

“Assignment Tracks & Learning Objectives for Upper-Division & Graduate Courses”
AAPT International Workshop-Conference on Teaching Philosophy

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Below are two examples of ways to structure a course to give students choices for assignments that are tailored to the learning outcomes they choose based on their individual needs and goals. Both examples give three options: one is from an upper-division course with a mix of majors and non-majors (Ethical Theory), the other from a graduate-level course with a range of undergrads, MA students, and PhD students (Plato seminar).

The basic problem addressed by these examples is that we see a range of students in our classes, with different levels of preparedness for the course and different academic and professional trajectories. A ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach doesn’t always work well, especially when it precludes a feeling of autonomy in students.

The way I’ve tackled this problem is through what I call ‘Assignment Tracks’. They are called ‘tracks’ because students pick one of three options early in the semester, and they have to continue within the bounds of that choice throughout the class. Each track has a separate set of assignments that practice different skills. This allows students to pick the work they are ready for and/or most interested in. A quick overview:

| Undergraduate Level | Assignments | Student |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Minor Track | Content-focused Essay Exams | One or two PHIL classes |
| Major Track | Skill-focused Short Essays | Minors or Majors |
| Grad School Track | 3000 word Conference Paper | Aspiring grad students |
| Graduate Level | Assignments | Student |
| Exam Track | Mock Qualifying Exams | Degree-requirement-satisfiers |
| AoC Track | Syllabi and Teaching Exercises | Non-area specialists |
| AoS Track | Conference Presentation & Paper | Area specialists |

This course structure was successful at allowing students to do the kind of work they find most beneficial. It also allows for a variety of assignments targeted at specific philosophical or academic skills. Unexpectedly, it does not significantly add to faculty workload (at least beyond the initial course design stage); in my experience, a more widely distributed set of assignments felt easier and more enriching than a standard workload.

The next challenge: how to adapt this structure to less explicitly academic learning outcomes?

Assignments

All students in the course will have the following assignments:

Reading

This will be a reading-intensive course, in both quality and quantity. You will have an average of 20 pp. of reading per class, with a range of 6-40 pp. This material will be very difficult, and you will undoubtedly have to read it more than once. We will cover both historically significant texts (some in translation) and recently published, cutting-edge research.

Daily Reading Quizzes

We will have low-stakes reading comprehension quizzes in class almost every day. These quizzes will use a variety of short-answer questions (multiple choice, True/False, etc), and will test whether you're keeping up with the reading and paying attention in class. These should be easy points that you earn simply by doing the minimal required work. Conversely, if you're doing poorly on these quizzes, this shows that you need to change your study habits. If you find yourself in this position, come talk to me about study strategies.

In addition, each student will choose one of three assignment tracks, with different sets of assignments that utilize different skills and aim at different goals (I will give you more details about these assignments in handouts later in the semester).

Minor Track

This track is for students new to the discipline, or to those who are studying Philosophy as a supplement to another field. The goal of this track is simply to understand and accurately explain the major concepts and details of each theory. You will be given six take-home essay exams focusing on these questions, one for each unit (you are only required to do five of these exams). These exams will contain a number of roughly one-page essays, focusing on accurately reporting and applying material from each unit.

Major Track

This track is for current (or aspiring) Philosophy Majors. The goal of this track is to develop fluency in the different approaches to philosophical argumentation common in the discipline. You will be asked to write five short essays modelling these approaches (you may choose which category you use for each unit of class, but you may only use each category one time):

- Exegesis
- Application
- Formalization
- Defense from Objection
- Internal Debate
- Accommodation/Conflation

Grad School Track

This track is for students who are considering a post-graduate degree (e.g. law school or a Philosophy PhD). This track involves an independent research project culminating in a writing-sample caliber final paper (c. 4000 words). All assignments for this track are directed toward this end:

1. Research pre-proposal
2. Bibliography
3. Annotated Bibliography
4. Research Proposal/Abstract
5. First Draft
6. Revised Draft

Note that you are not restricted to any track based on your enrollment status (e.g. you may choose the Major track even if you are only a Philosophy Minor). You will have to choose a track by the second week of class; I advise you consult with me first if you aren't sure which to choose.

