

INTRODUCTION TO CRITICAL REASONING

CSU Northridge, Fall 2026

"You have reason? ... Then why not put it to use? For if this performs its function, what more do you desire?"
— Marcus Aurelius, Meditations 4.13 (trans. Hard)

BASIC INFO

Catalog Info: PHIL 100, Section 01 (Class # 14058)

Class Location: Goodman Hall 325

Class Time: TuTh 8:30AM - 9:45AM

+ 1 hr/week online lecture (*asynchronous*)

NOTE : this is a 4-unit HYBRID section. So, in addition to attending class at designated times every week, students will be expected to watch an online lecture "asynchronously" on Canvas]

Instructor: Justin Kitchen (feel free to address me as "Justin" or "Mr. Kitchen")

Instructor Email: justin.kitchen@csun.edu

Office Hours: TuTh 10:00AM - 12:30PM

or by appt. (<https://justinkitchen.setmore.com>)

Office Location: Sierra Tower 532 (ST 532) and online via Zoom

- Join Zoom meetings from the 'Justin's Office' page on Canvas

COURSE TEXT

There is one textbook we'll use throughout the semester. **Physical versions are required and you should bring each week's reading to class** (i.e., you should have the physical book in front of you whenever you're in class).

For the Sake of Argument (2016) by Robert M. Martin [ISBN: 9781554813377]

Required Course Materials

You'll need college-ruled paper and something to write with for the weekly assignments (no "blue books" or "green books")

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The main text that we're using—*For the Sake of Argument* by Robert M. Martin—starts off by saying "this is a manual for philosophy students ... but this book won't teach you any philosophy" (ix) ... strange, right?. Then Martin says that the book "is intended to teach you how to do philosophy" (what?) by teaching you about "*philosophical* arguing, the most basic philosophical technique" (*ibid.*). Regardless of his view on what philosophy is or is not (we'll definitely talk about that in class), he's right that arguments are extremely important for philosophical thinking. Not only that, but arguments are very important for everyday critical thinking, regardless of whether you're a "philosophy student". So, throughout the semester, we will discuss how to identify, analyze, and evaluate different types of arguments. Because of the nature of the textbook, I think we'll have some cool discussions that will keep you invested and inspired to develop your critical thinking skills—to help you think more carefully about the things that you care about. And that's the point of this course.

GE Contributions: This is a lower division course that provides 4 units towards the "Critical Thinking" portion of your General Education requirement (a.k.a. Area 1B).

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Here is what you should expect in terms of the workload. If you suspect that we are not meeting these expectations or that too much is being asked of you, don't hesitate to reach out to the instructor.

As a 4-Unit course (not a normal 3-unit course), the following is expected (found in “[Policies and Procedures](#)” of the University Catalog): time spent with *direct faculty instruction* (e.g., listening to lectures in class or online; doing in-class assignments, and communicating with the instructor) should be 3½ hours per week (50 min per unit per week); time spent on *other academic activities* (e.g., doing the assigned reading, completing any assignments at home, and reviewing online resources) should be about 6½ hours per week (twice the time spent in class).

NOTE ON READING: We are going to be reading a couple philosophy texts in addition to the textbook. Keep in mind that it's normal to take much longer to read this type of text compared to non-philosophy texts. Plan to spend up to 4 hours of careful reading in preparation for each week.

As an “Critical Thinking” GE course, the following Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are expected (found in “[GE Student Learning Outcomes](#)” of the University Catalog):

Students will...

1. Explain and apply the basic concepts essential to a critical examination and evaluation of argumentative discourse.
2. Use investigative and analytical thinking skills to examine alternatives, explore complex questions and solve challenging problems.
3. Synthesize information in order to arrive at reasoned conclusions.
4. Evaluate the logic and validity of arguments, as well as the relevance of data and information.
5. Recognize and avoid common logical and rhetorical fallacies

GRADING SCALE

If letter grade method is selected, a standard grading scale with +/- increments will be used:

≥93.0% = A	80.0-82.9% = B-	67.0-69.9% = D+
90.0-92.9% = A-	77.0-79.9% = C+	63.0-66.9% = D
87.0-89.9% = B+	73.0-76.9% = C	60.0-62.9% = D-
83.0-86.9% = B	70.0-72.9% = C-	≤59.9% = F

If a CR/NC grade method is selected, a grade of CR is given for work equivalent to “C” or better and a grade of NC is given to work equivalent to a “C-” or less (<https://catalog.csun.edu/policies/credit-no-credit-grading/>)

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

The final grade is divided equally across four assignment categories:

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| 1. Quizzes | 25% |
| 2. Discussions | 25% |
| 3. Project | 25% |
| 4. Participation | 25% |

Weekly Reading Quizzes

At the start of Tuesday's class, I'll give you a short closed-book quiz to test basic comprehension of the reading. It will usually be brief —no more than 10 multiple-choice, true-false, or short answer questions. You'll be provided a second attempt online if you score at least 60% in class. I'll drop the lowest scoring quiz at the end of the semester.

