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Teaching statement

My central pedagogical goal is for students to become independent scholars: *independent* in the sense of being driven by intellectual interest rather than by external incentives, and *scholars* in the sense of having rigorous methods of reasoning to apply to philosophical problems. Towards these ends, I have students maintain a course blog, diagram arguments, practice guided reading, and complete a progressive sequence of workshops on writing and reasoning.

Course blog. Before every seminar, each student must write one blog post. Two students each post a question on any relevant topic. For example, a student recently posted the question, “In 1.9, how does Aristotle conclude that happiness is acquired? Outline his argument and his reasons for rejecting the other ways one could acquire happiness.” Each other student then chooses a question and posts a paragraph or two in response. I often use these student questions to begin seminar discussions, and to ensure that these questions are fruitful I begin the semester with a handout on writing effective discussion questions. Maintenance of a course blog gives students a stake in the course, lets them practice writing skills, and prepares them for discussion.

Argument diagrams. As a focal point of all of my undergraduate classes, I use diagrams in which numbers represent the claims of an argument and arrows represent relations of evidential support between those claims. I introduce argument diagrams in the first week of class (see the handout on evidence on pp. 14–15). Students diagram arguments in nearly every class and for many homework assignments. I also use argument diagrams to introduce good forms of reasoning, such as *modus ponens* and inference to the best explanation.

Guided reading. So that students learn how to extract arguments from a text, I often select a short but dense section of reading and have students analyze the meaning of a few sentences at a time. In a recent seminar on Plato’s *Meno*, we considered a two-page argument concluding that virtue can be taught because it is a form of wisdom. A student first read a few sentences to the class. That student then identified any signposting expressions (“because,” “therefore,” “however,” etc.) and explained what evidential or rhetorical relations were thereby indicated. Finally, the student attempted to identify the central premise and any evidence, explicit or implicit, supporting that premise (or objection, reply, etc.). I diagrammed that portion of the argument on the board, offering corrections and explanations as necessary. Another student then repeated the process with the next few sentences of the text. After 45 minutes, the board contained a complete diagram of Plato’s argument.

Writing and reasoning workshops. Over the semester, I walk students through a progressive sequence of 30-minute writing and reasoning workshops, all of which emphasize argument diagramming. (See p. 13 for an overview of this sequence for an introductory course.) The writing workshops cover topics like how to write a thesis statement, how to organize ideas within and across paragraphs, and how to explain a quotation effectively. The reasoning workshops cover topics like validity, soundness, and circularity. I use many short in-class exercises, supplemented by weekly homework assignments, to help students learn this material.

In lecture, I similarly aim to help students become independent scholars. For instance, I frequently display a short passage using PowerPoint and ask the audience to interpret it. I also periodically pause and ask students to pair off and discuss a challenging question.

In short, I give students substantial control over the direction of the course so that they may become independent, and I offer them continuous opportunities to practice focused skills so that they may become genuine scholars.

Quantitative student evaluations

Below are summaries of my quantitative student evaluations from my most recent semester of teaching (Table 1) and from *all* of my seminars taught as a professor (Table 2). For comparison, the last column of each table also includes data for all 12 Modern Philosophy and Political Thought seminars taught in Yale-NUS College in 2016.

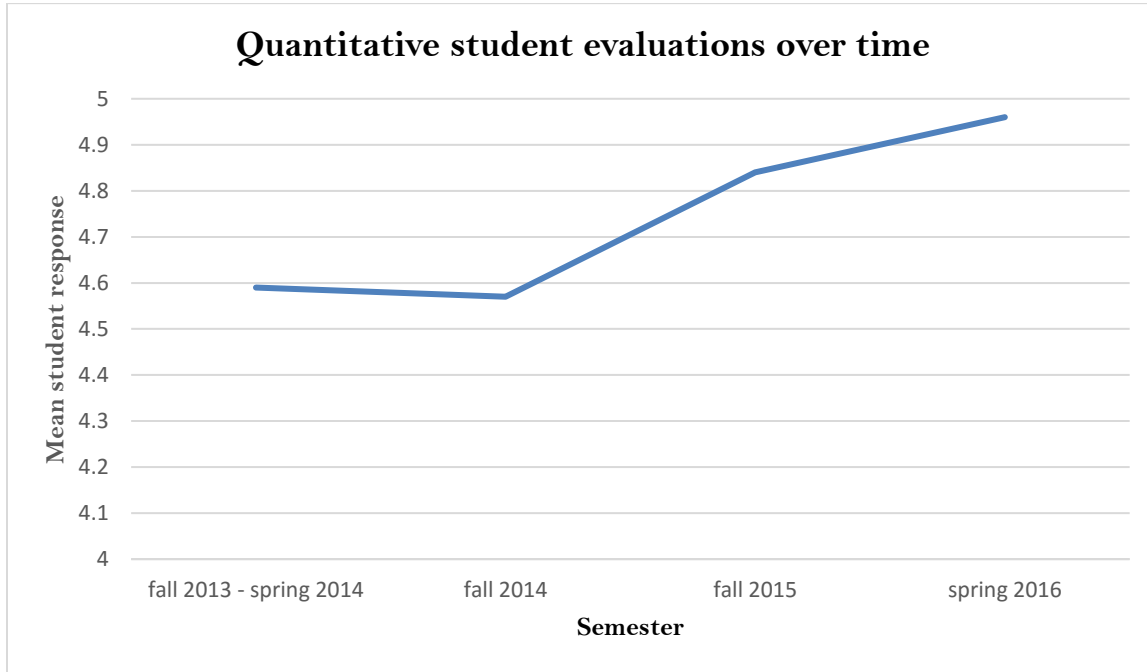
Table 1. Evaluations from spring 2016 (2 seminars)

