FUN QUESTION: “This page is intentionally left blank,” is a false statement about the first page of your syllabus. But it’s a true statement about flyleaf pages in your texts which are blank and intentionally blank. It’s true for the page / screen on which you’ll write your essay for PHIL 110-A: It’s blank, and you intend it to stay blank until you’re ready. BUT, if you put off writing, does procrastination mean it’s intentionally left blank? If you avoid writing about a painful subject, do you intentionally leave the page blank? The mind has all sorts of blank pages: cognitive place-holders, swaths of ignorance, patches of denial, zones of confusion, and playgrounds of curiosity. Which of your own pages are intentionally left blank?

Welcome to “What Can We Know?” Philosophy 110-A

What Can We Know? Fall 2016
10:30 a.m. – 12:10 pm Tuesday and Thursday
In Lindner (AVAS), Room 204

Instructor: Dr. Martin Fowler
Office: Spence pavilion (Room 114) in Academic Village
Phone: 336 278 5250 E-mail: fowlerm@elon.edu.

Prof. Fowler’s Office hours: - Fall 2016 - Tues: 10:00 am – 10:30 am (in Lindner 204), Tues. 2:10 pm – 3:10 pm, Wed. 3:20 pm – 4:10 pm, Thurs. 2:10 – 3:10 pm

This course introduces you to major ways in which philosophers have understood “knowledge.” We’ll explore questions addressed by their influential theories and frameworks about knowledge:

1. What counts as truth? Well-tested scientific claims, general common sense, how the world truly feels to you, and spiritual wisdom; all these claim to engage truth.
2. When should one doubt? Doubt and skepticism can protect the integrity of knowledge, but these same cautions can also make people afraid to risk knowing.
3. Why is knowledge taken more seriously than a hunch, guess or opinion? What makes content, information, or even truth count as “real knowledge”? What’s guaranteed?
4. What are your standards for what you are willing to believe? Whether you’re credulous or cynical, what standards do you honor to say, “I believe” or “I don’t believe?”
5. What are your best standards for claiming to know something? On what standards you rely when you claim to know, admit ignorance, or justifiably claim that you’re not yet sure?

In this course, you will achieve three goals:

1. You will learn and test four philosophical approaches to the nature of knowledge: commonsense empiricism, rationalism, radical skepticism, and mindfulness.
2. Through discussion, questions, writing, and new experiences, you will work out better, more thoughtful, and interesting answers to your own questions about knowledge.
3. You will learn how to participate in an enjoyable discussion about philosophical ideas, with greater discipline and depth than when you began this course. That’s a promise.

**Required Texts.** “What Can We Know?” has 5 texts. The Campus Bookstore may not have a text when you need it. You can purchase or rent online new or used copies of a text through amazon.com and other outlets. Plato’s dialogues and Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy* are online. Bring the text to class when we discuss it, in your hand or in your laptop.


**IN OCTOBER,** we read Plato’s *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo* (Hackett) (2nd Edition, 2002) ISBN-10: 0872206335 ISBN-13: 978-0872206335. Note: You can find many online versions of Plato’s dialogues, so access is no problem. Take the time necessary to read the original text several times. Take notes on what you read as you try to understand difficult philosophical ideas. Have a copy with you in class for our discussions.

**IN NOVEMBER,** we read Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy* (Hackett, 2011) ISBN: 0872204200. As with Plato’s dialogues, you can find online translations of Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Please do the assigned reading before you come to class. Bring the text to class for our discussions.


We will explore four frameworks within which philosophers have tried to understand knowledge, belief, truth, doubt, and certainty:

- **Commonsense empiricism, rationalism, radical skepticism, and mindfulness**

  **Commonsense Empiricism** is where we start when we think about what counts as knowledge. We look here FIRST for familiar and trustworthy standards to guide believing and knowing. We trust our experience of the world unless we encounter a compelling reason to doubt. In commonsense empiricism, people trust their senses, conceding that illusions and biases skew and mislead, but determined nonetheless to make the best of it, for, within commonsense empiricism, basic shared experience of the world seems the obvious place – maybe the only place – to find credible knowledge.

  We will study portions of Theodore Schick and Lewis Vaughn’s text *How to Think About Weird Things* (7th edition, McGraw-Hill, 2013), and the Introduction from Bertrand Russell’s
Skeptical Essays (1928) entitled “The Value of Skepticism.” We will read essays from David Hume’s classic Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748), and apply these ideas to defend, and take the measure of, commonsense empiricism. Schick and Vaughn list “weird things,” such as the paranormal, conspiracy theories, space aliens, and fad diets. They argue that commonsense empiricism and science show these weird claims to be unjustified and groundless.

