning and Inference to the Best Explanation
  - D. Statistics and Risk

### **Special Features of the Course** (if any) [to be designated by the instructor]

E.g., the use of learning technologies in the course (Internet, PowerPoint, web enhancement via a parallel course website, etc.); the inclusion of technological literacy learning in the course; etc.

### **Course Text** (current)

Vaughn, Lewis. *The Power of Critical Thinking* (Oxford, 4th ed., 2013), ISBN 978-0199856671.

### **Writing Requirement(s)**

Because PHR-100 is a General Education course, it has a substantial writing requirement. Consequently, students will be assigned at least one, and preferably two or more, well-designed out-of-class writing project(s) (other than examinations) during the course (journals, research papers, argument-analysis papers, book reviews, et cetera). Instructors shall respond to and comment on students' writing in detail.

The writing assignments will be constructed in order to allow students to put into practice in essay format the skills and tools learned. Students will practice putting arguments into standard form, reconstructing arguments, evaluating arguments in critical, argumentative prose essays. Students will also practice providing arguments (premises, evidence) for conclusions.

### **Grading Policy**

A student's final grade for the course is based primarily on his or her performance on the required work for the course (writing assignments, examinations, class presentations, etc.) and on his or her overall mastery of the material covered in the course. A student's class participation may also be evaluated, and the grade thereon may be used as a factor in determining the student's final grade for the course; but a class participation grade will count for no more than fifteen or twenty percent (15-20%) of the final grade. A student's research and writing work will count at least fifty percent (50%) of the final grade.

## **Attendance Policy**

### **BCC Attendance Policy:**

All students are expected to attend punctually every scheduled meeting of each course in which they are registered. Attendance and lateness policies and sanctions are to be determined by the instructor for each section of each course. These will be established in writing on the individual course outline. Attendance will be kept by the instructor for administrative and counseling purposes.

### **Philosophy and Religion Departmental Attendance Policy:**

Students are expected to attend class regularly and punctually. Attendance will be taken at each class session. It is expected that class will be conducted such that students will benefit in their written work by the lectures and class discussion. If students occasionally arrive late, they should be encouraged to enter quietly, not disturbing the class. If students miss class, they should be encouraged to use the course calendar to stay abreast of material. It is probably a good idea for students to find study partners and to exchange telephone numbers. Make-ups for examinations should be allowed by the instructor if, in the instructor's judgment, the student has presented a good excuse for missing the work. Instructors may penalize work which is late; however, the instructor's policies for make-ups and late work must be clearly specified on the student guide.

### **Attendance Policy in this Course:**

[To be designated by the instructor]

## **Course Texts and/or Other Study Materials**

**Recommended Texts:** The current editions of any of the following texts are appropriate for use in PHR-100.

Bennett, Deborah J. *Logic Made Easy: How to Know When Language Deceives You*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004.

Bickenbach, Jerome E., and Jacqueline M. Davies. *Good Reasons for Better Arguments: An Introduction to the Skills and Values of Critical Thinking*. Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 1997.

Bierman, Arthur K., and Robin N. Assali. *The Critical Thinking Handbook*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996.

Bowell, Tracy, and Gary Kemp. *Critical Thinking: A Concise Guide*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Fisher, Alec. *Critical Thinking: An Introduction*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

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Flage, Daniel E. *The Art of Questioning: An Introduction to Critical Thinking*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004.

Mutti, Robert. *Making Up Your Mind: A Textbook in Critical Thinking*. The Broadview Library of Logic and Critical Thinking Series. Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2002.

Porter, Burton F. *The Voice of Reason: Fundamentals of Critical Thinking*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

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Reichenbach, Bruce R. *Introduction to Critical Thinking*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2001.

Schick, Theodore, Jr., and Lewis Vaughn. *How to Think about Weird Things: Critical Thinking for a New Age*. Fourth Edition. New York: McGraw Hill, 1995, 2004.

Vaughn, Lewis. *The Power of Critical Thinking*. New York: Oxford, 4th ed., 2013.

Waller, Bruce N. *Critical Thinking: Consider the Verdict*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988.

Wilson, David C. *A Guide to Good Reasoning*. New York: McGraw-Hill College, 1999.

Wright, Larry. *Critical Thinking: An Introduction Analytical Reading and Reasoning*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

**Supplemental and Optional Books and Materials [optional]**

**Other College, Divisional, and/or Departmental Policy Statements [optional but recommended]**

Examples:  
 Statement on plagiarism and/or academic dishonesty.  
 ADA statement.  
 Sexual Harassment statement.  
 Statement on acceptable use of BCC technology.  
 Statement on the purpose and value of faculty office hours.

**Student and Faculty Support Services [optional but recommended]**

List support services, e.g., the Writing Center, the Math Lab, the Tutorial Center, Online Writing Lab (OWL), Office of Specialized Services, etc. Include information on the BCC Library.