<i>On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)</i>	% who agree or strongly agree	My mean/ Yale-NUS mean
The seminar professor helped me understand course concepts.	100%	4.96/4.28
The seminar professor challenged me to actively engage the material.	100%	4.96/4.25
I am motivated to explore beyond the material I encountered in seminar.	96.2%	4.54/3.98
I found it easy to obtain prompt feedback from the seminar professor.	100%	4.96/4.55
The seminar professor's responses to my work were valuable.	100%	5.00/4.47

*Table 2. Evaluations from **all** seminars (10 in total) taught as a professor*

<i>On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)</i>	% who agree or strongly agree	My mean/ Yale-NUS mean
The seminar professor helped me understand course concepts.	97.3%	4.74/4.28
The seminar professor challenged me to actively engage the material.	97.3%	4.79/4.25
I am motivated to explore beyond the material I encountered in seminar.	83.0%	4.26/3.98
I found it easy to obtain prompt feedback from the seminar professor.	96.4%	4.71/4.55
The seminar professor's responses to my work were valuable.	98.2%	4.83/4.47

To show the improvement of my quantitative teaching evaluations, I also include a graph showing student responses *by semester* to the prompt, “The seminar professor helped me understand course concepts.” Note that I taught a single group of students from fall 2013- spring 2014 and that I was on leave during spring 2015.



Qualitative student evaluations

This section contains the *complete, unedited* qualitative student responses from my spring 2016 seminar on Modern Philosophy and Political Thought. Qualitative responses for all other seminars are available upon request.

Prompt: What helped you learn in the course overall? (For example, lecture, seminar discussions, seminar professor, readings, assignments, and connections to other courses). Briefly explain why you found them helpful.

- Seminar discussions were extremely useful in helping me understand the course material. Prof Mehta is a great facilitator in class, encouraging us to think deeply about the text and having us discuss difficult topics.
- Class discussions – Prof Mehta is very precise and clear in explaining concepts. His teaching style also creates a very friendly environment where students feel less afraid to speak up and/or challenge his/other students' ideas.
- readings, assignments by seminar professor, handouts by seminar professor
- Everything (worksheets, office hours, class activities, discussions)
- Lectures were informative, seminars were very interesting.
- Seminar discussions that went in-depth into the philosophies and deconstructed their arguments. Class discussions on whether we agreed with these ideas allowed me to generate my own ideas.
- Homework and blogposts were extremely helpful. They developed my skills in writing and argument and I really increased my appreciation for philosophy.
- -readings -seminar discussions--> we slowly unpacked each of the readings, which was especially necessary for Arendt, Gandhi, and Nietzsche
- Seminar discussions were very focused on skills necessary to engage in philosophical discourse, allowing me to become more ready to engage in philosophical discussions. Reading directly from the texts also helped us see ideas for ourselves without the lens of other observers. Assignments were also more focused on people bringing out their own ideas, which is very valuable to the critical thinking objectives of the course.
- The handouts that the professor distributes. They offer some detailed guidance about how we should construct our essay. And the structure of the discussion is very helpful as well, every one gets a chance to say something during the class.
- Lecture: lectures were very useful because unlike with LH lectures, they were at the beginning of the week and they provided a framework for me to consider the texts. I was able to get a strong sense of the main arguments of the text, and this helped me to direct my thinking such that I could spend more time reflecting on and understanding the main points instead of worrying about not understanding the less important lines. Seminar discussions & seminar prof: I really (really really!) appreciated how structured the discussions were in class because it gave all of us a chance to take our time and analyze the texts. On the other hand, I was also surprised at how productive the more unstructured discussions were as everyone politely chipped in with their opinions. I think that the latter was greatly aided by the former, as everyone was used to paying

close attention to the text such that their opinions were supported by textual analysis, and also because there was a less competitive class environment, and students who are more talkative by nature often hang back to allow others to speak. Assignments: Aside from the major essay writing assignments, I think that the smaller class assignments were very helpful in training our essay writing skills during low-stakes tasks. In particular, I felt that the assignment on rewriting topic sentences such that they were more closely linked to one another was very useful in building a coherent and well-organized essay.

