CRITICAL REASONING

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No of Credits: 2 US credits / 4 ECTS credits

Semester: Winter, 2023--24

Course Status: BA course, Mandatory in PPE 1st year

Prerequisites: None

Course e-learning site: https://ceulearning.ceu.edu/course/view.php?id=16715

Meeting time: Thursdays, 10:40-12:50 (with a 10 min break at around 11:40)

Course Description

The aim of this course is to teach the skills and knowledge needed to more clearly understand and analyze the arguments of others, and to carefully construct arguments of one's own and present them in writing – skills with significant value both within and beyond academia. In particular, this course aims to develop the skills needed for (a) identifying, analysing, and clearly and charitably reconstructing the arguments of others; (b) identifying and avoiding common pitfalls in arguments; (c) efficiently assessing different sources of evidence; and (d) writing clearly, precisely and persuasively. Good critical thinking takes diligence and practice. For this reason, the classes will be practice-based and will operate on the assumption that students have completed the required weekly readings.

This course has been designed with attention to fostering an inclusive learning environment. Please kindly inform us about any unseen hurdles that may present a barrier to your learning. Feel free to reach out to us at any time about concerns or questions you may have about assignments, activities, or assessments.

Learning outcomes

At the completion of their work for this course students will be able to:
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the basic concepts and principles of critical reasoning;
- identify, reconstruct, and critique different types of arguments presented in texts and to identify and avoid common pitfalls in arguments; and
- take a reflective and critical approach to their own claims as well as those of others, and to construct their own arguments with clarity and precision.

Requirements

For all students, the basic expectations are:

1. Regular, punctual attendance of all classes (whether in person or synchronously online). Missing more than one week's classes without a doctor's note or other evidence of a justified reason for absence may result in a failing grade and/or the loss of tuition waiver or financial aid
2. Carefully completing the assigned readings before class
3. Active participation in discussions and group exercises, whether in class or online
4. Timely submission of assignments. Request for extension of assignment deadlines in cases of justified late submission must be sought in advance of the due date with the course instructor. There will be a late penalty of 1/3 of a letter grade (A to A-) for assignments received up to 48 hours late, then 2/3 of a letter grade (A to B+) up to 96 hours, and so on.

There will be the following main assignments:

1) A short "knowledge quiz" based on the assigned required readings, at the beginning of class once a week, most weeks, starting in week 2. The questions are designed to be quite straightforward for those who have carefully completed the readings in advance. (10%) (Throughout term)

For the purpose of taking the knowledge quizzes, you should bring to each in-person class a device on which you can access the internet (e.g., laptop, tablet, smartphone). Use of such devices in class is otherwise generally discouraged, and is only permitted for class-related purposes.

2) In-class midterm critical reasoning test. (30%) (Week 7, both classes)

3) A short critical analysis of a chosen published text chosed from a provided selection of articles (400-600 words) (30%) (Weeks 9/10)

4) A 1-2 page draft outline argument on a chosen topic from a provided selection of topics. (Ungraded, Week 11)

This is intended for you to work out, logically organize, and concisely communicate the central points you intend to make in an argument of your own, and to provide an opportunity to discuss and think through potential

objections and amendments. The outline should clearly state your thesis, and concisely present the main steps of your argument for it (bullet p oints are recommended!). There should also be an outline of the best objection to your argument and of your reply to it. There will be a peer feedback session in class for discussion of the outlines, after which it can be revised.

5) Revised 1-2 page outline argument. (30%, due end of finals week)

Assesment

The grade components are:
- 10% Knowledge quizzes
- 30% Midterm critical reasoning test
- 30% Critical analysis
- 30% Revised outline argument (only the second, revised version of the outline counts toward the grade)

Participation in class discussions and group exercises will also be taken into consideration, and may result in a 1/3 higher grade for the class in borderline cases.

All course requirements must be completed in order to earn a grade for the class.

Grading Criteria

For critical analyses
- To earn a B+ grade or higher, the critical analysis must identify the central argument or arguments of the text analyzed, differentiating the argument(s) identified in the text from extraneous or tangential material. *Standard form should be used* to present the main argument(s) from the text. The analysis will be presented in clear academic English without significant grammatical, spelling or other errors, and will be of appropriate length. The main assumptions and steps in the reasoning of the text will be identified, explained, and assessed with a reasonable degree of accuracy. One or two well-targeted objections to the argument will be considered.
- To earn an A-, the analysis must demonstrate the above qualities to a higher degree. The critical analysis will offer a clear and accurate presentation of the central argument(s) of the analyzed text. The objection(s) considered to the argument will be well-targeted and plausibly assessed.
- To earn an A, the analysis must be nearly flawless in style, organization, clarity and accuracy.

For outline arguments
- To earn a B+ grade or higher, the outline must clearly state a substantial thesis and concisely present a plausible argument for it. *Standard form should be used* to present the main argument, and the most obvious, significant objections to steps of the argument should be clearly identified and replied to in some way. It must be presented in clear academic English without significant grammatical, spelling or other errors, and will be of appropriate length.

- To earn an A-, the outline must demonstrate the above qualities to a higher degree. Any omissions, unclarities, or problems with your argument will be minor.
- To earn an A, the outline must give a concise, clear presentations of a thesis supported by a strong and original argument, including responses to potential objections. Flaws will be minor.

