

Reason and Reality
Philosophy 38
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philosophy ftw!

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Texts. Samir Okasha, *Philosophy of Science: A Very Short Introduction*. Order online. All others on Sakai.

Exercises: Homework, Quizzes, and Paper Drafts (33.3% of final grade). Most days you will either have homework, a reading quiz, or a draft due (I refer to all three of these as ‘exercises’). All exercises will be graded on a pass/fail basis, and your final exercise grade will be determined by the percentage that you pass. The exercises are also my means of taking attendance. Hence, all exercises must be handed in in-person at the beginning of class. You can miss/fail up to 3 exercises without penalty. For example, if there are 19 exercises, and you pass 15 of them, then your exercise grade will be $15/19 = 78.9\% = A$.

“The Levels” (33.3% of final grade). Except for the last paper you write in this course (see below), all other papers will be part of what I call my “levels system”. The levels system is modeled on *video game mechanics*. There are three *levels* of papers for you to progress through, and you are allowed to progress to the next level only after you have completed the previous level. **Just as with levels in video games, the idea here is to insure that you are always working on a task that is challenging enough to be interesting, but not so challenging that it is frustrating.** The levels will prepare you to write the final paper for the course, which is itself a complete philosophy paper.

Your “levels grade” is determined by how far you progress through the levels. You have exactly *five attempts* at the levels, each due on a specific day (see schedule). After attempting a level, you will receive one of four evaluations: “not much progress”, “good effort”, “almost”, or “complete”. Each attempt must be written on one of the readings covered since the last attempt was due (hence, each attempt will be on a *new* topic—you will not be rewriting the previous attempt). Your levels grade will be determined by how far through the levels you progress, and which evaluation you get on the last level you attempt, according to the following scale.

- Level 3.* Complete = A, Almost = A-, Good Effort = B+, Not much progress = B
- Level 2.* Complete = B-, Almost = C+, Good Effort = C, Not much progress = C-
- Level 1.* Complete = D, Almost = D-, Good Effort = F, Not much progress = F

The complete instructions for each level are as follows:

Level 1. Expository paper, between 150 and 300 words. Choose one particular *argument* from the readings and explain that argument in a very short paper. We will be doing some exercises during the first couple of weeks of class that will prepare you to write this paper.

Level 2. Expository paper, between 400 and 600 words. This paper will be just like level 1, except that you will explain two arguments from the reading that have some important relationship to one another. For example, you might choose to discuss an argument and

¹ In other disciplines, the term ‘argument’ is sometimes used in a broader way than it is used in philosophy. For example, some professors might use the term ‘argument’ to refer to a *thesis, view, or theory*. Philosophers, however, reserve the term ‘argument’ to refer to a *reason to believe something*. Any argument can in principle be put in premise/conclusion form, the premises being the *reason*, the conclusion being the *something*. When writing your papers, you should make a habit of writing the argument out in premise/conclusion form in your notes. This will help you to make sure you understand exactly how the argument goes, and exactly where in the argument you are criticizing.

then another argument that is an *objection to the first*. Alternatively, you might choose a second argument that *builds on* the first argument. There are other possibilities as well—the only requirement is that the two came from the readings and have some interesting relationship to one another. (When you write your paper, you should make it clear just what the relationship is.) As this paper now has a bit of complexity, make sure to include an introductory paragraph that briefly explains what your paper is going to be about and how it will proceed.

Level 3. Expository and critical paper, between 700 and 1000 words. This will be just like level 2, except that you will *also* argue that one of the arguments you discuss is unsound (i.e., that it either has a false premise or a bad inference). Your criticism here must be *original*, and you should be sure to defend your criticism against potential objections.

Final Paper (33.3% of final grade). The final paper is exactly the same as a level three paper, but will be graded on a standard A to F scale. By working on the levels, you will be preparing yourself to write a great philosophy paper!

Drafts. The total number of pages due for this course is extremely minimal. This reflects the fact that I expect you to write several completely revised drafts of each paper before it is due.

Office hours and outside appointments. If you check out my reviews on Rate My Professor, you'll see lots of students saying that my courses are challenging, but that coming to see me in office hours makes them a lot easier. These students don't lie. There's only so much that you as a student can get out of the 20-person conversation that takes place in the classroom. At a small college like ours, office hours are a highly-important extension of the classroom.

Folders. If I had only one goal for this course, it would be to help you become a better writer of critical essays. To this end, you will keep a folder of all of your level attempts. This will help me to track your progress, make sure you're taking into account comments I've written on previous attempts, and diagnose any reoccurring issues I see in your writing. You will submit the folder each time you submit a final draft of a paper. Here's how: on the *left-side* of the folder, include all and only previous *graded* work (not drafts). On the right-side, place the final draft of the paper you are now submitting. In the top-left corner of your paper, put your name, which attempt this is for you at your current level, and which attempt this is for you *overall*. For example, a student named Suzie Cue handing in her second attempt at level two after finishing level one in two attempts (making this her third attempt overall) would write:

Suzie Cue
1st attempt at level 2
3rd attempt overall

Late Policy. Each level attempt you turn in late will reduce your final levels grade by 1/3 of a letter (e.g., from an B+ to a B), 2/3 for more than 24 hrs late, 3/3 for more than 48hrs late, and so on. The same policy holds for the final paper. Reading assignments are due at the beginning of class. Students arriving late to class will have their final reading exercise grade reduced by 1/6 letter per late arrival. Reading assignments will not be accepted after the class period on which they are due and reading quizzes cannot be retaken. (Remember: you can miss 3 reading exercises without penalty.)

Participation . Philosophy is as much of an activity as a subject matter: the only way to learn it is to *do* it. To that end, this class is a seminar, not a lecture. That means that you will come to class each day prepared to discuss the readings, not to listen to me lecture. Everyone will participate every day.

The Hierarchy. Homework in this class has a hierarchical structure. It consists of the reading exercises, "the levels", and the final paper. Working hard on the reading exercises will help you do better on the levels. Working hard on the levels will help you do better on the final paper.