- The seminar discussions are very helpful to both understanding the nuances of the readings and developing thinking and discussion skills. The prof challenges us to think deeper about the text we are reading and see how each concept is linked to one another in the text and across different texts. I also found the discussion posts before each class very helpful in forcing us to engage with the text in a deeper level and to practice our writing skills.
- I think class discussion in seminars helped me a lot in learning more about the course, as it was well-facilitated and there were many activities which were both interesting and thought-provoking. I also found the lectures on thinkers especially that on Mill very helpful in my understanding of the text. The professor also helped immensely especially during office hours, which were very productive in providing feedback, discussing ideas, and in essay writing.
- I learned the most from my seminar professor, Neil Mehta, who taught extremely well. He makes very good use of every second of our time, and he makes sure we always have a chance to think deeply about the given topic before responding. Our discussions are fruitful and very intriguing.
- My seminar professor was excellent. He was very good at facilitating seminar discussions and explaining concepts in a clear way. After every class I really felt like I spent my 1 and a half hours well, i felt like I actually gained something new from the class. The readings were very interesting and enlightening. Having blog post was helpful in practicing for essays. My professor had mini workshops in classes throughout the semester to help us improve our writing skills which is something that I thought was extremely helpful, especially for students like me who had no background in writing academic papers and really had no guidance before.

Prompt: How could this course change in the future to improve student learning? [Note: Some comments pertain to the lectures, which were divided among the professors teaching the course. I delivered only one of the dozen or so lectures.]

- It is perfect now.
- None, Neil is a great professor.
- -
- Not sure. It is already quite good. Maybe not so many confucian readings?
- more time allocated to each text
- Make sure lectures are always quality Leave more time for Arendt!!!! Also spend more time on Nietzsche

- I think seminars could be focused more on the discussion of ideas and engagement with the professor. I also think that lectures could seek to draw more links between philosophy and the real world and more critical analysis of arguments; perhaps more focus on objections to philosophical ideas would be in order.
- I think more time should be spent on certain philosophers such as Nietzsche, as many other thinkers were also influenced by him and it would be more fruitful to see the relationship between the ideas of the thinkers, rather than viewing thinkers individually. I think the class discussions and assignments bring this out to a certain extent, but perhaps this could be touched on in lecture as well.
- Students should all have the same workload across the board. The fact that some students have a lot more work to do for a single grade is incredibly disadvantageous and unfair.
- I think occasionally our lectures could be improved upon, as they are often quite fast-paced or they lack a certain element of performativity that would help engage us students. Furthermore, I think it would be great if before we read the text we got some kind of context or introduction to it so that we are better able to understand the text before reading it- having the lecture the morning of the class does not provide enough time to fully engage with the text afterwards, so I generally tried to read the text before the lecture, but experienced a lot of difficulty because I had no idea what was going on, and I didn't feel comfortable looking up basic context online because I thought it might be construed as plagiarism if some things I read online influenced my later thinking for assignments for which I wasn't allowed to use outside sources.
- Sometimes I could not make sense of the readings until after the lecture; this can be extremely frustrating. Sometimes I wait until after lecture to read the text, as having the historical context and so on help me to actually make use of my first reading and not waste my time rereading the text. I would have liked to spend more time on Nietzsche. I do feel that some lectures weren't helpful and were extremely hard to follow. For this evaluation to be useful, I will be blunt and say that Prof. Fabian Geier's lectures were extremely hard to follow. Most of the time it was hard to take notes and derive anything useful from these lectures. While his lecture delivery has been improving over the year, I still found the lectures disappointing. I really liked Nietzsche's text but I don't feel like the lecture did any justice to it. I think lectures given by Prof. Keating, Prof. Mehta and Prof. Walker were much easier to follow and generally more helpful. Prof. Chang's lectures had very good content but I had a hard time understanding his accent which may just be due to my background. I think these professor's lecture styles should be used as benchmarks for future PPT lectures.
- The readings for PPT2 are very good as it is connected to each other and discusses very relevant political ideas. I really enjoyed the reading and the pace of readings.
- I have no complaints. I think the way this course was taught this semester greatly aided in my understanding of the philosophical texts.
- I think this course is great. I really enjoy it. From what I've heard from other seminar groups who are allowed to use their laptops in class, they don't really pay attention. Perhaps professors should ban students from using electronic devices in PPT class as it distracts people and is not necessary for class discussion.