PHIL 3103: Assignments Handout - Minor Track

Overview

In this Assignment Track, your main focus is content: your goal is to show that you have learned and understand the six theories we cover of the course of the semester. This means understanding the big picture main points of each theory, and also some of the nuances and intricacies. It also requires you to explain the material in a cogent, accessible way, in order to demonstrate your knowledge. While your primary concern is factual, you will occasionally have to weigh in on interpretive or philosophical debates (e.g. explaining why you think one theory has a better explanation of a given phenomenon than another, or how a theory would apply in a described case).

Each exam has the same format: 3-5 questions of varying difficulty and breadth, focusing on the relevant unit of material from class. You can be expected to write about 1 page per question, sometimes more, so anticipate 4-5 pages of writing for each exam. Depending on the unit, I may give you more questions and allow you to pick a subset to answer.

Each exam will also count for the same amount of your final grade: 14 points each. How exactly these points will be allocated will depend on how many questions you have and how difficult they are (I will tell you the point value of each question when you are given each exam).

Your individual assignments will be due on a regular basis throughout the semester, approximately every two weeks. But remember, there are six assignment deadlines, and you only have to turn in five assignments. So you can skip one of you wish (e.g. because a particular unit doesn't capture your attention, or because you're especially busy during one deadline).

If you have any questions on the timeline or any component of any individual assignment, don't hesitate to ask me about it. Ideally, we can make time to chat in person, but email is always an option too. And I'm happy to give advance feedback on anything you have before you turn it in.

Instructions

Each assignment has its own submission folder on D2L. Go to the 'Assessments' tab, then 'Assignments', where you will see each folder. Submit the relevant document(s) to each folder. And pay attention to due dates:

| | |
|-----------------|----------|
| Paper 1: | Feb 7 |
| Paper 2: | Feb 24 |
| Paper 3: | March 11 |
| Paper 4: | April 3 |
| Paper 5: | April 20 |
| Paper 6: | May 6 |

These deadlines are visible in your calendar on D2L as well.

PHIL 3103: Assignments Handout - Major Track

Overview

In this Assignment Track, you will practice deploying the many logical and rhetorical skills that are the stock in trade of philosophers, especially when it comes to philosophical writing. Most professional work in philosophy will use all these skills together, but it is easier to develop them by focusing on each one in relative isolation. So you will be asked to write several short papers, each focusing on a different skill.

Though the methodology of each paper will vary, the structure of each paper will be the same: a 4-5 page paper, focusing on the relevant unit of material from class. However, you can only write within each genre once. This means you have to give some thought about which assignment is the best fit for a given unit of class (it is possible to use any subgenre for any unit, but some may be more natural fits in some units compared to others, or you may have an easier time finding resources for some than others). These are not research papers, but you will need to incorporate a few legitimate, peer-reviewed secondary sources for most assignments.

Each paper will count for the same amount of your final grade: 14 points each. I will use a rubric that allocates sets of points for specific aspects of each paper (e.g. 3 points for style and readability, 3 points for research and citations, and 4 points each for explanation and argumentation. $3+3+4+4=14$).

Your individual assignments will be due on a regular basis throughout the semester, approximately every two weeks. But remember, there are six assignment deadlines, and you only have to turn in five assignments. So you can skip one of you wish (e.g. because a particular unit doesn't capture your attention, or because you're especially busy during one deadline).

If you have any questions on the timeline or any component of any individual assignment, don't hesitate to ask me about it. Ideally, we can make time to chat in person, but email is always an option too. And I'm happy to give advance feedback on anything you have before you turn it in.

Assignments

Exegesis

In this subgenre of writing, your goal is to explain a confusing or obscure facet of a theory or particular reading. This is not just a book review style content summary, however: you need to motivate that there is something genuinely in need of explanation, a problem that your paper can solve. This assignment is best used for our most difficult and/or confusing readings.