Example:

**Student and Faculty Support Services**

The Distance Learning Office – for any problems you may have accessing your online courses	Room C-334	201-612-5581 <a href="mailto:psimms@bergen.edu">psimms@bergen.edu</a>
Smarthinking Tutorial Service	On Line at:	<a href="http://www.bergen.edu/pages1/Pages/4787.aspx">http://www.bergen.edu/pages1/Pages/4787.aspx</a>
The Tutoring Center	Room L-125	201-447-7908 <a href="http://www.bergen.edu/pages1/pages/2192.aspx">http://www.bergen.edu/pages1/pages/2192.aspx</a>
The Writing Center	Room L-125	201-447-7908 <a href="http://www.bergen.edu/pages1/Pages/1795.aspx">http://www.bergen.edu/pages1/Pages/1795.aspx</a>
The Office of Specialized Services (for Students with Disabilities)	Room S-131	201-612-5270 <a href="http://www.bergen.edu/oss">http://www.bergen.edu/oss</a>
BCC Library – Reference Desk	Room L-226	201-447-7436

**Special Note on the Tutoring Center**

**The Henry and Edith Cerullo Learning Assistance Center** encompasses the Tutoring Center, the English Language Resource Center, and the Writing Center. The website of the Learning Assistance Center is located at [www.bergen.edu/pages/2192.asp](http://www.bergen.edu/pages/2192.asp). Tutoring services are available for this course in the Tutoring Center. I strongly recommend that you make use of those services as we progress through the course. As listed above, the Tutoring Center is located in Room L-125, and its phone number is 201-447-7908.

**Include the following statement on Logos – The BCC Philosophy Club**

**Logos – The BCC Philosophy & Religion Club**

Logos usually meets on Tuesdays during the Activities Period, 12:30-1:25 PM, but sometimes also on different days and at different times. I encourage you to join the club. Since you are interested in the study of philosophy, you should find the meetings and other activities of the Philosophy & Religion club very interesting. For further information, check the Philosophy & Religion bulletin board adjacent to Room L-325A or contact LOGOS Advisor, Professor Jennifer Lyden (L-326, 201-493-3540, [jlyden@bergen.edu](mailto:jlyden@bergen.edu)). (LOGOS does not hold regular meetings during the summer.)

**Include a Course Outline and Calendar** [can be combined in a single syllabus section]

The Course Outline and Calendar must include all of the following elements:

- A daily or (at least) weekly schedule of topics to be covered.
- Dates for exams, quizzes, or other means of assessment. (This does not mean that all evaluation of students must be in groups and at the same time. Exams and other means of assessment can be listed as "to be scheduled individually.")
- Due dates for major assignments – e.g., when is a paper due; if the topic has to be approved, when; if an outline or draft is an interim step, when it is due.
- Any required special events must be included in the outline/calendar, e.g., a lecture by a visiting speaker, a dramatic or musical performance, a field trip.
- Designation of Student Learning Objectives – by number – for each topic (see sample below).
- A note to students stating that the course outline and calendar is tentative and subject to change, depending upon the progress of the class.

**Sample Format for Combined Course Outline and Calendar**

**Note to Students:** The following Course Outline and Calendar is tentative and subject to change, depending upon the progress of the class.

Week(s)	Date(s)	Topic/Activity	Learning Objectives	Assignments/Events
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				

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10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				

**See the Sample Course Outline and Calendar below.**

**SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE AND CALENDAR**

[with designation of Student Learning Objectives – by number – for each topic]

**Note to Students:** The following Course Outline and Calendar is tentative and subject to change, depending upon the progress of the class.

Week(s)	Date(s)	Topic/Activity	Learning Objectives	Assignments/Events
1	1/16 – 1/18	What is reasoning? Three features of logical thinking	1	James Freeman, <i>Thinking Logically</i> , Chapter 1
2	1/23 – 1/25	Kinds of sentences	1, 2	Freeman, Chapter 1; hand-out exercise sheet
3	1/30 – 2/1	Kinds of definitions and problems of meaning	1, 3	Freeman, Chapter 2; Brief quiz # 1
4	2/6 – 2/8	Arguments versus non-arguments	2	Freeman, Chapter 3 Test # 1; Writing assignment on problems of meaning due
5	2/13 – 2/15	Argument macrostructure diagramming	2	Freeman, Chapter 4
6	2/20 – 2/22	Complex argument diagramming	2	Freeman, Chapter 4 Test # 2
7	2/27 – 3/1	Basics of argument evaluation	2, 3	Freeman, Chapter 5
8	3/6 – 3/8	Basic premise evaluation, presumption and burden of proof	2, 3, 4	Freeman, Chapter 6 Writing assignment on presumption due
9	3/20 – 3/22	Kinds of fallacies; fallacies of questionable assumptions	2, 4	Freeman, Chapter 6 Quiz # 2
10	3/27 – 3/29	Fallacies of irrelevance and grammar	2, 4	Freeman, Chapter 7
11	4/3 – 4/5	Inductive/Statistical fallacies (including causation)	2, 4	Freeman, Chapter 8 Fallacy review hand-out exercises
12	4/10 -4/12	Cognitive tunnels; biases and heuristics	4	Test # 3 (all fallacies) Answers to psychological reasoning tests due
13	4/17 -4/19	Evaluating non-arguments: explanations, expositions and slanting and bullshit (Frankfurt, Cohen)	1, 3, 4	Freeman, Chapter 9; Harry Frankfurt, <i>On Bullshit</i> ; Gerald Cohen, “Deeper into Bullshit”
14	4/24 – 4/26	Scientific and moral/legal reasoning (esp. analogies)	3, 5	Freeman, Chapter 10 Short essay on slanting, media, corporate-speak, and bullshit
15	5/1 – 5/3	Summary; tie up loose ends; review; and workshop	1-5	Final Exam Review; Final Examination