

PHIL 96W: College Composition Through the History of Philosophy

Instructor Information and Availability

Class Meetings:	MW 12:00 to 1:15pm, Calaveras Hall 123
Instructor:	Dr. Christina Bellon, Philosophy
Office Hours:	MW 10:00am-11:30am, and 2:00-3:00pm in MND 3010; also via messaging in Canvas, zoom sessions by appointment.
Contact:	MND 3010; Please keep communications within Canvas.
Availability:	Every effort is made to communicate with you quickly, effectively, and accurately. I take this as an important element of my responsibility to you. However, outside of office hours and on weekends, my response may be delayed.
Requirement:	Students are required to have a laptop or device from which they can access Canvas assignments during class periods.

Course Description

The Value of Philosophy

“Philosophy” means “love of wisdom.” The history of philosophy is a long conversation on the pursuit of wisdom. This course will summarize some of that journey from its recorded start to the contemporary period. By the end of the course, you will be able to define the different historical periods of philosophy as well as their key thinkers and works. You will also be able to analyze the dominant philosophical topics explored and texts written in each of those periods. By the end of the course, as your guide through this historical dialogue, I hope to make clear the value of continuing to pursue philosophical reflection and inquiry.

The Value of Writing and Reading in Philosophy

This course integrates philosophical inquiry with advanced college composition. Through close reading of key texts in the history of philosophy – from the Presocratics to Kant – students will build on both their introductory level understanding of philosophy and on their success in their College Composition I course (e.g.: ENGL 5 or equivalent) to further develop writing, research, and analytical skills grounded in the conventions of philosophical discourse. This course fulfills the College Composition II requirement by emphasizing writing as a process of inquiry, revision, and participation in disciplinary dialogue. Students will complete at least 6,000 words of formal and informal writing across.

Catalog Description

Introduction to the history of philosophy, emphasizing such themes as the foundations of knowledge, nature of reality, basis of a good life and a just society, existence of God, and the nature of self, tracing the development of these themes from antiquity to modernity.

Prerequisite(s): Completion of ENGL 5 or ENGL 5M OR ENGL 11 or ENGL 11M or

equivalent with a C- or better; sophomore standing (must have completed 30 units prior to registration).

Learning Outcomes

This course serves multiple purposes and has overlapping learning outcomes that introduce students to the history of philosophy in such a way that fulfills both the General Education Humanities requirement and the second semester composition graduation requirement.

Philosophy Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Distinguish the main historical traditions in Western philosophy, from Pre-Socratics to the Enlightenment.
2. Explain key philosophical concepts as they arise in the different historical periods, including knowledge, reality, reason, substance, identity, mind/soul, causation, experience, etc.
3. Summarize key texts in the history of philosophy.
4. Write clearly and cogently on a variety of topics in the history of philosophy.
5. Analyze philosophical problems of historical significance, including the mind-body problem, challenge of skepticism, relation of experience to knowledge, limitations of reason, relation of reason to passions, existence of God, the challenge of determinism, etc.

GE Area 3B: Lower Division Humanities Outcomes

[General Education Lower Division Humanities Outcomes \(GE 3B\)](#)

The learning objectives associated with 3B should focus on the human condition. Specifically, students completing 3B requirements should be able to:

- A. Demonstrate knowledge of the conventions and methods of the study of the humanities.
- B. Investigate, describe, and analyze the roles and effects of human culture and understanding in the development of human societies.
- C. Compare and analyze various conceptions of humankind.
- D. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the historical development of cultures and civilizations, including their animating ideas and values.

College Composition II Graduation Requirement

[College Composition II](#)

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate awareness of how disciplinary values influence writing approaches, audience awareness, and authorial purpose in philosophy.
2. Develop an understanding of the ways philosophical texts are written, researched, organized, and disseminated within the discipline.
3. Synthesize and analyze credible and relevant sources to support ideas for expository and analytic purposes across several genres appropriate to and evidenced across the history of philosophical writing.
4. Demonstrate use of conventions relative to philosophical writing, including argumentative structure, clarity of expression, and citation practices.

5. Construct texts in philosophical genres (e.g., analysis, dialogue, commentary) that communicate a controlling idea with clarity and fluency.
6. Demonstrate consistent control of written language in response to disciplinary conventions.

Textbook

Bellon, Christina M., *Thinking in Writing: A History of Philosophical Composition* (Sacramento, 2026). Available through Canvas.

Writing Requirements and Assessment

Students will complete at least 6,000 words of formal, informal, and revised writing, distributed across several assignments. Larger substantive projects will involve multiple drafts, peer feedback, and instructor review and feedback. Assessment will be based on content development, critical engagement with philosophical ideas, rhetorical awareness, and control of academic prose.

