

# Introduction to Epistemology

## COURSE

MWF 2:30-3:20  
College of Arts & Sciences  
725 Comm. Ave., Room 221

## INSTRUCTOR

Susan Kennedy  
Ph.D Candidate, Philosophy Dept.  
[skenn@bu.edu](mailto:skenn@bu.edu)

## OFFICE HOURS

Monday 12-2  
School of Theology  
745 Comm. Ave., Room 502

## TOOLS & MATERIALS

### Blackboard

Our class has a Blackboard site that contains the syllabus, assignments, and other course-related materials. You can log in to our Blackboard page at: <http://learn.bu.edu>

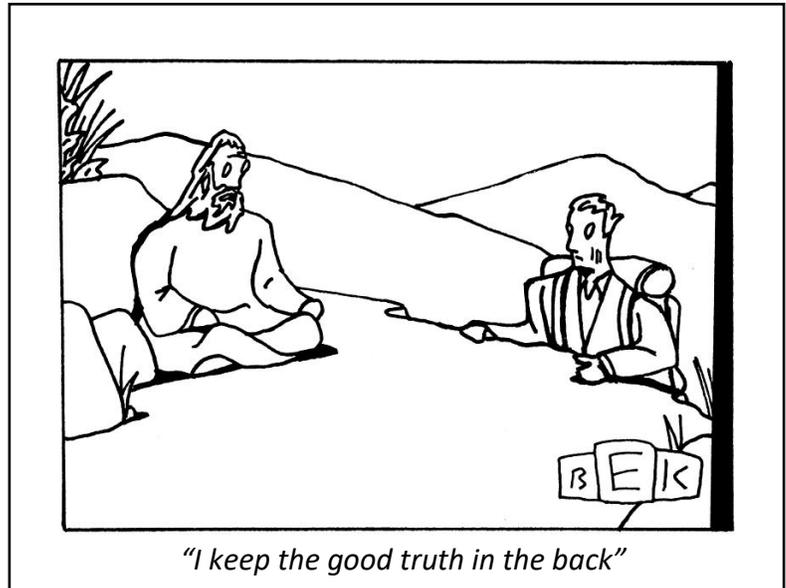
### Books

Purchase or rent the following, in print or electronic edition:

- Nagel, Jennifer. *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

### Additional Readings

All other readings for this course will be provided on the Blackboard site.

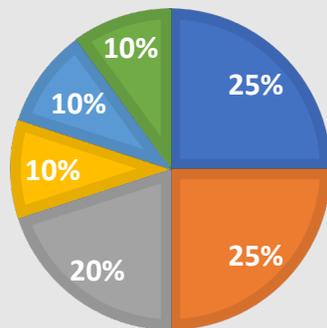


## Welcome to WR 120 G7

What is knowledge? How can we be sure that we are living in reality rather than a dream? When are we justified in our beliefs? How is one's social identity relevant to the pursuit of knowledge? In this course you will be introduced to Epistemology, the branch of philosophy that specializes in addressing such questions. We will explore these questions about knowledge and more by reading famous philosophers such as Plato, René Descartes, Jennifer Nagel and Miranda Fricker. Our aim will be to launch a careful and critical investigation into knowledge that will strip away some of its mystery and provide you with an understanding of some of the influential work in the field.

During this first-year Writing Seminar, you will cultivate skills and habits of mind essential to your academic success and to your future personal, professional, and civic life. You will learn methods for using sources effectively and responsibly as well as how to incorporate these into informed, well-developed pieces of writing.

## GRADE SUMMARY



- Academic Essay 1: 25%
- Academic Essay 2: 25%
- Alternative Genre/ Op-Ed: 20%
- Oral Presentations: 10%
- Short Exercises: 10%
- Portfolio: 10%

Your final grade may be adjusted up or down 1/3 of a letter grade to account for participation. Each absence beyond two may lower your final grade by 1/3 of a letter grade.

### SHORT EXERCISES

These are low-stakes assignments and activities that are designed to help you make progress on your graded, major assignments. They will not receive explicit grades, but you will receive credit for completing them on time.

### METACOGNITION

You will have opportunities to reflect on your reading and writing practices. The self-assessment you write at the beginning of the semester will take stock of your writing skills and establish personal goals for the semester. You will also reflect on your experiences as you complete each major writing assignment, ultimately leading to a final reflective essay in your portfolio.