Weekly Discussion Questions

During Thursday's class, I'll ask you a series of Discussion Questions that allow for deeper reflections on the week's material and more engagement with your classmates. I'll grade your answers based primarily on completeness and effort. I'll drop the lowest scoring discussion at the end of the semester.

Final Project

A final *project* will be comprehensive in nature—drawing the entirety of the course. It will be partially *research-based* (requiring some research into a contemporary moral issue that you care about) and partially *practice-based* (requiring the exercise of critical thinking skills). After the first part of the course, I will provide students with instructions and a rubric in a separate document.

Participation

In addition to attendance and some miscellaneous in-class assignments, participation will be graded based on how well students “discuss more” when asked. Before the start of every week, I'll assign five or six students at random to “**Discuss More**” in class. These students will be *required* to **1**) participate more in class (talking through some of the discussion questions on Thursday) and **2**) answer questions I ask them in the online lecture on Canvas). If you miss out on the week you're assigned, you can make up this assignment by coming to my in-person office hours.

Note on extra credit

Before you ask ... *no, there are no assignments that are specifically marked “extra credit”*. But you can get extra credit if you engage more in discussions (online or in-class); ask thoughtful relevant questions; answer the questions of your peers; and just participate more overall. This extra credit takes the form of a boost to your overall course grade (no more than one gradation at the end of the semester, e.g., a “B” would be increased to a “B+”).

FOUR IMPORTANT COURSE POLICIES

Electronics-Free Policy

Portable electronic devices are *counterproductive* in courses like ours (courses that pose many conceptual questions and demand students to reframe information in their own words). With that in mind, you're asked to embrace a rare opportunity to put aside your electronic devices (phones, tablets, laptops, headphones, watches) *for just one hour twice a week*. This means that all devices should be silenced and put away in your backpack or purse.

You're free to excuse yourself and check your devices outside the classroom, but if you insist on using them at your desk I will gently remind you and your course grade may be affected.

Policy on Late Assignments

For weekly assignments: these are due on specific days at specific times. As a general rule, *only one missing 'Reading Quiz' and one missing 'Discussion Questions' assignment can be made up in my in-person office hours*. Since there are many of these assignments, doing poorly on two or three is not terrible. If you miss or do poorly on more than one, I recommend that you email me ASAP to help you get back on track.

For the Project: Anyone who is late to complete the final Project or any draft of it will be penalized by one gradation per day. For example, a "B" would be reduced to a "B-" if one day late and to a "C+" if two days late.

If you can't submit any assignment on time *due to an accident or serious illness* (where the cause is clearly beyond your control), you may receive an extension at my discretion. Please email me ASAP (justin.kitchen@csun.edu) if you think this is the case.

Plagiarism

Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade. A second instance of plagiarism will result in an "F" *for the course*. All instances of plagiarism in the College of Humanities will be reported to the Dean of the College and may be reported to Assistant Vice President for Student Life for further action.

For the weekly quizzes, just keep your eyes on your own paper.

For the final project essay, if you feel that your formulations of your ideas or the ideas themselves are adopted in any way from another work, you should mention that work in the body of your essay or in a footnote. Do not worry that crediting someone else will lead me to underestimate your own creativity or originality. I find that all of the most insightful ideas owe some debt to the work of others, and I will be able to see what is distinctive about your proposals and arguments even when you credit significant portions of them to someone else.

Examples of plagiarism and strategies for avoiding it can be found on the following webpage: <http://library.csun.edu/guides/newsreporting/plagiarism>.

Use of AI Technology

I'm familiar with how students can use AI to help with course assignments—ranging from grammatical help (e.g., Grammarly) to full text-generation (e.g., ChatGPT). This is fine if used judiciously and with restraint, but it's not fine if you submit something as yours that you did not actually write. That would be a form of plagiarism. Thus, if any of your online assignments get flagged as containing a substantial amount of AI-assisted writing, **A)** I may interview you to check your personal comprehension of the material; **B)** I may have you redo the assignment in its entirety; or **C)** I may just follow the policy above regarding plagiarism. *If you're concerned about this, please reach out to me ASAP* so we can ensure you use AI in an academically honest way.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE INSTRUCTOR

During our time together, I'm happy to communicate with you by means of three methods: (1) *Office Hours*; (2) *student/faculty email*; and (3) *Canvas Discussions* ...