Formalization:

In this subgenre, your job is to take an argument from the reading and repackage it in a formal, numbered premise/conclusion form. After you've done so, you then evaluate the validity and soundness of your reconstruction: Is the logical structure of the argument valid (if not, where is the problem)? Are the premises of the argument true (if not, which is false and why)?

Application:

In this subgenre, you consider how a theory we've discussed works in practice, with a specific kind of example. You can focus on plausible, real-life cases, or on more outlandish thought experiments. Either way, your goal is to (a) plausibly show that a theory has a specific verdict in a given case, and (b) evaluate what this application has for the viability of the theory (i.e. does it get the right results for the right reasons? If not, where does it go wrong?)

Defense from Objection:

In this subgenre, you give the best defense you can think of against a specific philosophical objection against a theory. This requires first formulating that objection clearly and showing why it is a threat to the theory. Then, you explain how a proponent of the theory could respond to this objection, and motivate as best you can this response. Finally, you evaluate whether the defense actually works, or whether the objection is fatal to the theory.

Internal Debate:

This subgenre is like the Defense from Objection paper, but internal. Often proponents of the same theory will disagree mightily about how to best understand or formulate the theory. Here you present two competing alternatives within the same tradition (e.g. Act Utilitarianism and Rule Utilitarianism) and explain exactly where they disagree. You then give an argument for why you think one alternative is better than the other.

Accommodation/Conflation

Proponents of one moral theory will often try to capture positive aspects of another theory. Sometimes this is positive (Theory X is good, but my view Theory Y can capture what is good about X with its own resources). Other times this is more negative (Theory X is nothing about a version of Theory Y). In this subgenre, you explain the terms of this kind of debate in a specific case (e.g. 'Is care ethics just a kind of virtue ethics?' 'Can you be a consequentialist contractualist?'). You then adjudicate this debate, justifying a specific stance on how the two theories relate and why.

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| Paper 1: | Feb 7 |
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| Paper 4: | April 3 |
| Paper 5: | April 20 |
| Paper 6: | May 6 |

These deadlines are visible in your calendar on D2L as well.

PHIL 3103: Assignments Handout - Grad School Track

Overview

In this Assignment Track, you will engage in a single, sustained research project over the course of the semester. Your individual assignments will focus on individual components of this project: from conception to research to writing to revisions.

Your individual assignments will be due throughout the semester. You will find that some of these individual assignments are much more difficult and time consuming than others. You should also be aware that the most labor-intensive component of this project (and correspondingly the weightiest part of your final grade) will occur in late April, well before the end of the semester. So plan accordingly.

If you have any questions on the timeline or any component of any individual assignment, don't hesitate to ask me about it. Ideally, we can make time to chat in person, but email is always an option too. And I'm happy to give advance feedback on anything you have before you turn it in.

One more thing: it is OK if your project changes during the semester. But if/when it does, let me know so we can strategize how to proceed efficiently.

Assignments

Pre-proposal:

Here you pitch your idea for your research project. Choose one of the six moral theories we will cover in class, and a specific topic or question pertaining to this theory, and write up a goal or target you have in your research (defend a theory, object to a theory, assimilate a theory, etc). This should take you a sizable paragraph, but likely not much more than that.

Bibliography:

Find 10-15 sources (or more!) relevant to your proposal. These should be peer-reviewed academic articles and books written by philosophers for a philosophical audience. You can use the Works Cited of the papers we read in class to get started; it is also a good idea to consult the [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#), the [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#), or [PhilPapers](#). If you find a source that isn't quite what you wanted, track down what it cites and see if that is more relevant. Basically you are building your future Works Cited section now, as you begin your research. Philosophy doesn't use a specific citation style: I prefer APA, but if you are already comfortable with another style, you can use it instead.

Annotated Bibliography:

In this assignment your job is to write a short summary (3-5 sentences or so) of each of the relevant works you included in your Bibliography. You want to both (a) survey the main points of the paper, and also (b) discuss how the paper is relevant to your research project (e.g. it gives evidence of a central claim you need, or it is an objection you have to respond to, or it is just a classic work that everyone on the topic has to cite). If you've never done this kind of assignment before, or aren't sure what the standards or goals are, consult these resources:

<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/annotated-bibliographies/>

<https://guides.library.cornell.edu/annotatedbibliography>

<https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/assignments/annotatedbibliography/>

This step will be more work than you might expect. But it will save you a lot of trouble later on, both in helping clarifying your own thoughts, and helping you keep track of your sources when you need to use them later.

