

# THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER

## Course Syllabus

PHIL 3300-060: Approaches to Philosophy (Critical Thinking & Moral Reasoning)

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### Required Textbook:

*How to Think Critically: A Concise Guide*, by Jeff McLaughlin

Additional online readings will be available in Canvas

### Catalog Description:

A study of major areas of investigation in traditional and modern philosophy. Included are discussions of philosophies of knowledge, ethics, logic, aesthetics and metaphysics. Recommended for students who wish to take only one semester of philosophy.

### Course Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to...

1. articulate a basic understanding of the importance of philosophy
2. identify and explain the intellectual virtues
3. demonstrate the tools of critical thinking
4. evaluate the validity and strength of arguments
5. name and explain 37 logical fallacies
6. identify the main concepts of moral reasoning
7. apply a moral framework to ethical case studies

### Grading Scale:

A=90-100%, B=80-89%, C=70-79%, D=60-69%, F=less than 60%

## Grading:

Initiator Posts (5 @ 100 points each):	400 points (lowest dropped)
Response Post Assignments (5 @ 10 pts each):	40 points (lowest dropped)
Chapter Exercises (6 @ 20 pts each):	100 points (lowest dropped)
TOTAL	540 points

## Assessment:

**Discussion Board Assignment:** You'll make a minimum of six contributions to each discussion board: 1 initiator post + 5 response posts = 6 total posts (minimum). These posts will be spread out over three days, which means you need to be active on the board at least three separate days before the board closes. For example, you might post your initiator post on Friday, 2 response posts on Saturday, and 3 response posts on Sunday.

**INITIATOR POSTS:** You'll write one initiator post for each discussion board. An initiator post is one that starts a thread based on the discussion board prompt. A good post will offer a clear well-supported answer and make connections to the material in the textbook. You must include at least three direct quotes from the course readings (see board for relevant readings).

The post must be at least 300 words. There's no maximum word count, but keep in mind that grades are not based on quantity of words but on demonstrated comprehension and critical thinking. The grading rubric below shows exactly what is expected.

A direct quote is a word-for-word quotation taken directly from the reading and enclosed in quotation marks. You should have at least three of these. If you only use course material to quote from, quotation marks and parenthetical citations are enough, for example: "yada, yada" (*author's last name, page number or "Chapter 3"*). If students use even one outside source – like the excellent [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) – a reference list for *all* sources should be included at the end of the post and must follow Chicago Manual of Style (CMS). See [here](#) for Chicago examples, and see below for how proper citations affect the grade.

You must post first in order to view other posts. The edit function will be disabled. If you want to edit after posting, you may reply in the thread with corrections or request that I delete the post. There must be a very good reason for deletion. For grading purposes, I consider your first post to be the initiator post even if it is blank or incomplete.

Late initiator posts can be turned in for a lower grade before the board officially closes. A late penalty of half a letter grade per day applies in each case unless accompanied by a valid excuse (e.g. a doctor's note that indicates a serious illness).

DISCUSSION BOARD RUBRIC (INITIATOR POSTS)	
0-20 points	Answer is clear and well-supported
0-35 points	Multiple, relevant connections made (at least 3 direct quotes) to class readings.
0-20 points	Conveys respect for other points of view even if it takes a contrary position
0-25 points	Grammar is polished, several citations are included, and style conforms to Chicago Manual of Style.

**RESPONSE POSTS:** In addition to the initiator post for each discussion board, you'll write at least five response posts (for a total of 6 contributions: 1 initiator post + 5 response posts = 6). A response post is one that replies to a classmate's post and continues the conversation. One that ends the conversation or just says "I agree" in so many words does not qualify as a response. Good posts carry on the conversation in an interesting and relevant way and draw other students into the discussion. The minimum requirements for receiving credit for a response post are the following:

1. The post is 50 words.
2. The post is relevant to the thread.
3. The last sentence is a question.

Posts under 50 words don't count toward the required number of response posts. If you happen to post a few that are under 50 words, just make sure to post a few more posts that are 50 words.

If some of your posts don't end in a question, a deduction of **1 point** will be applied to the response post grade.

The penalty for not posting on the board on three separate days will be applied to the response post grade as a **3 point** deduction.

Extra credit will be awarded for posting extra response posts that meet the minimum conditions (above) for response posts. Up to five extra posts will count.

Response posts are due when the board closes (see each discussion board for date and time).

Late response posts will not be accepted. Once the board closes, there are no further opportunities to complete the assignment, so it's advisable to post early to avoid unforeseen events such as last-minute technical problems. Encountering technical issues is not a valid excuse for late work, unless the issue is the university's fault.