If you have questions about → USE ↴	Personal Matters	Concepts/Terms from Reading	Assignment Instructions
Office Hours...	✗	✓	✓
Student/Faculty Email...	✓	✗	✗
Canvas Discussions...	✗	✓	✓

- **Office Hours:** The most reliable way to get answers about the reading or assignment instructions is during office hours. Come to my office in person or else enter the designated Zoom meeting during my standing office hours. You can also make an appointment with me *outside* office hours at <https://justinkitchen.setmore.com>
- **Student/Faculty Email:** For personal matters, you should email me—using your *student* email address—at justin.kitchen@csun.edu. Please try to include your course number in the subject line (PHIL 100). I will usually respond within 24 hours. If I don't, feel free to email me again.
- **Canvas Discussions:** If you have questions about class policies or assignment instructions, post in the "Question about the Course" discussion on Canvas. If you have questions about concepts or terms from the reading, post in the "Questions about the Reading" discussions.

MORE COURSE RESOURCES

The Learning Resource Center

The Learning Resource Center (LRC) provides free, on-campus writing tutoring for CSUN students. It enables students to improve their academic performance through a variety of learning programs. Check out <http://www.csun.edu/undergraduate-studies/learning-resource-center> and "self enroll" in the Online Writing Lab Canvas site.

Disability Access / Accommodations

If you have a disability and need accommodations, please register with the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) office or the NCOD: Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services department. The DRES office is located in Bayramian Hall 110 and can be reached at (818) 677-2684 or by email (dres@csun.edu). NCOD: Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services is located on Bertrand Street in Jeanne Chisholm Hall and can be reached at (818) 677-2611 or by email (ncod@csun.edu). If you would like to discuss your need for accommodations, please contact me to set up an appointment.

Student Disclosure of Sexual Violence and Title IX

CSUN fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as a CSUN student, the course instructor is required to notify the Dean of Students. To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact:

- Campus Title IX Coordinator - (818) 677-2077; <http://www.csun.edu/eqd/>.
- University Police - (818) 677-2201 or (818) 677-2111 (24 hour police dispatch); <http://www.csun.edu/police/assault/>.
- Klotz Student Health Center - (818) 677-3666; <http://www.csun.edu/shc>.

For more information on your rights and available resources:

<http://www.csun.edu/eqd/title-ix-addressing-sexual-misconduct-gender-based-discrimination>.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

Take advantage of these resources before you graduate!

A lot of resources are now found at CSUN's new [Basic Needs Office](#) at the Valera NEST

- [CSUN Immigration Resources Hub](#)
- [Emergency MataCare grants](#): one-time grants to prevent evictions, urgent child care issues, etc.
- **DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) Resources**: Check out the [Central American Resource Center facebook page](#), [legal resources](#) listed on CSUN's Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) [Dream Center](#) that was created to support all undocumented students & allies.
- [University Counseling Center](#) (Bayramian Hall 5th Floor): Did you know part of your tuition covers a certain number of free counseling sessions each year? Once you leave CSUN, these sessions can cost up to \$200 per hour.
- [Help lines](#) (after hours when the University Counseling is closed) for numerous topics/needs (e.g., suicide, drug, rape, LGBTQ, military, or any crisis). You don't have to manage these feelings alone.
- [Pride Center](#): offers support and resources to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, & questioning students, faculty, & staff.
- [Learning Resource Center](#) offers tutoring, a writing center, & more
- [Campus computer labs](#)
- To de-stress, invite students to our [Oasis](#) for relaxation or our [Student Recreation Center \(SRC\)](#)
- [Disabilities Resource Educational Services \(DRES\)](#) for assistance with any disability
- [Klotz Student Health Center](#): Numerous health services including primary care, dental, nutritional counseling, acupuncture, massage and lots more.
- [Career Center](#) for resume writing & interviewing and much more;
- [USU](#) for more student services
- [Clubs & Organizations](#): Hopefully a dozen people have already advised you to "get involved" at CSUN
- [Associated Students](#) offers recycling, and a Children's Center providing child care
- [Financial Aid & Scholarships](#) offers aid for applications
- [University Library](#) for many additional academic resources
- [Veterans Resource Center](#) assists CSUN students as they transition from military service to academic success.

COURSE SCHEDULE

This is a *proposed* schedule of readings. I strive to stick to the schedule so that you can plan your semester accordingly, but this syllabus is subject to change as I reevaluate the workload and in light of unforeseen events. Please keep an eye out for announcements on Canvas and glance at the “Syllabus Revision History” section at the very end of the document.