Prompt: Briefly describe how your seminar professor taught the seminar, including any distinctive features or activities.

- Neil honed our thinking skills and helped us understand the content of the works we read, and the skills we can apply to those works and to all works. incredibly grateful for the skills i've learnt and how i now critical think better. this course and what i learnt is exactly what i came to yale nus for.
- Insightful advices, student discussions, guided readings
- Hands-on, facilitative.
- Prof Mehta usually begins class by summarising the text and/or questioning the central claim of the text. He guides us along key passages and is keen to listen to our opinion on the given passages. He will also sometime guide us through common logic forms and show us how they are used in the text that we're reading. Additionally, Prof Mehta is very good in using simple examples to convey complex philosophical ideas, which I found to be extremely helpful in understanding the text.
- We usually start of deconstructing the argument into its most fundamental claims and assessing the validity of these claims. We often consider the argument of one philosopher against others to decide where we stand on these issues.
- Prof Mehta tries to make everyone speak during class, so each student gets to read and analyse a specific part of the text for that lesson. Afterwards we have some time for open discussion and sharing of ideas.
- Professor Mehta was extremely meticulous and systematic. This was extremely helpful because it helped us focus on issues that were most salient.
- Logic diagrams--> very helpful Open discussions Guided discussions Close readings
- Prof Mehta begins each class by outlining very clearly what he is covering for the seminar. He then takes us through critical discussions of the text or activities that train us in philosophical skills such as discussion and argument diagramming. There is a lot of emphasis on engagement and group discussion; things are also very structured so everyone is on the same page and knows what is required of them. Brilliant!
- The professor is very helpful in deconstructing the text and offering advice about how to grasp the essence of the lectures. He is also very efficient in handling the course materials and grading the assignment.
- Prof Mehta made a concerted effort to ensure that the discussion was productive and focused by stating clearly the expected outcomes of each discussion, and this helped to anchor everyone's opinions and make them relevant. He also called on people to speak so that everyone had a chance to share their opinions, which I appreciated since I'm more shy in PPT classes.
- My seminar prof calls on students to read and analyse specific parts of the passage as well as to answer questions or even to lead discussions. We are also required to present arguments made in the text with simple logical structures.
- Before class, there were discussion seeds that allowed us to ask questions that intrigued us as well as attempt to answer or summarise the thinker's arguments. It also helped us in argument diagramming. He had well-facilitated discussion where everyone has a chance to speak about a certain topic, and also unmoderated discussion where we were allocated 5 minutes to engage in a discussion on a topic by ourselves, which I found very

challenging but also immensely useful. We also had group discussions within seminar where we were split into 4 groups and had to tackle an in-class activity.

- My seminar professor posed very interesting questions regarding the text and helped us see how specific details support a broader view of the text. He made a lot of discussion come from us, and he guided us without giving us any answers, which really helped our learning. As we were coming up with answers, he provided a lot of time and space for us to think before responding, which I really appreciated. I feel he really values our time and thoughts and ideas.
- My professor facilitated our seminar discussions in a structured way. He encouraged us to limit the number of times we speak if we are generally outspoken and to speak at least once if we are usually quiet. He would ask each person in the class their to do something every class, this could be interpreting a passage our stating a big idea presented in the lecture, or some other task.

Prompt: How many hours did you spend on this course in a typical week, not including scheduled seminar or lecture time?

- 3
- 5 hours / week
- 4-8
- Readings -- 3-4h Assignment (1 paper) -- 20h Assignment (short exercise) -- 30mins
- 8-10
- 4 hours
- 7
- 5
- 6
- 6
- 4-6 hours.
- 5
- 8
- 4
- 9

Prompt: Please use this space to elaborate on your previous responses or to address other issues such as classroom atmosphere; most or least helpful course materials, readings, or topics; or any other specific suggestions or concerns about the course.

- Professor Mehta is amazing and has really helped me develop my skills in philosophy. He has presented philosophy in precisely that way that I expected i.e. heavily focused on the use of logic, writing and presentation of ideas. I have applied his methods and his teachings in most aspects of my academic journey since I have met him and have thus found his course extremely helpful.