## COURSE GOALS

- Read a range of genres with understanding, appreciation, and critical judgment
- Express yourself orally; converse thoughtfully about complex ideas
- Craft responsible, considered, and well-structured written arguments
- Plan, draft, and revise efficiently and effectively; help your peers do the same by responding productively to their work
- Reflect on reading, writing, and editing practices

## Assignments & Activities

- Ungraded exercises and drafts (on time and complete)
- Academic essay 1 (approx. 1,500 words)
- Academic essay 2 (approx. 2,000 words)
- Alternative Genre/ Op-Ed (approx. 750 words)
- Oral Presentation (5-7 minutes)
- Portfolio
- Participation in class activities and discussions

## Policies

### Format and Submission of Assignments

Assignments should be carefully proofed. Written assignments should be formatted according to APA Style. All assignments should be submitted on Blackboard.

### Late and Missed Assignments

You are allotted a time bank of two days that can be used in 24-hour units to extend the deadline of one or two of your graded assignments. This eliminates the need to request extensions and allows flexibility in managing your workflow. After you use up your time bank, graded assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade each day they are late.

### Email

Email should be carefully proofed, with a subject heading, salutation (e.g., "Hi Susan"), valediction (e.g., "See you in class"), and your name. For the appropriate level of formality, use my emails to you as a guide.

## RESOURCES

### CAS Writing Center

The [CAS Writing Center](#) (100 Bay State Road, 3rd floor, with a satellite location at Mugar Library) offers one-on-one consultations for students to discuss their work for WR courses with well-trained writing consultants. Whether you consider yourself a strong writer or a weak one, you can benefit from meeting with a consultant.

The CAS Center for Writing is open Monday through Friday. Hours for the current semester are posted on the website below. While the center accepts walk-in visits, you are strongly encouraged to reserve an appointment in advance. Because of the high demand for consultations, students are limited to one reservation per week. Reserve an appointment via the website or by calling 617-358-1500.

### Accessibility

If there are circumstances that might affect your performance in this course, speak with me so we can develop a plan to satisfy both your learning needs and the course requirements. [Disability Services](#) is the office responsible for assisting students with disabilities (physical or mental). Whether or not you have a documented disability, many support services are available at BU.

## Policies, cont'd

### Attendance

You may miss two classes without penalty. Save your free absences for when you need them. Each absence beyond two may lower your final grade 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g., *B* becomes *B-*). Five or more absences will be grounds for an *F*. Habitual tardiness (more than three times) may also lower your grade one-third of a letter grade. If you have a special obligation that will require you to miss several classes, please talk with me at the beginning of the semester. Please note: missed conferences will be counted as absences.

### Engagement

The success of this seminar depends on your participation. Come prepared to ask questions, offer ideas, and listen and respond to your fellow classmates productively and respectfully. Phones should not be used in class. Laptops may be used only for specified activities. If this policy presents problems with notetaking, let me know.

### Chosen Name and Gender Pronouns

This course aims to be an inclusive learning community that supports students of all gender expressions and identities. While class rosters are provided to instructors with students' legal names, please let me know if you would like to be addressed by a different name than that listed on StudentLink. You are also invited to tell me early in the semester which set of pronouns (she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/their/theirs, etc.) you feel best fits your identity.

### Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is the passing off of another's distinctive words or ideas as your own. Cases will be handled in accordance with BU's [Academic Conduct Code](#). ***Penalties can range from failing an assignment to expulsion from the university.*** In this class we will discuss conventions for using and citing sources. If you have any questions about plagiarism, please speak with me.

## Course Schedule

Note: This schedule is subject to change based on the needs of the class. Changes will be announced in class and will be posted online.

### Module 1: COURSE FOUNDATIONS

In the first few weeks of the semester, you will learn the basic vocabulary of philosophers and start exploring key issues in epistemology. Short exercises are designed to help you practice effective reading strategies and systematic note-taking. We will focus on analyzing and understanding sources, critical evaluation, planning and drafting papers, and revising in an effective, efficient way.

Date	Class Focus	Readings Due	Assignments Due
<b>Week 1</b>			
W 9/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implicit Bias &amp; Stereotype threat</li> <li>• Assign Self-Assessment</li> </ul>		
F 9/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Epistemology – Who cares?</li> </ul>	Chapter 1 Introduction, Nagel pp. 1-12	
<b>Week 2</b>			
M 9/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close-reading exercise - René Descartes – 1<sup>st</sup> Meditation (In-Class)</li> <li>• Assign “Claim and Key Words” exercise</li> </ul>	Chapter 2 Scepticism, Nagel pp. 12-30	<b>Self-Assessment</b>
W 9/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review Claim and Key Words exercise</li> </ul>	René Descartes – 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> Meditations	<b>Claim and Key Words Exercise</b>
F 9/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quoting and Paraphrasing Sources</li> </ul>	Barry Stroud – “Problem of the External World”	
<b>Week 3</b>			
M 9/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quoting and Paraphrasing Sources, cont’d</li> </ul>	Hilary Putnam – “Brains in a Vat”	
W 9/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Argumentation: Planning your draft</li> </ul>	Robert Nozick – “Experience Machine”	
F 9/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing an Introduction</li> </ul>	“Epistemic Self Indulgence” - Battaly	
<b>Week 4</b>			
M 9/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-class peer feedback using “Big 5” worksheet</li> </ul>		<b>First Draft</b>
W 9/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revising your draft</li> </ul>	Chapter 3 – Rationalism and Empiricism, Nagel pp. 30-45	
F 9/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close-reading exercise – Plato’s Thaetetus (In-Class)</li> </ul>	Selections - Thaetetus	