I recommend completing as much of the readings as possible **over the weekend *before*** their respective week begins. **Unless otherwise stated, each task will be undertaken and submitted *during class time*.**

WEEK 1 (Aug. 23–29): Introductions

READING:

- Course Syllabus
- *Recommended:* Martin Introduction

TASKS:

- Task #1: Intro Group Assignment
- **Task #2: GET PHYSICAL COPY OF BOOK ASAP**

WEEK 2 (Aug. 30 – Sep. 5): Truth and Bullshit

READING:

- Martin Ch. 1

TASKS:

- Task #1: Quiz #1 on Tuesday
- Task #2: Discussion #1 on Thursday
- Task #3: *If selected*, “Discuss More”

WEEK 3 (Sep. 6–12):

READING:

- Martin Ch. 2

TASKS:

- Task #1: Quiz #2 on Tuesday
- Task #2: Discussion #2 on Thursday
- Task #3: *If selected*, “Discuss More”

WEEK 4 (Sep. 13–19): Writing Your Thoughts

READING:

- Martin Ch.3-4

TASKS:

- Task #1: Quiz #3 on Tuesday
- Task #2: Discussion #3 on Thursday
- Task #3: *If selected*, “Discuss More”

WEEK 5 (Sep. 20–26): Argument Basics

READING:

- Martin Ch. 5

TASKS:

- Task #1: Quiz #4 on Tuesday
 - Task #2: Discussion #4 on Tuesday
 - Task #3: *If selected*, “Discuss More”
-

WEEK 6 (Sep. 28 – Oct. 4): Testing for Validity

READING:

- Martin Ch. 6

TASKS:

- Task #1: Quiz #5 on Tuesday
 - Task #2: Discussion #5 on Thursday
 - Task #3: *If selected*, “Discuss More”
-

WEEK 7 (Oct. 5–11): More Formal Logic

READING

- Reading on Formal Logic (provided in Week 5-6)

TASKS:

- Task #1: Quiz #6 on Tuesday
 - Task #2: Discussion #6 on Thursday
 - Task #3: *If selected*, “Discuss More”
-

WEEK 8 (Oct. 12–18): Basic Justification

READING

- Martin Ch. 7

TASKS:

- Task #1: Quiz #7 on Tuesday
 - Task #2: Discussion #7 on Thursday
 - Task #3: *If selected*, “Discuss More”
-

WEEK 9 (Oct. 19–25): Justification by Authority

READING

- Martin Ch. 8

TASKS:

- Task #1: Quiz #8 on Tuesday
 - Task #2: Discussion #8 on Thursday
 - Task #3: *If selected*, “Discuss More”
-

WEEK 10 (Oct. 26 – Nov. 1): Justification by Analysis

READING:

- Martin Ch. 9

TASKS:

- Task #1: Quiz #9 on Tuesday
 - Task #2: Discussion #9 on Thursday
 - Task #3: *If selected*, “Discuss More”
-

WEEK 11 (Nov. 2–8): Analogies and Thought Experiments

READING:

- Martin Ch. 10

TASKS:

- Task #1: Quiz #10 on Tuesday
 - Task #2: Discussion #10 on Thursday
 - Task #3: *If selected*, “Discuss More”
-

WEEK 12 (Nov. 9–15): Discussion on the Final Project

NO CLASS TUESDAY (VETERANS’ DAY)

READING:

- TBD

TASKS:

- Task #1: Quiz #11 on Thursday
 - Task #2: Discussion #11 on Thursday
 - Task #3: Clear your Final Project “Practice” with the instructor by Saturday evening
-

WEEK 13 (Nov. 16–22): Inference to the Best Explanation

READING:

- Martin Ch. 11

TASKS:

- Task #1: Quiz #12 on Tuesday
 - Task #2: Discussion #12 on Thursday
 - Task #3: *If selected*, “Discuss More”
-

WEEK 14 (Nov. 23–29): Reading Long Philosophical Arguments

NO CLASS THURSDAY (THANKSGIVING)

READING:

- TBD

TASKS:

- Task #1: Quiz #13 on Tuesday
 - Task #2: Discussion #13 by Wednesday (on Canvas)
 - Task #3: Prepare to start your 10-day “Experiment” no later than next Monday (Dec. 1st)
-

WEEK 15 (Nov. 30 – Dec. 6): Having Philosophical Discussions

READING:

- TBD

TASKS:

- Task #1: **Begin** your 10-day “Experiment” no later than Monday, Dec. 1st
 - Task #2: Quiz #14 on Tuesday
 - Task #3: Discussion #14 on Thursday
 - Task #4: *If selected*, “Discuss More”
-

WEEK 16 (Dec. 7–13): TBD

READING:

- TBD

TASKS:

- Task #1: Bring TWO print-out of your “Argument Reconstruction” to class on Tuesday, Dec. 9th.
 - Task #2: Submit the “Argument Reconstruction” on Canvas by Tuesday evening
 - Task #3: Discussion #15 on Thursday
 - Task #4: *If selected*, “Discuss More”
-

WEEK 17 (Dec. 14–20): FINALS WEEK

READING:

- TBD

TASKS:

- Task #1: Submit Final Project by Thursday, Dec. 17th.

Document Revision History:

Aug. 21 —syllabus made available to students

NOTICE ANY TYPOS? LET ME KNOW!