- Prof Mehta encourages a very positive and receptive class atmosphere. He tells us clearly what he expects of our class participation and guides us through to ensure that everyone is confident to speak and ask questions (even if they are not very well developed).
- I really enjoyed this course even though it was very challenging, and I think it was because of the teaching style of the professor.
- NIL
- NIL
- This course was well-executed and I learnt much from it. I hope, however, that more time could be spent on significant philosophers like Nietzsche and Rousseau as they are key to our understanding of the modern world. Moreover, I would appreciate more focus on contemporary philosophical thought such as existentialism and structuralism as these also do much to inform our understanding of the modern world. Professor Mehta is an excellent teacher - he does his utmost to support us and make sure classes are structured and meaningful. I enjoyed his insights (which he should share more often) and in-class activities, which makes class time more interactive. Hope to take more classes with him in future.
- NA
- I felt that it was good that the prof laid down some ground rules concerning class discussion to encourage the quieter students to speak up and ensure the conversation is not dominated by more vocal students. What could help promote discussion is to engage the class in relating the concepts mentioned in the text to real life, like to our own moral values etc. Also, it would help if there were more time set aside for discussions and the prof can call upon students to start the discussion.
- As we are a quiet class, I think that the facilitated discussions really helped us convey ideas and challenge ourselves to formulate opinions and analyses of the text. The professor also carried out certain writing and discussion "workshops" for us to improve on our basic skills, which I thought were extremely useful and applicable to other modules as well. I think the professor also did very well in engaging us as a class, asking the right questions that provoked discussion, and was also interesting by relating concepts we learnt in class with real-life happenings and pop culture. With regards to readings, I would think that having shorter excerpts of philosophical texts is more conducive for our learning, as we are able to focus more and glean information out of a condensed but short segment, rather than skimming through 100 pages of a book. In this respect, I really enjoyed the Chinese philosophers as I managed to get more out of it, while thinkers like Nietzsche did not really make an impact on me because there was just too much information that I could not process within one reading.
- n/a
- Neil Mehta is an amazing teacher. He helps us address really challenging concepts in class, but leaves us room to develop our own conclusions. He spurs us on to excellence in our writing, and offers valuable feedback on our essays in a timely manner. He also cares about our personal development, and spent a lot of time in class trying to teach us how to participate in group discussions. Biweekly blogposts are kind of annoying to do, but I can see their value.

Qualitative faculty evaluation

Below is a *complete, unedited* faculty evaluation based on classroom observation – the only such evaluation I have received as a professor:

Class observation of 1.5hr seminar for PPT#2, on the subject of Gandhi
Observation by Nick Tolwinski conducted on Monday April 7th, 2014 (2:15pm until 3:45pm).
Premeeting half an hour before class and postclass analysis done on Friday April 11th.
15 students present, 8 female, 7 male.

The class was arranged around one square table with the professor sitting among the students in order to prevent a center point. One student was assigned the role of scribe and his role was to take notes on the discussion recording the other student's comments on the whiteboard. At the end of the first half of the class, the scribe is asked to summarize the discussion, the notes are photographed and posted to the course blog. A second student takes over for the second half of class a scribe, repeating the same process.

The seminar started promptly at 2:15pm a tactic that clearly encourages students to be on time as only a couple of stragglers were a few minutes late. The first task for the students was to address a question posted on the blog by one of them. The course has a standing assignment where students are required to post questions and answers in response to the readings assigned for that week. At the start of the seminar, Neil chose one of the questions and asked the students to respond. Anshuman, the student who had posed the question on the blog was assigned to moderate the discussion.

The first half of the class was geared toward giving the students a chance to ask their own questions and attempt their own answers with minimal interference from the professor. The discussion progressed well, but it did tend toward a conversation between two students, Anshuman the discussion leader and Abel. Over time, other students took part and the professor encouraged some of the points to be taken up in more depth. Although, it should be added that the discussion leader Anshuman did an excellent job pausing the discussion and asking for a summary from the official scribe in order to stimulate the discussion.

The second half of class also focused on questions from the course blog, but despite also having a student discussion leader the professor took an active role in shaping the direction and content of the conversation. This appeared to stir more students into taking part. The discussion ranged over more of the reading bringing together a variety of Gandhi's beliefs. Most excitingly, it led to an animated examination of the need for corporeal punishment for children and adults with pro and anti positions argued strongly.

Assignment: During the seminar, the professor announced the paper topics for the final writing assignment. The paper topics came with a twist as the prompts were far too broad to address in a writing assignment forcing the students to first find a question that they could address and then proceeding to write the paper. I am curious as to how this will turn out, as it appears on the surface to be a great idea where students have to do some thinking **before** they start writing.

Participation: Of the fourteen students all but one participated. The one who did not was Pei Yun Chia an extremely shy student in my class as well. Two women in the class only spoke once and briefly but two of the men also spoke only twice and briefly. The rest of the

students participated freely with differing opinions of different length and depth. Both male and female, Singaporean and non participated.

