



PHILOSOPHY STUDENT SURVIVAL GUIDE

HOW TO STUDY PHILOSOPHY

The study of philosophy, like the sciences, deals with the creation and refutation of carefully constructed theories. Unlike the sciences, however, it is not so much the theory that matters but rather, the argument that backs it.

Here are some helpful hints to get ahead:

- Take notes on the author's conclusions as well as the author's arguments for these conclusions. Tracking the conclusions is clearly important, but without a special effort it's very easy to fall into the habit of tracking nothing but the conclusions. In philosophy we are concerned with conclusions roughly to the extent that they are well-supported. Moreover, your understanding of the book is vastly truncated if you only know its conclusions.
- Finding the argument for a given conclusion is not easy and often doesn't come with much completeness on the first or even the second reading. This is one reason to take notes on your understanding of the argument, as this understanding emerges. It would be a shame to lose such hard-won knowledge.
- Take notes on the important passages, terms, claims, and arguments even if you don't understand them. You will increase your chances of understanding them later if you draw explicit attention to them in your notes.
- Notes should be a safe zone where you can explore your own uncertainties, different readings of the text, implications of the author's position, and questions that these raise in your own mind. They shouldn't merely record the results of your understanding, but should become part of the process of understanding.

HOW TO ORGANIZE YOUR TIME FOR SUCCESS

By the time you write your first mid-term of the academic year, you have most likely experienced the frantic scrimmage to somehow read and retain chapter upon chapter of philosophical text. From then on, you begin to learn that if you want to save yourself from what seems to be an impossible feat, you must start early!

Philosophy is a study that involves reading and a lot of it! Although this might seem exhausting right now, philosophy is a very fascinating and enjoyable subject to study. However, you'll only appreciate it after you start reading! Yes the readings are often very long, but you will find yourself engaged with



arguments and moved by differing opinions. When you find that you can enjoy the text, time will go much faster!

One way to cut down on study time is to read the chapters you will be discussing in class *before* the day of class. This way, if you didn't understand some part of it, you will be able to ask during the lecture. If you put off reading the text, you will find that you don't remember the helpful hints from the lecture as well as you had hoped you would.

If you have a philosophy course load of three or four courses, you might find that you will be writing an essay every week. Fear not! Get a calendar in the first week of classes and mark all due dates for your different assignments as per your class syllabi. Give yourself at least three days for editing. Editing is everything! If you don't give yourself time to edit, or leave the essay to the night before it is due, you will likely be unhappy with your grade.

A secret best shared is that your professors are very helpful! Approach them with a draft of your essay about a week before it's due. If you've missed the mark, they can help get you back on track.

HOW TO GET THE HELP YOU ARE LOOKING FOR

If you've never approached your professors before, you might find asking for help or guidance rather intimidating. What you might not think of is that your professors have all been students too! In fact, introducing yourself to your professors and asking questions when you don't understand a concept are all ways to make important connections. You never know when you might need a reference letter for graduate school.

Here are some effective ways to get the academic help you are looking for:

- Find out if there is an advisor who handles the type of questions you might have. For example, if you are wondering when to declare your Major in Philosophy, you will need to approach the Director of Undergraduate Studies.
- If you have a question regarding course material, approach the course's instructor or teaching assistant. They are your best bet if you need clarification because they are the experts.
- Once you know who to go to, start with an email. Email your advisor/professor/teaching assistant and ask your question. If your question is too long to ask via email, request to see them in their office hours. Most professors will have office hours and if they do not, they will likely set up an appointment.
- When you go to meet with your advisor/professor/teaching assistant, remember that his or her time is limited. Prepare your questions beforehand and limit them to 3 or 4. It is better to ask a few questions every now and then than to ask all your questions in one sitting. This way, your professor will notice that you are really trying to do well!



TOP 10 “DON'TS”

The top 10 things to avoid in order to be successful are:

1. Don't start papers and assignments the night before they are due. Philosophy papers need to be both accurate and concise. The fatigue from staying up all night to finish the paper will most likely result in rambling.
2. Don't write papers without providing a thesis statement! You will be surprised how much a simple thesis statement can impact your grade!
3. Don't email your professors for help the night before an assignment is due. If everyone in your class is doing the same, there is little chance that your questions will be answered.
4. Don't miss classes or discussion sections! Philosophy lectures, unlike those in math, cannot be avoided in the hope that the text book will explain everything on its own! The lectures you attend will be where most of your understanding of the course will come from.
5. Don't let an entire month go by before you start the assigned readings. You will understand the readings better if you have already done them before class. Some readings can be long and you may never catch up if you've created a backlog.
6. Don't make any assumptions about course or graduation requirements. Always ask if you don't know! Every year several of our faculty members serve as advisors, and it is their job to answer your questions regarding your degree and graduation. If you don't think you have enough courses to graduate, make an appointment!
7. Don't let stress get in the way of your academic success. If you find that you are unable to focus or would like a counselor to talk to, visit www.students.ubc.ca/livewelllearnwell. There is help for everyone.
8. Don't let competition bring you down. Competition is everywhere, but be kind to yourself. Let it do nothing else but act as a motivator for success.
9. Don't burn out! Doing lots is great but be strategic and choose courses/activities that will benefit your degree and future career path. Anything more should be for pleasure.
10. Don't sit on the sidelines. University life is also about making connections and gaining real-world skills. Join a co-op program, take a term abroad, take part in the Philosophy Student Association, or attend weekly colloquia. There are many opportunities to make the most of your academic life. When you graduate, you will have nothing more than the knowledge you gain and the connections you make to start your career with. Don't miss out!