Abstract:

An Abstract is a paragraph-length, detailed description of a paper. The difference between an Abstract and the Pre-proposal is that the Pre-proposal is speculative and focused on big picture questions, while the Abstract is much more concrete and focused on your own approach to the topic in your paper. In other words, you are distilling what you are about to do in your First Draft before you do it (this will help you focus your thoughts and iron out your strategy and scope before you start writing in earnest).

First Draft:

A c. 4000-word philosophy research paper. You should aim for the same level of quality as you see in most of our readings in class, so you can use this reading as a model to follow (in style, scope, strategy, etc). Make sure your paper has at least one identifiable main argument: this is a philosophy paper, after all. In other words, you need to make, and justify, a claim that is controversial or overlooked or disputed (in other words, more than just a summary or a compare-and-contrast).

Revised Draft:

I will give you detailed feedback on your First Draft. You will revise your paper based on this feedback, and submit a Revised Draft as the culmination of your research. In addition, you will include a cover letter detailed what changes you made between these drafts, and how you responded to my feedback (this is something authors of journal articles often have to do: I will give you more instructions on this part later in the semester).

Instructions

Each assignment has its own submission folder on D2L. Go to the 'Assessments' tab, then 'Assignments', where you will see each folder. Submit the relevant document(s) to each folder. And pay attention to due dates:

| | |
|-----------------------|----------|
| Pre-proposal: | Jan 27 |
| Bibliography: | Feb 10 |
| Annotated Bib: | Feb. 24 |
| Abstract: | March 9 |
| First Draft: | April 20 |
| Revised Draft: | May 6 |

These deadlines are visible in your calendar on D2L as well.

PHL 5313: Soul and Immortality in Plato
Spring 2017
M,W 1:30 pm – 2:45 pm
Dale Tower 607

Instructor: Jerry Green
Email: jgreen@ou.edu
Office: Dale Tower 617
Hours: T,Th 10 am-12 pm

Course Work: Tracks

Given that there are many goals one might have in taking this class, it is appropriate to allow for a range of assignments that satisfy those goals. To that end, I have designed three tracks with different kinds of work aimed at these goals.¹

AoS Track

This track is meant for students who intend to claim Ancient Philosophy as an Area of Specialization (i.e. an area in which they plan to write their dissertation or publish independent research). This track has three requirements:

1. An APA style 20 minute presentation, based on a 3000 word paper. (20 pts)
2. An APA style 5-10 minute comment on another student's presentation. (10 pts)
3. A final paper, 5000-8000 words, based on the 3000 earlier draft (50 pts)

AoC Track

This track is meant for students who intend to claim Ancient Philosophy as an Area of Competence (i.e. an area in which they can teach upper-division courses on short notice).

This track has two requirements:

1. Two detailed course syllabi, one for a lower-division ancient survey, one for an upper-division ancient course on a specialized topic or figure. (2 x 15 pts)
2. Two 20-30 minute in-class lectures, where you will have the primary responsibility for delivering course content for the class. You may make expanded article review presentations, or you can cover the primary text instead. (2 x 25 pts)

Exam Track

This track is meant for students who don't have a research or teaching interest in Ancient, but are instead taking this course to satisfy a course distribution requirement or prepare for an MA or PhD exam. This track has two requirements:

1. One additional article review as described above (5 pts)
2. Three written exams, centered on ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology respectively. Note that these answers will require some additional reading outside of what we cover in class. (3 x 25 pts)

Undergrad Track

Like the AoS or Exam tracks, but not quite as demanding. Pick 2a or 2b, not both.

1. Two additional article reviews (2 x 5 pts)
- 2a. A final paper, c. 3000 words with both first (25 pts) and final (45 pts) drafts
- 2b. Two of the three written exams (2 x 35 pts)

The schedule for these assignments will be determined once enrollment is finalized and course tracks have been assigned.