The discussion board is the focus of the class, the main learning tool (notice the percentage of the grade). I will be active on the boards and hope to be involved in some rich conversations. Be sure to return regularly to the threads to reply to questions and comments, especially in your own thread. Learn how to search for posts, including mine, by using the search function on the board. When I reply to a post, I often take a contrary position as devil's advocate. My response to your posts should be interpreted as constructive and an opportunity to strengthen your argument. It doesn't mean that I don't like you or that I have a different moral, religious, or political stance than you. In fact, it's nearly impossible to figure out my personal beliefs from my posts. If I express a point of view, I do so for teaching purposes, to help you think more carefully about your own position and to extend the conversation. By the way, it's possible to get an A in this class and disagree with my personal opinions. It happens quite regularly.

No late initiator or response posts are accepted after the board closes.

Cases of plagiarism earn an automatic zero and a possible F in the course. Plagiarized posts may be sent to UT Tyler Judicial Affairs to receive additional consequences. In short, do your own work, and be careful to give credit to the original author when you quote or paraphrase. Do not use the Internet or A.I. to write your post for you. See A.I. and plagiarism policy in the Start Here module.

**Chapter Exercises:** You will complete exercises for each chapter of the book *How to Think Critically: A Concise Guide*. The exercises can be found in Canvas in the drop box for each assignment. You may use your books (open book), but you may not use the Internet or A.I. to answer the questions.

## Course Policies:

**Late work policy:** Assignments must be submitted by the deadline. Discussion board posts are not accepted after the board closes. Chapter exercises are not accepted after the deadline. A penalty of half a letter grade per day up to two letter grades will be assessed for late initiator posts until the board closes. This penalty will be waived only under special circumstances (e.g. a serious illness accompanied by a doctor's note).

**Communication policy:** The best way to communicate with the instructor is through UT Tyler e-mail ([gbock@uttyler.edu](mailto:gbock@uttyler.edu)) or in Canvas. Students can expect replies within 48 hours excluding weekends and holidays. Students who do not receive a reply within this timeframe should attempt to contact the instructor again. The instructor communicates with the class via Canvas emails and announcements. It is important that students check their email and allow push notifications for class announcements.

**Class conduct policy:** The subject matter of this class can make some people hot under the collar. This said, all comments and behavior must be classroom appropriate. What does

“classroom appropriate” mean? It does *not* mean that students cannot express unpopular opinions. It means practicing reasoning and logical argumentation. It means being civil and listening with respect. Insults, snide comments, name-calling, cutting someone off, derogatory tones, sarcasm, ridicule, cussing, vulgarity, personal attacks, racial slurs, misogynistic remarks, etc. will not be allowed. If you are unsure about what counts as disrespectful, consult the instructor or the Golden Rule. The instructor will act as the final word on what is or is not classroom appropriate. Violators may be ejected from the class.

***Cell phone policy (face-to-face sections):*** Mobile devices can be used in the classroom if it is related to what is going on in class. If you have an electronic textbook or plan to take notes on your device, please let me know early in the semester. They are permissible as long as they don’t distract you or your classmates from the lesson.

***Arriving late or leaving early policy (face-to-face sections):*** Arriving on time can sometimes be challenging, but it is better to be late than never. However, late arrivals and early departures can be disruptive. For this reason, please don’t make a habit of it. If it becomes a regular issue, points will be deducted from the attendance grade.

***Extra credit policy:*** Extra credit is available in the class but only on discussion boards and only when they’re open. Extra points can be earned by posting extra response posts that satisfy the basic requirements of response posts (see the requirements above). After you’ve posted the minimum number of qualifying response posts (5), each extra post will receive one point, up to five points max. By the way, five points of extra credit is equivalent to half a letter grade on the initiator post.

***“It is what it is” final grade policy:*** Grades are final once the final grade percentage has been calculated in Canvas at the end of the semester. No changes will be made unless the instructor has made a mistake. Grades are not bumped up unless the student is within .5% of the next letter grade. For example, an 89.5% is an A. An 89.4% is a B. No extra credit opportunities will be given during the last week of class. The conditions for an “incomplete” are stated in the university handbook: “(a) the student has been making satisfactory progress in the course; (b) the student is unable to complete all course work or final exam due to unusual circumstances that are beyond personal control and are acceptable to the instructor; and (c) the student presents these reasons prior to the time that the final grade roster is due.” The terms and deadline for satisfying an “incomplete” will be set by the instructor.

***A.I. policy:*** See A.I. and Plagiarism policy in the Start Here module.

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#### [UT TYLER HONOR CODE](#)

I embrace honor and integrity.

Therefore, I choose not to lie, cheat or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do.