## Module 2: ACADEMIC WRITING USING MULTIPLE SOURCES

In this module, you will build on the critical evaluation skills you practiced in the first module by learning how to acknowledge and respond to objections as well as integrate multiple sources into your paper. Now that you have been familiarized with the problem of skepticism, you will learn about different accounts of the nature of knowledge as well as theories of epistemic justification.

Date	Class Focus	Readings Due	Assignments Due
<b>Week 5</b>			
M 10/1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Close-reading exercise cont'd – Plato's Thaetetus (In-Class)</li> </ul>		<b>Final Draft and Meta-Cognitive work for portfolio</b>
W 10/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" – Edmund Gettier (In-Class)</li> </ul>	Chapter 4 – The Analysis of Knowledge, Nagel pp. 46-59	
F 10/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contemporary debate in Epistemology – A matter of perspective</li> <li>Assign "Claim and Criticism" exercise</li> </ul>	Chapter 5 – Internalism and Externalism, Nagel pp. 60-71	
<b>Week 6</b>			
T 10/9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-class outline: Bonjour</li> <li>Assign 2<sup>nd</sup> Academic Essay</li> </ul>	Laurence Bonjour – "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge"	<b>Claim and Criticism 1</b>
W 10/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summarizing sources cont'd</li> </ul>	Alvin Goldman – "Internalism Exposed" Sections I-III	<b>Claim and Criticism 2</b>
F 10/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sign-up for conference times for 10/15-10/19</li> </ul>	Alvin Goldman – "Internalism Exposed" Sections IV-VIII	
<b>Week 7</b>			
M 10/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conferences Begin</li> <li>Mapping the debate</li> </ul>	Conee and Feldman - "Internalism Defended"	<b>First Draft - Outline</b>
W 10/17		Pryor – Analysis of Bonjour	
F 10/19		Part V Intro – Sosa	
<b>Week 8</b>			
M 10/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-class peer review</li> </ul>		<b>Second Draft</b>
W 10/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sentence-level revisions and proofreading strategies</li> </ul>	Quine – "Epistemology Naturalized"	
F 10/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction to social epistemology</li> </ul>	Chapter 6 – Testimony, Nagel pp. 72-86	

### Module 3: GENRE AND AUDIENCE

In this module we will shift focus to individuals embedded in a social world. For your final assignment you will write an op-ed that draws connections between the course content and current events.

Date	Class Focus	Readings Due	Assignments Due
<b>Week 9</b>			
M 10/29	•	“Knowledge in a Social World” –Alvin Goldman	<b>Final Draft and Metacognition</b>
W 10/31	•	“Testimony: Acquiring Knowledge from Others”- Lackey	
F 11/2	• Assign short exercise	Goldman “Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust?”	
<b>Week 10</b>			
M 11/5	• “Philosophy Bites” Podcast with Miranda Fricker	“Testimonial injustice” - Fricker	<b>Short Summary Exercise</b>
W 11/7	•	“Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types” - Alcoff	
F 11/9	• Intellectual Arrogance, Silencing and Ignorance	“Calm Down, Dear” - Tanesini	
<b>Week 11</b>			
M 11/12	• Epistemic Violence and Silencing •	“Tracking Epistemic Violence” - Dotson	
W 11/14	• Gender and Race	“Gender and Race” - Haslanger	
F 11/16	• Race	“White Ignorance” – Charles Mills	<b>Due First Draft</b>
<b>Week 12</b>			
M 11/19	• Transcript from Anita Hill v. Clarence Thomas hearings	Anita Hill “How to get the Kavanaugh Hearings Right”	
W 11/21	Thanksgiving Recess		
<b>Week 13</b>			
M 11/26	• Assign oral presentations	Myisha Cherry podcast with Linda Alcoff Ep.8 “Whiteness”	
W 11/28	•	Myisha Cherry - TV interview	
F 11/30	In-class workshop on Editorials		
<b>Week 14</b>			
M 12/3			<b>Oral Presentations</b>
W 12/5			<b>Oral Presentations</b>
F 12/7			<b>Oral Presentations</b>
<b>Week 15</b>			
M 12/10			<b>Oral Presentations</b>
W 12/12	<b>FINAL PROJECT AND PORTFOLIOS DUE</b>		