Philosophical Writing Guides and Standards

The philosophy Department has prepared some guidance for our expectations of student writing in the discipline. You can find the Department's writing guidelines here:

[Writing Guidelines](#)

[Grading Standards](#)

The national organization for professional philosophy, the American Philosophical Association, also provides [guidelines for non-sexist and inclusive language](#) expectations in the discipline.

Assignments

The following assignments comprise the whole of the requirements for this course. This course is based on a total of 130 available points. The Capstone ePortfolio assignment will prepare you for the Writing Placement for Juniors Assessment. [Undergraduate Writing Assessment Requirement | Sacramento State](#)

Assignment	Description	Learning Outcomes	Word Count	Point Value
Philosophical Reflections (low stakes, multiple formats; used for larger writing projects)	For each of the three historical periods, students will explore an assigned text that raises a philosophical problem and demonstrates a particular rhetorical mode (aphorism, dialogue, letter, meditation, essay, etc). These reflections will allow students to demonstrate content comprehension through summary, exposition, critique of the claims in the texts. Students will practice writing in different historically significant forms developing their voice, audience awareness, and familiarity with the historical and cultural context of the works. These pieces serve as prewriting for their drafts of the subsequent larger composition projects below.	PHIL: 1, 2, 3 GE3B: A, D Comp II: 1, 2, 3	Total: 2000 words (250 words x 6-8).	15 pts (2pts each). Weighted value = 10%

<p>Dramatic Dialogue Project on the Nature of Reality Or the Good Life</p>	<p>Working in teams of 2-3, students will collaborate to prepare an original dialogue exploring one theme or problem of concern in ancient philosophy. This builds on pre-writing reflections. Student groups draft the complete dialogue, engage in guided peer feedback, revision, and submission. Feedback provided with rubric and 2-3 written suggestions for improvement. Revision process includes short reflective memo indicating revision plan.</p>	<p>PHIL: 2, 4, 5 GE3B: B, C Comp II: 4, 5, 6</p>	<p>Total: 1000 words each Draft: 1200 words (each 300 words) Feedback: 250 words Revision Memo: 250 words Revision: 400 words (200 each)</p>	<p>25 pts Weighted value = 15%</p> <p>Complete Draft: 5pts Feedback: 5pts Revision Memo: 5 pts Final submission: 10pts</p>
<p>Meditation on Self Understanding</p>	<p>Working individually, students will write a meditation on the philosophical challenge of self-understanding, drawing on their writing reflections from the Medieval and early Enlightenment periods. The philosophical topics will include an exploration of the role of faith, reason, and sentiments/emotions and synthesis of several perspectives into a uniform argument in answer to the problem. Students will submit a complete draft and engage in feedback-revision before final submission. This project includes guided peer feedback, revision, and submission. Feedback provided with rubric and 2-3 written suggestions for improvement. Revision process includes short reflective memo indicating revision plan.</p>	<p>PHIL: 2, 4, 5 GE3B: A, B, C Comp II: 3, 5, 6</p>	<p>Total: 1500 words Draft: 1000 words Revision: 250 words Revision Memo: 250 words</p>	<p>25 pts Weighted value = 20%</p> <p>Complete Draft: 5pts Feedback: 5pts Revision Memo: 5pts Final submission: 10pts</p>
<p>Epistolary Exchange on the Limits of Knowledge from Experience (Enlightenment)</p>	<p>Working in teams of 2-3, students will collaborate to prepare an original exchange of letters between Hume, Du Chatelet, and Kant exploring the problem of causation as the limit of human experience, reason, and understanding. This builds on pre-writing reflections from medieval and enlightenment philosophers. Each student adopts the persona of one of the three philosophers to draft three letters each. As letters, students will do research on the biographical and contemporary cultural, socio-political conditions in each country (Scotland, France, Germany) of the time to lends</p>	<p>PHIL: 4, 5 GE3B: B, D Comp II: 3, 4, 6</p>	<p>Total: 1800 words each Draft three letters: 900 words (each letter 300 words) Revision: 300 words Revision Memo: 300 words</p>	<p>20 pts Weighted value = 15%</p> <p>Complete Draft: 5pts Revision Memo: 5 pts Final submission: 10pts</p>

	authenticity to letters between colleagues.			
ePortfolio Capstone	Students will choose one of their previous major assignments at least 1000 words, revise it according to feedback (400 words) to create a final version of at least 1200 words. They will also write a 1000 words reflection on their writing process through the semester, what they have learned, how their skills have improved, and how they will apply these in future courses. This ePortfolio is designed to be submitted for the WPJ upon completion of this course.	All PHIL All GE3B All Comp II	Total: 1600 Revision to original: 400 words Revision Memo: 200 words Reflection: 1000 words	30 pts Weighted value = 25% Revision: 10pts Revision Memo: 5pts Reflection: 15pts
Participation	Philosophy is a collaborative activity. Participation includes responding to in-class question prompts, engaging in productive dialogue with peers, and raising questions or objections that foster exploration and understanding, submitting a written thinking response, or written question to start the next class. You earn tokens by participating in class; your participation grade will depend on the number of tokens collected by the end of the semester.	All PHIL All GE3B All Comp II	None.	15 pts Weighted value = 15% Full pts >30 tokens. No pts <5 tokens.