In pre and post class analysis, the professor reports a recent downturn in participation as the semester comes to an end. I must second this point as students in my class have also slowed down as the long and hectic first academic year is concluding. (In the future, I would recommend peer evaluations to take place earlier in the semester.) Neil reports, that in previous classes the student directed discussions have involved more of the class and led to more animated discussion suggesting that this technique works well when students have more energy. Further, Neil reports that he has taken steps in his latest seminar to intervene more when the discussion becomes static.

Overall, the exercise of students directing their own discussion appeared to be less successful than the one where the professor intervened. There was a somewhat disappointing level of agreement that Gandhi was just nuts. The second part of the discussion was much more engaging, as students had to examine why they thought Gandhi was nuts and why perhaps some of the things they believe are just as nuts.

The professor was very good at pointing the students in the right direction without giving them the answers. The rapport was very good and the discussion though in the end heated did not become disrespectful. He also held the silence giving the students a chance to gather their thoughts and answer the question posed without jumping in himself. Another important lesson was that Neil affirmed and encouraged students who used the text to argue their points, citing textbased evidence as much better than simple conjecture. I thought this was a key learning goal as students had to think and read to make their points come across.

One general point for PPT is that seminars could include some discussion of the lectures during class time in order to stimulate attendance as reports suggest that lectures have been world class!

Writing skills: the master plan¹

[Note: I use this handout on the first day of my introductory philosophy course. It outlines the sequence of writing and reasoning exercises through which the class will progress over the semester.]

By the end of the semester, you will be able to write a sophisticated paper in which you state your position on a central philosophical question, defend it with an original argument, explain an objection to your argument by a thinker whom we have studied, and rebut that objection. This will be an impressive accomplishment.

As stepping stones to this final goal, you will progress through the following sequence of exercises and papers:

1. Recognizing **evidence** (claims which rationally support other claims) and diagramming simple arguments.
2. Distinguishing evidence from explanation and good evidence from bad evidence.
3. Identifying implicit claims.
4. **Signposting** (clearly indicating the structure of your ideas) within paragraphs.
5. Writing a **thesis statement** (the central argumentative claim of a work) and **topic sentences** (sentences indicating the purpose of a paragraph or section).
6. Understanding basic rules of grammar and style.

Paper 1: Interpret a central idea of a thinker whom we have studied, citing the text to support your claims.

7. Criticizing an argument via the only two rational methods: criticizing its claims or criticizing its inferences.
8. Understanding good and bad forms of argument involving “if ... then.”
9. Understanding two more good forms of argument: **argument by elimination** and **explanatory inference**.
10. Quoting texts effectively.

Paper 2: Interpret an argument of a thinker whom we have studied, citing the text to support your claims, and defend an objection to that argument.

11. Writing an introduction and a conclusion.

Paper 3: Interpret a pair of arguments for opposing conclusions from two thinkers whom we have studied, citing the texts to support your claims. State which conclusion you accept and which you reject. Identify precisely why the argument for the latter conclusion fails, carefully supporting your position with evidence.

You will regularly practice these skills in homework assignments and blog posts.

¹ I owe a large intellectual debt to Jay Garfield for his extensive and thoughtful suggestions on this handout.

Sample handout – Understanding evidence

Evidence for a claim is simply *a reason to believe that claim*. Dark clouds are evidence that it will rain; my dog’s wagging tail is evidence that he is happy; Professor Plum’s thumbprint on the murder weapon is evidence that he committed the crime.

Let’s come up with three pieces of evidence that this is a water bottle.

We can diagram evidential relationships. We will use numbers to represent specific claims and arrows to represent evidential support. For example, if “1” represents the claim that dark clouds are gathering, “2” represents the claim that it will rain, and “3” represents the claim that I should carry an umbrella, then we will represent their relationship like this:



We use certain words – *because, since, therefore, so, etc.* – to mark evidential relationships: “Since dark clouds are gathering, it will rain soon.” These words are among the many **signposts** that indicate relationships among ideas; we will talk about many more signposting expressions in future classes.

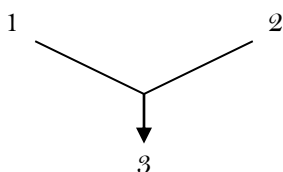
Let “1” represent the sentence that mice are square, and let “2” represent the sentence that elephants are round. Let’s diagram these two sentences:

Because mice are square, elephants are round.
Because elephants are round, mice are square.

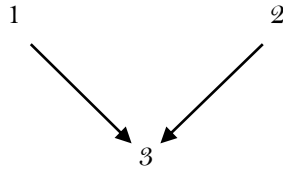
Sometimes several claims provide evidential support collectively but not individually. For example:

1. Amber says that this chemical is hydrogen peroxide.
2. Amber is an experienced chemist.
3. This chemical is hydrogen peroxide.