It’s easier to criticize a belief than to prove that a belief is true. It’s easier to spot an argument’s mistakes than to make a good argument. It’s easier to presume standards of belief and knowledge, which “everybody knows,” than to explain why those standards are good enough for a rational person. Schick and Vaughn introduce you to thinking skills such as discerning and evaluating evidence, and avoiding fallacies. We will use these skills to map the boundaries of commonsense empiricism. David Hume (1711-1776) and Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) are excellent spokesmen for this framework. They have no patience for lazy and sloppy thinking. Selections from their works are posted on our course website as our assigned reading.

Rationalism After Fall Break, we explore two fundamental challenges to commonsense empiricism. The first is Rationalism. We find rationalism in the dialogues of Plato (430-350 BCE), including Meno, Euthyphro, selections from the Republic, and the Apology. These ancient texts introduce you to Plato’s ideas about apprehending ideal Forms beyond sensory experience, and which make experience itself possible. In Plato’s dialogues, you’ll also meet Plato’s friend and teacher: Socrates. At times Socrates speaks for himself. Other times, he sounds like Plato.

We then explore a 17th century form of rationalism in René Descartes’ Meditations on First Philosophy (1641). Descartes’ method of knowing is based on deduction. He promises trustworthy certainty. If you like that, maybe you are a “Cartesian” and don’t know it. We’ll evaluate Platonic and Cartesian objections to the more modest and cheerfully open-ended empiricism of David Hume and later empiricists. We’ll learn how empiricists object to the rationalism proposed by Plato and Descartes.

ARE YOU SKEPTICAL?

Radical Skepticism. Another challenge to common sense empiricism, rationalism, and confidence about knowledge is radical skepticism. Descartes wanted certainty and knowledge foundations. Ironically, his Meditations contain the classic statement of radical skepticism. Platonic and Cartesian skepticism undercut commonsense empiricism and set standards for differently grounded knowledge. This skepticism became more influential than their respective claims that true knowledge is clear, distinct, certain, and owes nothing to empirical experience. Timothy Morton’s “The End of the World” from Hyperobjects, shows that radical skepticism is alive for 21st century folks (21sters).
Mindfulness. While we consider commonsense empiricism, rationalism, and radical skepticism, we'll test all three approaches to knowledge within the practical framework of *mindfulness*. This means “being in touch with your inner and outer world.” It has roots in meditative traditions, both religious and nonreligious. Mahayana Buddhism and Zen Buddhism are two such traditions, as are monastic communities in Roman Catholicism and Sufi mysticism in Islam. You'll experience this each week in nonreligious contemplative exercises, which are the gift of many meditative traditions.

Matthew Crawford’s book, *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction*, is a contemporary case and guide to deepening attention in a world full of distractions. Crawford also wrote the bestseller *Shop Class as Soulcraft* (2010), and his 2015 text provides guidance for how to be mindful in our contemporary world. We’ll read Crawford’s book throughout the semester to test how well commonsense empiricism, rationalism, and radical skepticism fare by Crawford’s standards.

In October and November, you’ll also read a short but powerful guide to meditation by Julia Hilton: *Basics of Meditation: The First Steps to Changing Your Mind and Your World*. This will instruct you into your own practice of meditation this fall and beyond.

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*The Minute of Silence.* We begin class with a full minute of silence a time for doing nothing before class begins. Because we have complex and active minds, we need time and shared permission to “get ourselves together” before focusing effectively together. This shared discipline conveys respect and consideration for our shared time and work. If you’re late, do not take your seat until that minute of silence ends.

Respect for Classmates and Discussion: When a student talks to the class and instructor, all "eyes and ears" are on that individual. When a student asks or answers a question that is NOT a signal to whisper to others and ignore the one who is speaking. You’re thereby telling the speaker that her/his comments are unimportant. So, don’t check your IPhone or laptop when someone speaks. That's rude. Enjoyable and committed discussion means giving speakers your intentional attention. You’ll practice this, and be corrected when you fail to respect others.

Accept Responsibility in an Academic Community: When we make a mistake in action or judgment, we accept responsibility gracefully. We won’t say, “It’s not my fault.” Printers don’t work, all parking spots may be taken, or we oversleep. But ducking responsibility or trying to pass blame to others makes us appear to be persons of poor character. For example, when you notice my mistake about an assignment, or I entered your grade incorrectly, let me know promptly and politely. I owe you an apology, explanation, and maybe a correction, not excuses.

