

General information and policies
for all of Dan Hicks' classes
Last updated August 2010

1. THE BIG THREE

All the logistical information for our class has been spread out over three places.

- (1) This document, which is updated infrequently
Includes lots of small but important details for all classes
- (2) The Teaching page on my personal website, which is here:
<http://www.nd.edu/~dhicks1/teaching/>
Includes contact information and links and handouts for all classes
- (3) The webpage for our specific course, which is linked on the Teaching page
Includes the schedule of readings and assignments, and links to the readings (when I have links) and the list of required books (when I have required books). You may need to use your school ID and password for access. This page will be updated to reflect changes in the class schedule, so be sure to check it regularly.

2. WHO AM I?

I'm Dan Hicks, your instructor. I prefer my students to call me 'Dan'; if you absolutely must be formal, you can call me 'Mr. Hicks'. The best way to get in touch with me is by email: hicks.daniel.j@gmail.com.

3. GRADE BREAKDOWN

Grades are typically based on an unweighted average of assignments and class participation. Each of these, in turn, is graded on a 4-point scale that corresponds to grade points in a traditional way:

4	A	3.5	A-/B+
3	B	2.5	B-/C+
2	C	1.5	C-/D+
1	D	0	F

Due to grade inflation, I consider a B to be the minimal level of reasonable work.

4. CLASS PARTICIPATION

Like most other classes, you can't learn to do philosophy just by watching someone else do philosophy. You have to actually practice doing it yourself. Since face-to-face, real-time discussion is an essential part of doing philosophy, active participation in class discussion is essential to learning to do philosophy well. Indeed, it is, if anything, *more* important than the practice you get in written assignments. This is why I weigh class participation the same as a full paper.

Class participation is based on quality, not quantity. A quiet student who says one or two brilliant things a week will probably get a 3.5 or 4 for participation. A student who, in my judgment, just likes to hear himself talk is likely to get a 2.5 or 3. Someone who is rude, disrespectful, misses class more than 3 or 4 times or otherwise lowers the quality of our discussion could easily get a 0 or 1. Participation

takes into account the comments you make, the questions you ask, and how well you listen to others – it involves both talking *and* listening.

Athletes may be exempted from attending class for a limited number of specific days. It is the athlete's responsibility to make sure that I know what days these are and grant the exemption. Don't assume the athletic department will let me know when you'll be gone!

5. READING AND OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES

Active participation in class discussions, writing good papers, and even just understanding lectures all require some familiarity with the assigned reading. Furthermore, my classes are usually structured progressively, with later readings reacting to earlier readings, and I spend a great deal of time choosing readings that are reasonable in terms of both length and difficulty. For these reasons, it is essential and expected that you keep current with the assigned readings. If you fall behind, do not expect my lectures to keep you with the rest of the class, and do not expect to maintain a good grade in the class.

At the same time, I design my classes to cover challenging material at a fast pace, and I recognize that my students are all busy with other classes, work, family responsibilities, and other activities. Furthermore, the authors we read are often contributing to ongoing philosophical debates with which students are not familiar, and reading these texts outside of their intellectual context can make some parts virtually impossible to understand. I therefore cannot expect my students to perfectly understand the assigned reading at the beginning of class (or in their response papers, which are written before class), and I understand if occasionally an impacted schedule keeps a student from getting to her or his reading for my class.

So, I offer the following deal to each of my classes. For their part, students must

- (1) make a reasonable effort to read the assigned texts before each class meeting,
- (2) over the course of the whole semester, neither unreasonably sacrifice their work in my class for the sake of their other responsibilities and activities nor unreasonably sacrifice their other responsibilities and activities for the sake of their work in my class, and
- (3) take the initiative in asking me for additional help if they need it.

For my part, I will

- (1) overlook occasional days when an individual student was too busy to do the reading,
- (2) not schedule pop quizzes or other punitive measures designed to coerce students into reading,
- (3) adequately identify and explain the most important parts of the assigned readings during lectures and discussions, and
- (4) make myself available during regular office hours and by appointment for individual meetings with students who need additional help.

If I feel that one or more students are not living up to their part, it is my obligation to contact them individually or, in the case of a widespread failure, bring it up during class time for general discussion. If students feel that I am not living up

to my part, it is their obligation to contact me, either face-to-face or by email, for discussion.

6. SPECIFIC TYPES OF WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

I assign several different types of out-of-class writing assignments. Note that not every class gets each type of assignment. The course website will say explicitly which types of assignments your class has, how many, and when they are due. **All assignments should be submitted by email in DOC, DOCX, or RTF format; I don't accept hard copies.**

6.1. Logical analyses. A logical analysis is an opportunity for you to practice some of the most important methods of philosophy: analyzing and reconstructing arguments. Your analysis will focus on a single text – usually something short, like an op-ed column or a few paragraphs of an article. If the text is long, and I don't specify what to focus on, you should choose one relatively small but important section. Sometimes I'll ask you to pick the text on your own, other times I'll assign a text. Your analysis has three parts:

- (1) In a single sentence, identify the *thesis* or primary claim of the text. This might be a direct quotation, or you might need to paraphrase (restate the claim in your own words). A paraphrase should try to balance *accuracy*, *clarity*, and *charity* – an ideal paraphrase captures what the author was trying to say in clear language that makes it sound at least plausible.
- (1a) Sometimes the author won't have a single primary claim. Instead, they'll discuss several different but somewhat related ideas. In this case, you should identify one especially important and controversial claim that the author makes and treat that as the thesis. Again, you might quote or paraphrase this.
- (2) Identify the *major argument* the author gives to support the thesis – the reasons why the audience should believe her or his claim. In some cases the argument can be stated quite simply and directly. In other cases the reasoning will be complicated, and involve several different claims that work together to support the thesis. In either case, try to break the argument down into clear, easy-to-understand components. Again, this may involve either direct quotation or careful paraphrase. I encourage you to put your reconstruction in premise-conclusion form, but this is not required. As with the thesis, your analysis of the argument should try to balance accuracy, clarity, and charity.
- (3) Finally, in 100-200 words (about one or two long paragraphs), answer the following question: Does the argument give good support to the thesis? If we have discussed some ideas from logic in class – such as different kinds of arguments, fallacies, and validity and soundness, for example – I expect you to use at least some of these ideas in answering this question.

6.2. Long response papers. A long response paper is 1200-1500 words (about 4-5 pages). A response paper is a response to the reading for a particular class meeting, and is intended in part to help spark class discussion; also, some of your classmates will write short responses papers to your long response. That means

long response papers are circulated to the whole class, but without my comments or a grade. To make sure there's enough time for this, the response paper is due at 5pm two days before the class covering the paper to which you're responding, including weekends. For example, if you're writing a long response to the reading for Monday the 10th, your paper is due by 5pm Saturday the 8th. I'll circulate sign-up sheets for long response papers during the second week of class or so.

The content of a long response paper is much like the content of a full paper – it has the same four parts (introduction, summary and analysis, argument, conclusion) and is graded by the same criteria. It's just shorter, and tied very closely to a particular reading. For more on the qualities of a good philosophy paper and grading criteria, see the Giant Philosophy Papers Packet.

6.3. Short response papers. A short response paper is 300-600 words (about 1-2 pages). A short response is a response to another student's long response paper, and is intended in part to help start class discussion. Unlike long response papers, **short response papers are not circulated to the whole class; only I read them.** To make sure there's enough time for me to incorporate your short response into the class discussion, a short response should be submitted at least 12 hours before class starts. You cannot write a short response during the week you write a long response, and you can only write one short response per week.

The content of a short response paper should focus on one particular claim or line of thought discussed in the long response. It should have an especially brief introduction, and either a summary and analysis or develop an argument, but probably not both. Use the short response as a way to start a discussion with your fellow students. Do you agree with their interpretation of the readings? Do you think their criticism of the author's argument works? Can you extend their points to still other new cases?

You don't sign up for short response papers; just pick a long response and write a short response to it!

6.4. Full papers. Full papers are any writing assignment longer than 1500 words (about 5 pages). The course website or paper assignment will specify the length requirement. Generally, full papers are assigned in a traditional way – everyone picks from a list of one or a few topics, and turns in their paper on the same day.

In some classes, we'll spend a full class session talking about the qualities of a good full paper just before you receive the first assignment, based on the Giant Philosophy Papers Packet. Students in other classes are welcome to look through this packet to get a better idea of the expectations for your papers.

Full papers should be emailed to me by 5pm on the scheduled due date. I grade full papers blind – without knowing who wrote which paper. To facilitate this, please do **not** include your name anywhere in your paper, and use this specific format for the filename:

IPFA09-2-7777.docx

The filename starts with a course code, which has four letters and two numbers that identify the course, semester, and year. In this case, the code is IPFA09, for Intro to Philosophy, Fall 2009. You can find this on the course webpage. Next comes the

number of the paper – in this case, it's the second paper. Finally come the last four digits of your ndID. You can find this on the front of your student ID card, at the bottom. In this example, the student's ndID ends with 7777.

In general, I would rather give you an extension than have you turn in something that isn't your best work or something that you bought from a paper mill. But I can only give you an extension if you let me know in advance that you need the extra time. Generally speaking, you must send me an email by 5pm the day before the paper is due with a short (1-2 sentence) explanation of why you need the extension. If there is a last-minute emergency, you should contact me as soon as possible.

7. NON-SEXIST LANGUAGE

Sociologists have known for decades that the use of gendered words like 'man', 'he', 'him', 'his' and 'himself' as generic or gender-neutral terms encourages sexist stereotypes, regardless of the author's intent. It is, in addition, simply bad grammar – consider 'Some men are female' and 'Each applicant is to list the name of his husband or wife'. Students are therefore required to read, understand, and adopt one or several of the strategies in the APA pamphlet 'Guidelines for non-sexist use of language' in their writing for the course, available both from the course website and at <http://www.apaonline.org/publications/texts/nonsexist.aspx>.

8. EXAMS

Any exams will be based primarily on three short essays of approximately 300-450 words with questions announced a week in advance. I'll announce five questions; the exam will be four of these five; and you must answer three of these four. The final will be cumulative, with an emphasis on the final section of the course (between the last regular exam, if any, and the final), and given during the registrar-scheduled final time unless otherwise announced. In classes with logical analyses (like Intro to Philosophy), there will also be one or two questions on logical terminology and concepts (classifying arguments, validity, etc.).

Some students with recognized physical or mental impairments may be eligible for certain kinds of accommodation during exams, lectures, or other parts of the course. These students should make arrangements for these accommodations through the Sara Bea Learning Center.