1 by itself is not evidence for 3. Similarly, 2 by itself is not evidence for 3. But 1 and 2 together are evidence for 3. We will diagram this as follows:



This is very different from the situation depicted below, in which 1 and 2 independently support 3:



Let's come up with plausible values for 1, 2, and 3 in the above diagram.

These exercises have been easy; it's time to try something more challenging. Try the next two exercises in small groups, putting your answers on the whiteboard.

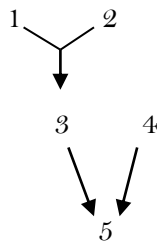
Hint: when you diagram an argument, always *look for the conclusion first*.

Exercise 1. Using the numbering system below, diagram the chain of reasoning in the following paragraph (which is poorly written and should not be taken as a model):

Everyone wants to be happy. But you can only achieve that goal by caring for others, since the selfish life is ultimately empty. So you should be altruistic. In addition, if you are altruistic, then other people will help you get what you want.

1. Everyone wants to be happy.
2. You can only achieve happiness by caring for others.
3. The selfish life is ultimately empty.
4. You should be altruistic.
5. If you are altruistic, then other people will help you get what you want.

Exercise 2. Write a sensible paragraph corresponding to the following diagram:



Sample Syllabi

Below are sample syllabi for five courses: *Mind and Matter*, *Knowledge and Its Scope, Objectivity and Morality*, *Contemporary Ethical Theory and Practice*, and *Introduction to Philosophy*. My actual syllabi include information about office hours, grading policies, attendance, participation, classroom etiquette, plagiarism, and the like. For brevity, I omit such details below.

Mind and Matter

The following syllabus is designed for an introductory or intermediate survey course in philosophy of mind. To suit departmental needs, I would gladly teach versions of this course with a greater emphasis on behaviorism, functionalism, intentionality, or philosophy of psychology. An advanced version of this course might include extended selections from books such as David Chalmers' *The Conscious Mind* or Daniel Dennett's *Sweet Dreams*.

The Mind-Body Problem

Week 1	David Armstrong, "The Causal Theory of the Mind" John Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs"
Week 2	René Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> , Meditation 6 Gilbert Ryle, "Descartes's Myth"
Week 3	J. J. C. Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes" (excerpts) Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" (excerpts)
Week 4	Brie Gertler, "In Defense of Mind-Body Dualism" Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia"
Week 5	Lewis, "What Experience Teaches" (excerpt) Daniel Dennett, "Quining Qualia" (excerpt)
Week 6	Gilbert Harman, "The Intrinsic Quality of Experience" Sydney Shoemaker, "The Inverted Spectrum," excerpt (pp. 357-372)
Week 7	Ned Block, "Inverted Earth" Colin McGinn, "Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?"
Week 8	Joseph Levine, "Materialism and Qualia: The Explanatory Gap" Daniel Dennett, <i>Sweet Dreams</i> (excerpt)

Intentionality

Week 9	Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning,'" excerpt (pp. 139-145) Fred Dretske, "A Recipe for Thought," in Chalmers 2002
Week 10	Ruth Millikan, "Biosemantics," in <i>White Queen Psychology and Other Essays for Alice</i> John Perry, "The Problem of the Essential Indexical"

Psychological Explanation

Week 11	Daniel Dennett, "Intentional Systems" Stephen Stich, "Folk Psychology"
Week 12	Hilary Putnam, "Brains and Behavior" Paul and Patricia Churchland, "Stalking the Wild Epistemic Engine"

Knowledge and Its Scope

The following syllabus is designed for an introductory or intermediate survey course in epistemology. I would also gladly teach versions of this course with a greater emphasis on the internalism/externalism debate or virtue epistemology.

Skepticism

- Week 1 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditations 1 and 2
Peter Unger, “An Argument for Skepticism”
- Week 2 Bertrand Russell, “The Existence of Matter”
G. E. Moore, “Proof of an External World”
- Week 3 Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (excerpt on induction)
Goodman, “The New Riddle of Induction”

Defining Knowledge

- Week 4 Plato, *Theaetetus*
A. J. Ayer, “Knowledge, Belief, and Evidence”
- Week 5 Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”
Keith Lehrer and Thomas Paxson, “Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief”
Richard Feldman, “An Alleged Defect in Gettier Counter-Examples”
- Week 6 Alvin Goldman, “A Causal Theory of Knowing”
Alvin Goldman, “What Is Justified Belief?”
- Week 7 Keith DeRose, “Solving the Skeptical Problem”
David Lewis, “Elusive Knowledge”