¹ Note: If you are also enrolled in both PHIL 5313 and PHIL 6393 this semester, you may not claim the AoC track for both courses. But you can do the AoS or Exam tracks for both if you wish.

PHIL 5313/6393: AoC Presentation Instructions & Rubric

Overview

Though almost all of our academic training is in research, the academic profession is mainly constituted by teaching; even 2/2 positions at top research positions tend to be 40% teaching, 40% research, 20% service. And you're more likely to end up with a 4/4, or even 5/5, teaching load than a 2/2. Not to mention, if you go the alt-ac route one of the most transferable skills you have from graduate training comes from teaching (think running meetings, client presentations, etc). So, you should have the opportunity to practice and further develop your teaching skills, even in your graduate courses.

To that end, if you take the AoC track you will be asked to give to teaching presentations. The simplest way to think of things is like this: pretend you're running a single session of an upper-division ancient philosophy survey that meets for 50 minutes and can only afford to spend one meeting on any particular topic. Your audience is a collection of majors, minors, and neither: they have some background in philosophy, but mostly have never done ancient outside your class.

As you likely know from your discussion sections, a 50 minute session does not mean 50 minutes of material: you're lucky to cover half that. So, you should think in terms of 20-30 minutes of content instead. In essence, put together a short lecture that explains the primary material to non-experts. This is different from the level of sophistication you would expect in a grad seminar or a conference. And note that as a professor you are likely at some point to be asked to teach outside your own AoS: you don't need to be an expert in the topic to be a competent instructor.

Instructions & Rubric

Each presentation should be 20-30 minutes of content. You may be interrupted with questions (as you normally would when teaching), so it's likely that you'll be in charge of the class for more like 45 minutes (again, just as you normally would when teaching).

Each article review is worth 25 pts, which equals 25% of your final grade. Your review should include the following components, each of which is worth 5 pts.

1. Content: Do you have a good grasp of (at least one interpretation of) the material? Can you tell a recently plausible/charitable story of what is happening in the text and why? (It's OK if you have to over-simplify here: again, the idea is that you're teaching an upper-division undergrad course, not a seminar).
2. Clarity: Did you explain things in a clear, easy-to-follow way? Did your lecture have a sensible structure?
3. Q&A: Did you do a good job fielding questions? (This doesn't always mean being able to answer every question: admitting you don't know something, or that things are complicated, are often the right response).
4. Value-added: What did you add to the discussion that an undergrad with no experience in ancient could figure out on her own? (This could be background context, extra details, philosophical clarity, real-world application, etc).
5. Supplementary Material: Some kind of handout, powerpoint, etc, of the sort you'd likely use in a class. This can be a reading handout distributed before class, an outline of the primary text, a reconstruction of the important arguments, a collection of relevant passages from elsewhere, etc. If you use lecture notes instead of this kind of material, give me those instead.

Don't hesitate to ask if you have any questions!

Overview

There's a lot more to teaching than what goes on in the classroom. Some of your biggest teaching decisions will involve what to teach in the first place. And badly-designed syllabus can ruin a class, even if you do a good job in front of the students day-to-day. And a well-designed syllabus can save you a lot of prep time once the semester gets started. So thinking about how to construct a good syllabus and plan a good course is an important professional skill.

I've uploaded to Canvas several chapters about syllabus design from teaching and pedagogy books that I like; you should find these useful. I've also written about some of my own thoughts on syllabus design at blog [The Philosopher's Cocoon](http://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2016/02/syllabus-design-an-occasional-series-part-1-against-inertia.html), which goes into some detail about the specific things I'd like you to think about (see below). You can see this series-in-progress here:

<http://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2016/02/syllabus-design-an-occasional-series-part-1-against-inertia.html>

<http://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2016/07/syllabus-design-an-occasional-series-part-2-what-kind-of-class.html>

<http://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2016/08/syllabus-design-an-occasional-series-part-3-learning-outcomes.html>

<http://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2017/02/syllabus-design-an-occasional-series-part-4-learning-outcomes-continued.html>

One last thing: it is of practical benefit for you to make your syllabus as close to the real thing as possible. It's quite common to be asked about a course with very little prep time. For instance, you could be asked by a job search committee to provide a syllabus with a week's deadline, or you could be assigned to teach an ancient course last minute. If you make a fully functional syllabus now, you'll have it to rely on down the road.