For knowledge quizzes:
- To earn an A, one must answer at least 90% of all quiz questions correctly (over the entire term).
- To earn an A-, one must answer at least 80% of all quiz questions correctly (over the entire term).
- To earn a B+, one must answer at least 70% of all quiz questions correctly (over the entire term).
- To earn a B, one must answer at least 60% of all quiz questions correctly (over the entire term).
- To earn a B-, one must answer at least 50% of all quiz questions correctly (over the entire term).
- To earn a C+, one must answer at least 40% of all quiz questions correctly (over the entire term).
- Below 40% of all quiz questions answered correctly results in an F.

Readings

Chapters from the following textbooks will be assigned. The required chapters will be made available on the CEU learning site and there are copies of the books in the CEU library.

When there are practice exercises at the end of the chapter it is not mandatory to read or complete these. However, doing so is recommended!

- Bowell, T. and Kemp, G. (2010) *Critical Thinking: A Concise Guide* (3rd Edition) London: Routledge.
- Thomson, Ann (2009) *Critical Reasoning: A Practical Introduction* (3rd Edition) London: Routledge
- Weston, A. (2017) *A Rulebook for Arguments* (5th Edition) USA: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

PART I. IDENTIFYING AND EVALUATING ARGUMENTS

Week 1
Argument and rhetoric
What is the difference between argument and persuasion? What are some examples of rhetorical ploys? What are the conclusions and premises of arguments, and how are these identified?

Required reading:

- Bowell and Kemp, Chapter 1: Introducing Arguments (pp.3-24)
- Bowell and Kemp, Chapter 2 (only the Section: Rhetorical Ploys, pp. 40-49)

Week 2
1. Standard form,
2. Nondeductive arguments I: Arguments by analogy

What is standard form? What are the steps needed to identify an argument and put it into standard form? What is the structure of an argument by analogy? What makes a good (or bad!) argument by analogy?

Required reading:
- First, review the readings from week 1, especially B&K Chapter 1 (pp.3-24), then:
- Weston, Chapter 3: Arguments by analogy (pp.19-22)

Week 3
Nondeductive arguments II: Arguments about causation, generalizations
What is the nature of arguments about causes and effects, how can we evaluate them?
What is the difference between soft and hard generalizations? When do examples support generalizations?

Required reading:
- Weston, Chapter 5: Arguments about Causes (pp.33-38)
- Weston, Chapter 2: Arguments by Example (pp.9-17)

Week 4
Deductive arguments
Deductive validity and soundness. Valid forms of deductive argument.

Required reading:
- Weston, Chapter 6: Deductive arguments (pp.39-49)
Recommended reading (non-mandatory) on deductive vs inducive arguments:
- Bowell and Kemp, Chapters 3 and 4

Week 5
Evaluating arguments: Assumptions and implications
We will explore how to evaluate arguments by teasing out assumptions, assessing implications, looking for general commitments, and formulating parallel arguments.

Required reading:
- Thomson, Chapter 1: Identifying Assumptions (pp.24-34)
- Thomson, Chapter 3: Recognising Implications (pp.72-82)

Week 6
Flaws in Reasoning
We identify some fallacies and faulty argument techniques and discuss related rhetorical ploys

Required reading:

- Bowell and Kemp, Chapter 7: Pseudo-Reasoning (pp. 202-239)

OPTIONAL PRACTICE SESSION WITH TEACHING ASSISTANT

Week 7
CRITICAL REASONING TEST (in class)
- Please prepare by reviewing all the earlier course materials.

PART II. RECONSTRUCTING AND ASSESSING LONGER ARGUMENTS

Week 8
Identifying and reconstructing arguments
How to reconstruct an argument from a longer text

Required reading:
- Bowell and Kemp, Chapter 5: Argument Reconstruction (pp.118-160)

Week 9
Argument evaluation
Engaging with arguments; the concept of rational persuasiveness; assessing validity and inductive forcefulness

Required reading:
- Bowell and Kemp, Chapter 6: Issues in argument assessment (pp.169-197)

PART III. MAKING GOOD ARGUMENTS

Week 10
Constructing arguments
How do you construct a strong argument of your own? Where do you begin? How do you create a complete outline for an extended argument?

Required reading:
- Weston, Chapter 1: Short Arguments, Some General Rules (pp.1-8)
- Weston, Chapter 7: Extended Arguments (pp.51-59)
Recommended reading:
- Weston, Chapter 4: Arguments from Authority

CRITICAL ANALYSIS DUE

Week 11
Expanding the argument
Getting from an outline to a successful essay.

Required reading:
- Weston, Chapter 8: Argumentative Essays (pp.61-68)
- Rippon, A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper (pp.1-7)

DRAFT OUTLINE ARGUMENT DUE

Week 12
Peer feedback session and conclusion of course
In this session students will discuss and try to defend their draft outline arguments with a peer feedback group, and give feedback on the outlines of others in the group. The peer groups will be created and outlines will be distributed in the week prior to class. After class, students will have the opportunity to revise their argument outline before turning it in for grading.

Required reading:
- The argument outlines from your peer feedback group

PEER FEEDBACK DUE