The Structure of Knowledge and Justification

- Week 8 Ernest Sosa, “The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge”
Roderick Chisholm, “The Myth of the Given”
- Week 9 Wilfrid Sellars, “Does Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?”
Donald Davidson, “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge”
- Week 10 Ernest Sosa, “Reflective Knowledge in the Best Circles”
Richard Feldman and Earl Conee, “Evidentialism”

Naturalized Epistemology

- Week 11 W. V. O. Quine, “Epistemology Naturalized”
Jaegwon Kim, “What is ‘Naturalized Epistemology?’”
- Week 12 Alvin Goldman, “Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Epistemology”
Hilary Putnam, “Why Reason Can’t Be Naturalized”

Classical Eastern and Western Philosophy

The following syllabus is designed for an introductory or intermediate survey course in classical Greek, Indian, and Chinese philosophy. It is inspired by the Philosophy and Political Thought course at Yale-NUS College, which all first-year students must take and which I helped design.

Classical Chinese Philosophy

Week 1	Confucius, <i>Analects</i> , excerpt Mencius, <i>Mengzi</i> , excerpt
Week 2	Xunzi, <i>Xunzi</i> , excerpt
Week 3	Laozi, <i>Dao De Jing</i> , excerpt
Week 4	Zhuangzi, <i>Zhuangzi</i> , excerpt

Classical Greek Philosophy

Week 5	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> Plato, <i>Meno</i>
Week 6	Plato, <i>Phaedo</i>
Week 7	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , book 1
Week 8	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , book 2

Classical Indian Philosophy

Week 9	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> , excerpt
Week 10	Śaṅkara, <i>Gītābhāṣya</i> , excerpt and Rāmānuja, <i>Gītābhāṣya</i> , excerpt
Week 11	<i>The Questions of King Milinda</i> , excerpt
Week 12	Śāntideva, <i>Bodhicaryāvatāra</i> , excerpt

Objectivity and Morality

The following syllabus is for an intermediate undergraduate course in meta-ethics. I would also be happy to design an introductory or advanced course of this sort. A historically-oriented version of such a course might include much more extensive selections from Hume and Kant; a version of the course with a contemporary orientation might instead include longer readings from books such as Allan Gibbard's *Thinking How to Live* or Richard Joyce's *The Myth of Morality*.

Realism and Anti-Realism

Week 1	John Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values" Peter Railton, "Moral Realism"
Week 2	Gilbert Harman, "Ethics and Observation" Nicholas Sturgeon, "Moral Explanations"
Week 3	Richard Joyce, <i>The Myth of Morality</i> , excerpt Richard Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist"
Week 4	Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism Defended" Russ Shafer-Landau, "Ethics as Philosophy"
Week 5	Charles Stevenson, "The Nature of Ethical Disagreement" David Brink, "Moral Disagreement"

Humeanism

Week 6	David Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals</i> (extended excerpt)
Week 7	Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons" Russ Shafer-Landau, "Moral Reasons"

Kantianism

Week 8	Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (extended excerpt)
Week 9	Philippa Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives" Christine Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reason"

Emotivism / Expressivism

Week 10	A. J. Ayer, "Critique of Ethics and Theology" Charles Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms"
Week 11	Gilbert Harman, "The Nature of Morality," chapter 3 Allan Gibbard, "The Reasons of a Living Being"
Week 12	Mark Schroeder, "What is the Frege-Geach Problem?" Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "Expressivism and Embedding"

Introduction to Philosophy

This syllabus is designed for a broad survey course introducing students to philosophy (several other syllabi in this portfolio are designed for more specialized introductory philosophy courses).

Knowledge

- Week 1 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditations 1 and 2
Peter Unger, “A Defense of Skepticism”
- Week 2 Bertrand Russell, “The Existence of Matter,”
G. E. Moore, “Proof of an External World”
- Week 3 Alvin Goldman, “A Causal Theory of Knowing”
David Lewis, “Elusive Knowledge”

God

- Week 4 Alvin Plantinga, “Is Belief in God Properly Basic?”
William Alston, “Perceiving God”
- Week 5 William Rowe, “The Ontological Argument”
Simon Blackburn, “Miracles and Testimony”
- Week 6 John Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence”
Richard Swinburne, “Why God Allows Evil”

Mind

- Week 7 David Armstrong, “The Causal Theory of the Mind”
John Searle, “Can Computers Think?”
- Week 8 J. J. C. Smart, “Sensations and Brain Processes”
Brie Gertler, “In Defense of Mind-Body Dualism”
- Week 9 Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”
Frank Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia”
- Week 10 David Lewis, “What Experience Teaches”
Daniel Dennett, “Quining Qualia” (excerpt)

Ethics

- Week 11 Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality*, Chapter 1
Nicholas Sturgeon, “Moral Explanations” (excerpt)
- Week 12 Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, Chapter 1
Carl Cohen, “The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research”