

## Critical Reasoning, PHIL105.014 Fall, 2009

Peter Amato, MacAlister 5030, extension 1353, [peterama@drexel.edu](mailto:peterama@drexel.edu)

Office hours: T, Th. F 3:30-5 and other times by appointment. Class meets T, Th 2:00-3:20 in [Alumni Engineering Labs 279](#)

**Hello.** Critical Reasoning can be the most useful and important course you ever take, because it helps you exercise and develop your logical and linguistic abilities. These skills involve finding the *point* of messages you read and hear, determining what *evidence* has been provided as support, and assessing whether or not that evidence is any *good*. Developing, practicing, and improving abilities like these will help you succeed in anything you might do in life that involves language and thought. No matter what endeavors you eventually pursue, your chances of success will be greater if you are inclined to think logically and communicate clearly about them, whatever they are.

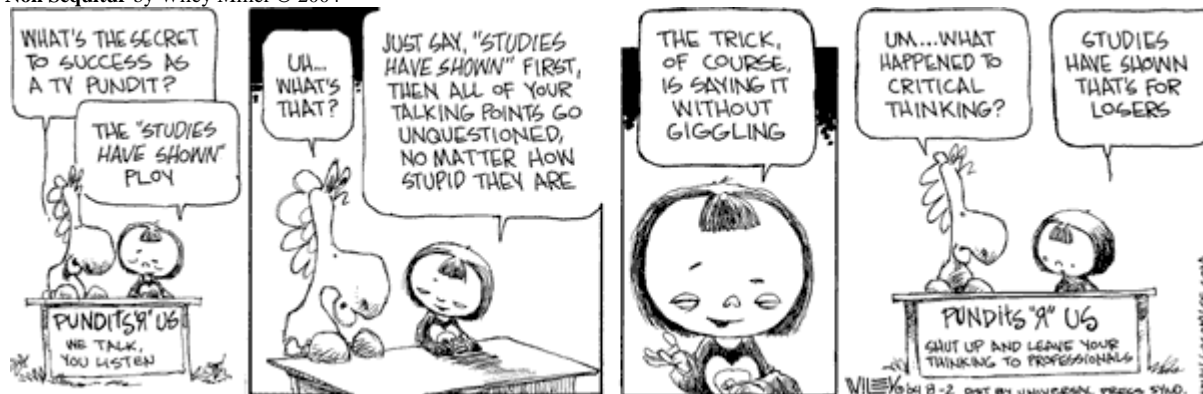
It is no coincidence that assessments of your logical and linguistic abilities are prominently featured in exams designed to gauge your likelihood of success in graduate study and in the pursuit of careers in law, business, and medicine. It has been observed that students who focus directly in their coursework on developing critical reasoning skills consistently outperform almost everyone else on exams like the GRE, GMAT, LSAT, and MCAT.<sup>1</sup> (Philosophy has been called the ideal Minor or *second* Major because Philosophy classes help you develop these skills.)

Critical reasoning skills help us see beyond mistaken and misleading information and exercise our own independent thinking in many areas of life. In the news-media, journalists and so-called “experts” present us with claims about what is happening in the world and interpretative analyses that influence how we think about things. Scientists present us with the results of their studies and make inferences from them about the safety and effectiveness of products we want to use. Businesses urge us to buy their products and services based on claims made in the marketplace. Critical reasoning assists us in understanding and evaluating all these types of claims by helping us develop a sense of the logical and linguistic standards reasonable evidence should be held to.

But developing your critical reasoning skills offers benefits of many other sorts, as well. When you grasp the meaning of a novel, poem, or song lyric, for example, you are using skills of inference to interpret the artist’s messages. Most of the skills used by artists involve expressing themselves in meaningful and coherent ways using logic and language. On a broader level, critical reasoning is the fundamental skill of democratic citizenship. Democracy requires that each citizen have equal and unrestricted access to the processes of public deliberation about matters of mutual concern. In order to make reasonable decisions, we have to be ready to assess the actions and claims of politicians and others in a fair-minded and rational way. Critical reasoning skills help us understand the difference between arguments that are *convincing* and therefore strong, and arguments that may be *persuasive*, but are actually incomplete, weak, misleading, or false.

In addition to these and other reasons why this class can be worthwhile, it can also be fun and interesting. I will do what I can to make it as fun, interesting, and worthwhile as possible, and I hope you will too. **Welcome to the class!**

Non Sequitur by Wiley Miller © 2004



**Texts:** Our main text is [Nothing Grows in Astro turf \(This is the text for Critical Reasoning, Fall, 2009\)](#). It is *not* available in the Drexel Bookstore but is posted online as a .pdf file in the section for this class at my website, which is: <http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~pa34>. You can also purchase a copy of this text from the *Drexel Copy Shop* in MacAlister Hall, and a copy has been placed on the reserve shelf in Hagerty Library. If you have any trouble getting access to the text, please let me know. There are also two films for this class which are required material. Discussion questions for each film will be provided. A list of reserve and recommended materials for this class can be found by clicking [here](#).