Laptops and iPhones. There are no bad people in our class and no bad electronic devices. (EDs) People and EDs have dysfunctional relationships. Our EDs are more pets than tools. We spend the first weeks training our EDs to obey our commands to make that relationship positive. This is not about YOU following rules. This is not about FORBIDDING EDs. This is grooming better relationships with your EDs. We do not curse ourselves nor our EDs for
failings. EDs love playtime, learning tricks and games, and receiving rewards for being a good pet. But EDs don’t know when to stop pleading. Make the partnership between you and your ED’s a great and a one-way tether to an ED pulling the leash.

Questions About Grades: Late assignments and papers do not receive credit for the course.
1. If you do not understand a particular grade, you should absolutely seek clarification from Prof. Fowler. Invite him to an appointment. Under no conditions will your grade be lowered. Use a Goodle calendar, app, or other reminder to keep you on time in submitting assignments.

2. If you want clarification, first submit something in writing explaining your question. If you thought your answer was correct, document your belief with evidence from the text.

3. After our appointment, or, after reviewing your written explanation, I will decide if a grade change is warranted, and I will inform you promptly.

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Questions About Attendance. You have two (2) free absences, excused or unexcused, without penalty. The third absence costs 1 point off your final grade. The 4th absence costs 2 pts. The 5th
absence costs 3 pts. Beyond 5 absences, you lose a letter grade (10 points) off your final grade. This is about not punishing absences. It’s about consequences you create, for missing class means you participate less. When you attend the class and do good work, you create positive consequences. Regardless of why you miss a class session, this is the system for this semester. Your presence matters. “Did I miss anything?” Yes, you and the class were robbed of your presence and participation.

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**Pop Quizzes. (Part of your Class Participation Grade)** The pop quizzes in this class consist of 1 out of 6 questions below. Whether a pop quiz happens on the assigned reading for any given class day is a matter of chance. At the start of class, one of you will roll a die. If the student rolls 3 or above, there is no pop quiz that day. The professor must answer that student’s hardest question about what we can know. However, if the student rolls a 1 or 2, the class has a pop quiz. The student then rolls the die again. The number rolled is the question number. **This counts as part of your Class Participation Grade.**

The Six Pop Quiz Questions:

1. What is the most important point of the assigned reading for today?
2. How would you compare the reading assignment to a previous reading assignment in the course?
3. Give an example or real world application of some idea or concept in the assigned reading.
4. Open your book and give the page number for what you thought was the most important sentence in the reading. Why did you think that sentence is so important?
5. What question did you have about the assigned reading or what in the reading troubled you?
6. What was the author’s main claim about knowledge in the assigned reading for today?

* Partial Credit: If you did not read the assignment, what is an important concept you have learned so far in this course?

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**PAPERS: Note: Late Papers and late assignments do not receive credit in the course.** The instructions for all 3 papers are in the BOOK OF ASSIGNMENTS tab on our course Moodle website. The rubric and standards for philosophy papers are provided in this syllabus. You will be do Eli Review peer reviews of certain drafts of your classmates’ papers, and they will do the same for you. Your instructor will provide feedback to you on all your written work in the course.

**First Paper. (10 points)** Your first paper will be a 1,200-word essay. This is due on Moodle before midnight on Friday, September 9, 2016.

**Second Paper. (15 points)** Your second paper is a 1,200-word essay. This is due on Moodle before midnight on Friday, September 30, 2016.

**Third Paper (20 points)** Your third paper is a 1500-word essay. This is due on Moodle before midnight on Friday, December 8, 2016.
An excellent guide to writing philosophy papers by Prof. Amy Kind of Claremont McKenna College is provided at the end of this syllabus. I’ll quiz you in this essay.

**Homework. (30 points)** Submit homework assignments on the class Moodle website ON TIME and on Moodle. Sometimes you will submit your homework on Eli Review as well, so that you can receive peer feedback. The instructions for each assignment are in your BOOK of ASSIGNMENTS on the class Moodle website. This is to ensure that you have the benefit of Tuesday class discussion and Thursday exercises before doing homework on the assigned reading. Homework assignments are posted on our class Moodle website. **Late homework receives no credit. Each of the 10 homework assignments is worth 3.0 points. Total:30 pts.**

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**Pecha Kucha Film Group Project. (10 points)** In November, you will complete group project that will be presented in class. The presentations will be in the Japanese *pecha kucha* style – 20 slides presented for 20 seconds each (for a total of 6 minutes and 40 seconds). Every slide contains an idea and appropriate graphic. The slides are on a timer rather than being advanced manually by the student, so the presenter(s) must rehearse carefully to keep the presentation on track with the slide. November 8 and 10 will be dedicated to each group’s *pecha-kucha* presentations about an idea or concept from “What Can We Know?” The most impressive presentations develop an argument with alternative solutions in 20 slides. However, you may focus upon one book or idea, the meaning of meditation, or a particular philosophy. Choose a film, which illustrates your topic and argument from Philosophy 110-A