Instructions & Rubric

Upload both your syllabi to Canvas under 'Lower Division Syllabus' and 'Upper Division Syllabus', respectively. They're due 5.8.17, but I recommend you do at least one before that.

Each syllabus is worth 15 pts. You have two syllabi to design, one for a lower-division ancient survey, and one for an upper-division 'Great Figures' course (e.g. a Plato course or an Aristotle course, which can itself be a survey or a topic-focused course). Each syllabus should include the following components:

1. Course overview (a prose explanation of the course, one paragraph to one page)
2. Required Texts (if any)
3. Course goals
4. Learning Outcomes
5. Assignments & Grade distribution
6. Reading schedule

You can skip the legalistic back-matter (it is important, but it varies significantly school to school).

In addition to the syllabus itself, I also want to see a brief discussion explaining the thinking behind the decisions you've made. I am particularly interested in seeing how you think your assignments support your learning outcomes, and how your learning outcomes support your coarse goals. You should also explain things like (i) why you've chosen to focus on your particular course topic, (ii) why you've chosen your specific text (or chosen not to use one), and (iii) why you've included the specific reading list/schedule you're using.

PHIL 5313/6393: Article Review Instructions & Rubric

Overview

Anyone can be a philosopher with a little practice. Pursuing an advanced degree means training to become a *scholar*. Scholarship requires more than just developing and distributing your own ideas. Scholarship also involves a responsibility to engage with the work of others. For academic philosophers, especially in ancient philosophy, this means engaging with the numerous books and journal articles on the topic at hand.¹

For this class, we will use article reviews to practice developing habits of good scholarship. These article reviews will require you to engage carefully with some of the most relevant literature on the topics we cover in class.

Instructions & Rubric

Each article review should be roughly 4-5 pages of text (c. 1200-1500 words).

You should upload your paper to Canvas under the ASSIGNMENTS tab, under the 'Article Review' assignments (1-3, depending on your assignment track). Use a .doc(x) or .pdf format: Canvas doesn't always play well with .odt, .rtf., or .pages files.

They are due no later than the Friday before your article is assigned for class, so that I can look at them over the weekend before we meet.

Each article review is worth 5 pts, which equals 5% of your final grade. Your review should include the following components, each of which is worth 1 pt and will be graded on a sufficient/not-sufficient basis:

1. Synopsis: A single sentence which expresses all and only the most important information of the paper. This is much harder than it sounds, and you will need to draft multiple attempts before you get it right. And no cheating: colons and semi-colons, dashes, and other independent-clause-combiners aren't allowed. Why make you do this? Because concision is important (e.g. when facing a submission word limit) but it also difficult and requires practice.
2. Abstract: A one-paragraph summary of the paper, ≤150 words. Like a journal abstract, this paragraph summarizes the content of the paper. But unlike a journal abstract, this paragraph should not be promissory or incomplete. The Synopsis and Abstract sections will have roughly the same content: the point is to get you thinking explicitly and strategically about how to distill you're the information in your review into a concise format.
3. Summary: A two-to-three page summary of the main points of the paper. The twist is that you should present things in order of importance, not follow the paper's order of presentation. Suppose you are tasked with summarizing the paper, but could be interrupted or cut off at any time (e.g. the way you might be in a job interview that asks about your dissertation).
4. Engagement: A one-paragraph presentation of an objection to the argument of the paper, or a question about something important that the paper leaves unanswered.
5. Response: A one-paragraph suggestion for how the author might meet the problem you raise in the Engagement section.

¹ In addition to basic professional competence, there are also important considerations of justice involved in proper engagement and citation of secondary literature. See, e.g. here, esp. §2.1:

<https://whatswrongcvsp.com/2015/12/14/whats-wrong-with-current-citation-practices-in-philosophy/>