**Assignments & grading:** I'll assign four Exercise Sets worth 10% each. These will reflect the material in our readings, films, and class discussions. An instruction sheet will be provided for each one. We'll have a Midterm (25%) and a comprehensive Final (25%). Each will include short essay questions and exercises like argument analysis and fallacy recognition. Exams will resemble the work done in the Exercise Sets. Emailed work is on time if sent in a readable format by the time specified in the assignment instructions. Late penalties increase each day until the assignment is returned. After that, it will not be accepted. The remaining 10% of your grade is for class participation and attendance.

**Class participation & attendance:** This class works best as an ongoing conversation in which each of us is engaged. Your class participation and attendance grade will reflect your involvement in and preparation for the class as assessed over the course of the term. You'll do well if you read

<sup>1</sup>Reported in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 66:1, 1992. For additional data in support of this claim see: [www.pages.drexel.edu/~pa34/philexcel.htm](http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~pa34/philexcel.htm).

the material prior to class, and come prepared to discuss it. Anything that interferes with your ability to attend and participate in class must be documented within two weeks of its occurrence or it will not be excused. Documentation involves providing evidence that attendance was impossible or difficult due to illness, emergency, or legal or family responsibility. If you can't document absences, if you do not do so within two weeks of their occurrence, or if I don't agree they were necessary, they will not be excused. Good class participation requires *participating in class discussion regularly and having no more than one week of unexcused absences*. Two weeks of unexcused absences loses all class participation credit. More than two weeks of unexcused absences automatically **fails this class**. Here is a chart I use as a guideline for class participation and attendance grades: [http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~pa34/Attendance\\_Charts.pdf](http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~pa34/Attendance_Charts.pdf).

**Electronic devices:** The use of electronic devices for communication or entertainment purposes during class-time is not allowed and will not be tolerated. If you have an emergency during class-time and must answer your phone or send a text message please leave the room.

**Academic honesty:** Plagiarism is using another's words, phrases, or ideas as if they were yours. This includes failing to identify sources consulted in the production of work, even those which have not been quoted. Any assignment that involves plagiarism automatically receives zero and will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards. A second results in failure for the course. Students are expected to know what plagiarism is. See: [http://www.drexel.edu/provost/policies/academic\\_dishonesty.asp](http://www.drexel.edu/provost/policies/academic_dishonesty.asp); and <http://www.sparknotes.com/help/plagiarism.html>.

**Schedule of reading and assignments:** The chapters indicated below refer to the text mentioned above. Please try your best to read the assigned sections of the text before the class at which we plan to discuss them. The sample problems at the end of most chapters in the text are required reading, but you don't have to write out answers to the problems, and we won't directly go over them in class unless you have questions about them, (which are encouraged!) You'll find our Exercise Sets and Exams this term relate closely to many of these sample problems.

Date:	Topic(s):	Reading for this class:
Tuesday, 9/22	Introducing the class; Critical Reasoning and Philosophy	This syllabus
Thursday, 9/24	Critical Reasoning and Philosophy; Arguments	Chapters 1-2
Tuesday, 9/29	Arguments	Chapter 2; <b>Exercise Set #1 assigned</b>
Thursday, 10/1	Arguments ; Inferences and Fallacies	Chapters 2-3
Tuesday, 10/6	Inferences and Fallacies	Chapter 3; <b>Exercise Set #1 due - 10%</b>
Thursday, 10/8	Inferences and Fallacies	Chapter 3
Tuesday, 10/13	Deductive Arguments; <b>Return Exercise Set #1</b>	Chapter 4; <b>Exercise Set #2 assigned</b>
Thursday, 10/15	Deductive Arguments	Chapter 4
Tuesday, 10/20	Deductive Arguments	Chapter 4; <b>Exercise Set #2 due - 10%</b>
Thursday, 10/22	Deductive Arguments; <b>Return Exercise Set #2</b>	Chapter 4
Tuesday, 10/27	<b>Midterm Exam - 25%</b>	
Thursday, 10/29	Inductive Arguments	Chapter 5
Tuesday, 11/3	Inductive Arguments	Chapter 5
Thursday, 11/5	Inductive Arguments; Inductive Fallacies	Chapters 5-6; <b>Exercise Set #3 assigned</b>
Tuesday, 11/10	<b>The Persuaders</b> - No class, please watch the film online. Instructions and questions will be provided. <a href="#">Click here</a> to watch the film online.*	
Thursday, 11/12	Inductive Fallacies	Chapter 6; <b>Exercise Set #3 due - 10%</b>
Tuesday, 11/17	Inductive Fallacies; <b>Return Exercise Set #3</b>	Chapter 6
Thursday, 11/19	Inductive Fallacies; The Use and Abuse of Language	Chapters 6-7; <b>Exercise Set #4 assigned</b>
Tuesday, 11/24	<b>Toxic Sludge is Good for You: The Public Relations Industry Unspun</b> - No class, please watch film online. Instructions and questions will be provided. <a href="#">Click here</a> to watch the film online.*	
Tuesday, 12/1	The Use and Abuse of Language	Chapter 7; <b>Exercise Set #4 due - 10%</b>
Thursday, 12/3	The Use and Abuse of Language; <b>Return Exercise Set #4</b>	Chapter 7
TBA	<b>Final Exam - 25%</b>	

\*Both films for class are reserved at Hagerty Course Reserves and can be watched in the library if you have any trouble watching them online.