

Why? Argumentation in Theory and Practice

Bachelor of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Syllabus from 09 September 2026

Instructor

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 16–17h, Bertoldstr. 17, Room 01.071.

Please make an appointment with Silvia Stößer (silvia.stoesser@ucf.uni-freiburg.de).

Times and Rooms

Only from 7 January – 19 February 2027 (Block II)

Thursdays, 10-12h, KG I HS 1108.

Course Description

Like children, scholarly work is driven by why-questions—and by giving answers to these questions. More than that: The structure and content of academic texts should answer why-questions: it should give arguments for the concepts used or discarded, the positions defended or attacked, for the interpretations advanced or undermined. The same holds true of essays, term papers and virtually any text students are asked to write at the university. However, it is surprisingly difficult to give good—sound, easy to understand—arguments. It is even harder to come up with a structure for texts that supports the arguments given in it.

This class therefore aims to help students with recognizing, reconstructing and crafting arguments, from the miniscule detail in a sentence to the overall structure of a whole text. It offers a mixture of (a lot of) exercises and (some) theoretical foundations.

General Reading

Harvard Writing Center (n.d.): *Strategies for Essay Writing*,

<https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/strategies-essay-writing>.

Lee, Siu-Fan (2017): *Logic. A Complete Introduction*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Ernest (2009 [2000]): *Meaning and Argument. An Introduction to Logic Through Language*. 2nd ed. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Kane, Robert (ed.) (2002): *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*. Oxford University Press.

Watson, Gary (ed.) (1982): *Free Will*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Learning Goals

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

- reconstruct arguments from texts, assess their soundness and craft sound argument for their own texts,
- have a solid understanding of basic argumentation theory,
- and live a better—examined—life (bonus points for knowing what that means).

Attendance

Standard LAS attendance policies apply. Generally, students should inform the instructor about their absence ahead of time, if possible. Students can miss **one session** in a workgroup without having to give specific reasons. Students may miss another **one session** if they hand in the necessary proof defined in the general LAS attendance guidelines (see [ILIAS Info Board](#)). In this case, instructors may ask students to prepare make-up work.

Note that you are expected to arrive punctually for workgroups and the lecture. Presuming that your time is more valuable than everybody else's time is simply arrogant, if not rude.

Assessment and Assignments

Pass/fail assignments: active participation in class, fulfillment of three tasks (see below).

Course Outline/Schedule

#	Date	Topic	Reading/Task
1	07.01.2027	Course Overview and Organisation	Plato : <i>Protagoras</i> , 309a–314c.
2	14.01.2027	Basic Ideas from Logic and Argumentation Theory	Siu-Fan Lee (2017): <i>Logic</i>, Chapter 1 (“What Is Logic?”) Task: Upload an example of a good argument from a text of your other classes (from any semester). Optional: Catarina Dutilh Novaes (2021): “You can’t argue with that!”
3	21.01.2027	An Argument From the Debate About Free Will	Peter van Inwagen (1975): “The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism” In Class: Gerald Harrison (2011): “Frankfurt’s Refutation of the Principle of Alternative Possibilities” Optional: Harry Frankfurt (1969): “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”
4	28.01.2027	Kinds of Arguments	Task: Groups prepare one of the following texts Henrik Walter (2011): “Contributions of Neuroscience to the Free Will Debate” Peter F. Strawson (2008 [1962]): “Freedom and Resentment”
5	04.02.2027	Bad Arguments & Fallacies	James Lenman (n.d.): “How to Write a Crap Philosophy Essay: A Brief Guide for Students.” Siu-Fan Lee (2017): <i>Logic</i>, Chapter 3 (“Informal Fallacies”), 63–76 and 94–105.
6	11.02.2027	Argumentation as Structure	Simon Rippon (2008): “A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper” Task: Bring an introduction from one of your own term papers/essays that gives an overview of the essay/term paper.

Full Bibliography

- Dutilh Novaes, Catarina (2021): "You can't argue with that!". In: Mareen Sie and Bart Engelen (eds.), *Second Thoughts. First Introductions to Philosophy* Tilburg: Tilburg University Press.
- Frankfurt, Harry G. (1969): Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility. In: *The Journal of Philosophy* 66 (23), 829–839.
- Harrison, Gerald (2011): Frankfurt's Refutation of the Principle of Alternative Possibilities In: Michael Bruce and Steven Barbone (eds.), *Just the Arguments: 100 of the Most Important Arguments in Western Philosophy*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 123–124.
- Lee, Siu-Fan (2017): *Logic. A Complete Introduction*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Lenman, James (n.d.): How to Write a Crap Philosophy Essay: A Brief Guide for Students. <(The original website is down but the paper is floating on the net. Just google it.)>.
- Plato (1997): *Complete Works*. Ed. by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis, IN: Hachette.
- Rippon, Simon (2008): A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper. *Harvard College Writing Center*, <http://hwpi.harvard.edu/files/hwp/files/bg_writing_philosophy.pdf>.
- Strawson, Peter F. (2008 [1962]): Freedom and Resentment. In: ders., *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*. London: Routledge, 1–28.
- van Inwagen, Peter (1975): The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism. In: *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 27 (3), 185–199.
- Walter, Henrik (2011): Contributions of Neuroscience to the Free Will Debate: From random movement to intelligible action. In: Robert Kane (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* Oxford University Press, 515–529.