The 6 minute and 40 second presentation counts 10 points. This class project is graded as follows:

1. Submit a 150-word proposal for your Study Group’s film pecha kucha (5 points.)
2. The 6 minute 40 seconds presentation of your group’s pecha-kucha. (5 points)

Everyone in your group will be present for the presentation, but preparing the presentation, rehearsing, and leading small group discussion may be their contribution. You will have a form for self-evaluation of your presentation as a group. A rubric and guideline to show you what is expected for a great pecha kucha presentation is provided at the end of this syllabus.

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**Your Course calendar for Philosophy 110-A - fall 2016**

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**Week 1: Welcome to “What Can We Know?”**

Construct an assignment Calendar today!

**Tuesday August 30, 2016**- Introduction to the course material and your introductions to each other. Set up a Google calendar for the course assignments.

**For Thursday, September 1, 2016**  **INTRODUCTION TO ELI REVIEW.** Read *The Value of Skepticism* by Bertrand Russell. Russell wrote this essay as an introduction to his book, Skeptical Essays (1928). Russell recommends what he regards as simple rules for a reasonable
skepticism, which would nevertheless be radical for society. His examples are from the early 20th century, but you can readily apply his rules to contemporary issues and dogmas. Do you think Russell is right or does he depend too much on experts? Also: Study the course syllabus. Know the assignments and when they’re due.

**Week 2: Sufficient evidence for claims: When is enough, enough?**

**Tuesday, September 6, 2016.**
Before Tuesday, September 6, 2016, read Schick/Vaughn, Chapter 4, *Knowledge, Belief, and Evidence* Continue to study the course syllabus.

**NOTE:** Your 1st homework assignment is due before 11:55 pm on

**Tuesday the 6th of September 2016.** This is a 150-200 word essay and the instructions are in the BOOK OF ASSIGNMENTS on the class Moodle website.

Before **Thursday, Sept. 8, 2016** read CRAWFORD [PART I - ENCOUNTERING THINGS] – *Introduction* , and Chapter 1 - *The Jig, the Nudge, and Local Ecology*

| Quiz on Amy Kind essay and the course syllabus | Due before 11:55 pm on Thurs. Sept. 8, 2016. | 5 points |

**Note:** Your First Paper (1200 words) (10 points) is due on Moodle before 11:55 pm on Friday, September 9, 2016. Reminder: Late assignments do not receive credit.

**Week 3: Substantial, Weak, and Deceptive Arguments**

**Before Tuesday, Sept. 13, 2016,** read Schick/Vaughn, Chapter 3 *Arguments, Good, Bad, and Weird.*

Your completed Quiz on the Philosophy 110-A syllabus and Amy Kind’s “How to Write a Philosophy Paper” *is due on Moodle* before 11:55 pm on **Thursday, September 8, 2016.**
Before Thursday, Sept. 15, 2016 Read CRAWFORD: Chapter 2 - *Embodied Perception* and Chapter 3 - *Virtual Reality as Moral Ideal*

Note: **Homework No. 2** is due on Moodle before 11:55 pm on Thursday, September 15, 2016. Please submit your homework no. 2 on Moodle before 11:55 pm on Thursday, September 15, 2016. **Also submit your homework on Eli Review at the same time!**

**Week 4: Does Personal Experience Count as Knowledge?**

Before Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2016, read Schick/Vaughn, Chapter 5: *Looking for Truth in Personal Experience*

**Week 5: Experience and Empiricism**

**Week 4**

Before Thursday, September 22, 2016, read CRAWFORD: Chapter 4 - *Attention and Design* and Chapter 5 - *Autism as Design Principle*

**Week 5**

Tuesday, September 27, 2016: Before Tuesday, Sept. 20th, AND read Schick/Vaughn, Chapter 5: *Looking for Truth in Personal Experience.*

**ELI REVIEW**

Submit your peer review of classmates’ homework No. 2 before 11:55 pm on Tuesday, September 20, 2016.

Submit your peer review of classmates’ homework No. 3 before 11:55 pm on Tuesday, September 27, 2016.