Grading Scale

Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Developing Understanding	Needs Improvement	Not Yet Demonstrated
Demonstrates thorough understanding and skill beyond course-level expectations	Consistently meets course learning outcomes with solid understanding.	Shows partial understanding; approaching expectations with room to grow	Struggles to demonstrate key concepts or skills; needs targeted support	Has not yet shown evidence of understanding; major revisions or relearning needed
	B+ (87-89%)	C+ (77-79%)	D+ (67-69%)	F (<60%)
A (94-100%)	B (84-86%)	C (74-76%)	D (64-66%)	
A- (90-93%)	B- (80-83%)	C- (70-73%)	D- (60-63%)	

Course Policies

Respect for Diversity

Sacramento State is one of the most diverse universities in the United States, which is a big part of what makes it such a thriving and wonderful institution; this is a great benefit for all of us. This class will only be rich if everyone feels able to express their understanding of the course material and be heard by others. Because this is a philosophy class, and philosophy prompts us to think in

ways that may be unfamiliar, you might be unsure of expressing your thoughts and questions. We owe it to each other to encourage engagement by listening attentively and being willing to give each other space to explore in common. Respectful engagement also requires us to be attentive to the impact of our opinions, and how we express them, on others. Everyone has a responsibility to make the classroom environment a place where we can explore difficult matters.

Respect for Accessibility

Sacramento State is committed to ensuring an accessible learning environment where course or instructional content are usable by all students and faculty. If you believe that you require disability-related academic adjustments for this class (including pregnancy-related disabilities), please immediately contact Disability Access Center (DAC) to discuss eligibility. A current accommodation letter from DAC is required before any modifications, above and beyond what is otherwise available for all other students in this class, will be provided. Please be advised that disability-related academic adjustments are not retroactive.

Students requiring accommodation should arrange to see me privately after class or during office hours. DAC is located on the first floor of Lassen Hall 1008. Phone is 916-278-6955 and e-mail is sswd@csus.edu. For a complete listing of services and current business hours visit the [Disability Access Center Website](#).

Technology Component

All in-class writing and revision will be done in canvas with lockdown browser. Students are required to come to class with a laptop or device by which they can access Canvas.

Additionally, Canvas will be used for distribution of course materials and assignments, course calendars, announcements, and class notification options. It is your responsibility to ensure you have regular and reliable access to computing facilities sufficient to the needs of this course. This class has a hybrid Friday asynchronous component – this is managed through Canvas, as well. Please ensure you are available on Fridays though we do not have in-class meetings. Technical problems must be addressed with the Information Resources and Technology service desk servicedesk@csus.edu or (916) 278-7337.

Attendance and Late Assignments

Being present in class together is key to success, so please try to attend all class meetings. This course does not offer grade points for attendance. However, you will learn the most and be more confident with the material if you come to participate, contribute to the creation of a positive classroom experience, and be ready to learn from others and share what you have learned in turn. Electronic devices may only be used for in-class activities.

All assignments are due at the date and time specified in the assignment and in Canvas.

No extensions, no exceptions. It is your responsibility to know the due dates and to plan accordingly. Leaving an assignment until the day or two prior is risky and makes you more vulnerable than you already are to factors and events in the universe beyond your control!

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offenses which will not be tolerated in this class. The use of Quizlet, or similar websites, is strictly prohibited. Unauthorized use of AI tools is also strictly prohibited (see below). Assignments in which plagiarism or other forms of cheating are found will be graded at 0 (not just an F). Repeated or egregious (>20% of course grade value) violations of the university policy will result in an F in the course. ALL incidents of cheating and

plagiarism will be reported both to the Department Chair and to the Student Conduct Office in Student Affairs for possible further administrative sanction. *It is your responsibility to know and comply with the University's Academic Honesty Policy.*

Responsible Uses of AI

AI is everywhere and can be incredibly helpful at times. However, it can also be an easy shortcut that impedes learning. We are here to learn. Using AI to shortcut your development and refinement of these skills does you a disservice – it impedes your learning rather than supports it. For this reason, here are the expectations for your uses of AI tools in this course:

Authorized Uses of AI	Unauthorized Uses of AI
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammar or spell check to then make your own corrections. • Tutoring to support your learning (be careful about what is integrated and cite your sources): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Asking for suggestions on next steps when you get stuck or confused. ○ Seeking general information on a topic to aid in your understanding of that topic. ○ Seeking help with finding sources. • When specifically instructed to use AI for an assignment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking an AI to answer assignment prompt. • Asking an AI to answer a quiz or exam question. • Asking AI to create a first draft of your own essay or assignment. • Copying AI generated text and passing it off as your own work, whether an essay, paragraph, sentence, or phrase. Even phrases that you borrow from others may require citation. • Asking an AI to summarize a reading.

Unauthorized uses of AI will be treated as cheating to which the Academic Integrity Policy applies.

Title IX Statement

The University requires faculty and staff to report any personal disclosures of sexual misconduct including rape, dating/domestic violence and stalking to the [Title IX Coordinator](#). Students who do not wish to report their experience to me or the Title IX Coordinator may speak to someone confidentially by contacting [Student Health and Counseling Services](#).

Weekly Schedule

DATE	MODULE & READINGS	ASSIGNMENTS
Mon Jan 26	Module 0: Course Orientation & Introductions Review of syllabus, course policies, and introductions.	
Jan 28- Feb 4	Module 1: What is Philosophy and How Do We Write It? Read: Bellon, <i>Thinking in Writing: A History of Philosophical Composition</i> , Chapters 1 & 2. ePortfolio Baseline: Reflection on your writing.	ePortfolio Baseline. WA #1 Charitable Interpretation, in-class.
Fe 9-11	Module 2: The Presocratics and the Dao - What is Reality Made Of? Read: Bellon, Chapter 3.	WA #2 Aphorisms, in-class

Fe 16-18	Module 3: Socrates and Plato: Knowledge Through Dialogue Read: Bellon, Chapter 4.	WA #3 Dialogue Analysis, in-class.
Feb 23-25	Module 4: Aristotle and Confucius: Systematic Philosophy and the Good Life Read: Bellon, Chapter 5 Wed: In-class Dialogue mapping and draft submission.	Wed: Team draft of Dialogue. In class.
Mar 2-4	Module 5: Hellenistic Philosophy: Living Well in an Uncertain World Read: Bellon, Chapter 6 Wed: In-class Dialogue revision, memo, final submission.	Wed: Dialogue revision, memo, final submission. In class.
Mar 9-11	Module 6: Faith and Reason in Medieval Thought Read: Bellon, Chapter 7.	WA #4 Scholastic Argument, in-class.
Mar 16-18	Module 7: Women Philosophers: Finding Voice and Authority Read: Bellon, Chapter 8 ePortfolio check-in: Reflection on your writing.	ePortfolio Check-in. WA #5 Voice & Authority, in-class.
Mar 23-27	Spring Recess – Campus Closed, No Instruction	
Mar 30-Apr 1	Module 8: Montaigne and the Essay: Skepticism and Self-Examination Read: Bellon, Chapter 9	WA #6: Skepticism, in-class.
Mar 31	Cesar Chavez Day – Campus Closed, No Instruction	
Apr 6-8	Module 9: Rationalism - Descartes and Elisabeth of Bohemia Read: Bellon, Chapter 10 Mon: In-class draft of Meditation.	In-class draft of Meditation on Self-Understanding.
Apr 13-15	Module 10: Empiricism and Personal Identity: Locke, Cavendish, and Hume Read: Bellon, Chapter 11 Wed: In-class Revision and Submission.	In-class revision and submission of Meditation on Self-Understanding.
Apr 20-22	Module 11: Science, Induction, and Reason’s Limits: Du Châtelet, Voltaire, and Hume Read: Bellon, Chapter 12 ePortfolio check-in: Reflection on your writing.	ePortfolio Check-in. WA #7 Philosophical Objections, in-class.
Apr 27-Apr 29	Module 12: Critical Philosophy: Kant’s Synthesis Read: Bellon, Chapter 13	WA #8 Synthesis, in-class.
May 4-6	Mon: In-class drafting of Epistolary Exchange Wed: In-class revision & of Epistolary Exchange	In-class submission of Epistolary Exchange
May 11-13	Module 13: Reflecting on Philosophy and Writing Read: Bellon, Chapter 14 Wed: ePortfolio Preparation, Revision Memo, draft Reflective Statement.	ePortfolio draft revision memo, reflective statement.
May 18-21	FINALS WEEK ePortfolio Completion and submission, in-class. Attendance is mandatory!	Completion and Submission of ePortfolio.