Before Thursday September 29, 2016, read CRAWFORD: (Chapter 4) *Attention and Design*. Homework No. 3 - due on Moodle and on ELI REVIEW before 11:55 pm on Thursday, Sept. 22nd. the instructions for this assignment are in your BOOK of ASSIGNMENTS on our class Moodle website.
Note: **Homework No. 4** is due on Moodle before 11:55 pm on Thursday, September 29, 2016. It’s a 200-word essay, but you’ll need to watch a one-hour video in the assignment first, so leave time for that. Then you can use that information in your essay about the pyramids. The instructions for Homework no. 4 are in your BOOK of ASSIGNMENTS on the class website.

Your 2nd paper (1200 words, 15 points ) is due on Moodle before 11:55 pm on Friday, September 30, 2016. Instructions are in your BOOK of ASSIGNMENTS on Moodle.

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**Week 6: Miracles and Amazements**

**Tuesday, October 6, 2016:** read David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Chapter X – “On Miracles” It’s in your BOOK OF ASSIGNMENTS.

**Thursday October 8, 2016** Read CRAWFORD (Part II: Other People: Chapter 6= *On Being Led Out*, and Ch. 7 *Encountering Things With Other People*.

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**Week 7: Miracles and Poking the Sensory Bubble**


Note: Homework no. 5 is due on Moodle before 11:55 pm on Thursday, October 13, 2016.

**NOTE:** Tuesday October 11th is also **Yom Kippur.** If you observe Yom Kippur and will not be attending class on Tuesday October 11, 2016, be sure to read Ch. 3 on "Stillness" in "The Basics of Meditation." Think about the place of stillness in the ceremony. You will have an option of writing about this in Homework No. 5. Please submit your Homework No. 5 before 11:55 pm on **Thursday, October 13, 2016**. The instructions for Homework no. 5 are in your BOOK of ASSIGNMENTS on the class Moodle website.
FALL BREAK; Starts after classes on Fri. Oct. 14TH, until 8:00 AM on Wed. Oct. 19, 2016

**Week 8:** Is Common Sense Empiricism Naïve?

Before Thursday, October 20, 2016, read CRAWFORD: The Culture of Performance and the Erotics of Attention

**Week 9:** How is Knowledge Possible? Can it be taught?

Before Tuesday October 25, 2016, read PLATO’s dialogue, Meno. (In BOOK OF ASSIGNMENTS)


**Homework No. 6:** Take the Plato Quiz on Moodle before 11:55 pm on Friday, October 28, 2016. This is your quiz on Plato's dialogues, Meno, and "the allegory of the cave" from The Republic.


**Homework No. 7** – submit on Moodle and on ELI REVIEW before 11:55 pm on Thurs. October 27, 2016. Instructions for Homework No. 7 are in Ch. 2 of your BOOK of ASSIGNMENTS.

**Week 10:** Knowledge about the supernatural

Before Tuesday, November 1, 2016 (All Saints Day), read PLATO’s dialogue, Phaedo

Also read Hilton, Julia. Basics of Meditation: The First Steps to Changing Your Mind and Your World, Ch. 6.

**ELI REVIEW** Submit your peer review of classmates’ homework No. 7 before 11:55 pm on Tuesday, November 1, 2016.

Week 11: Radical Skepticism: The Cartesian Challenge

Before Tuesday November 8, 2016, Read Descartes, Meditations I-III (from Meditations on First Philosophy)

Also read Hilton, Julia. Basics of Meditation: The First Steps to Changing Your Mind and Your World, Ch. 8.

Homework No. 8 - Pecha kucha presentations today

Submit your peer review of classmates’ homework No. 8 before 11:55 pm on Tuesday, November 1, 2016.


Homework No. 8. Is due on Moodle before 11:55 pm on Thurs. Nov. 10, 2016. The instructions for Homework No. 8 are in Chapter 2 of your BOOK of ASSIGNMENTS on the class Moodle website. Submit your assignment to Eli Review at the same time.

Week 12: Skepticism vs. Certainty (Again)

Before Tuesday, November 15, 2016, read David Hume: Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Chapter XII. This is posted in THE BOOK OF ASSIGNMENTS on the class Moodle website. Homework No. 9 due on Moodle before 11:55 pm on Thursday November 17, 2016. Instructions are in your BOOK of ASSIGNMENTS.
Submit your peer review of classmates’ homework No. 8 before 11:55 pm on Tuesday, November 15, 2016.

Before Thursday November 17, 2016, read CRAWFORD, Epilogue: Reclaiming Reality

** Thanksgiving Break- starts after afternoon classes on Fri. Nov. 16th and ends at 8:00am on Monday November 28, 2016.

Week 13 How much radical skepticism about knowledge is justified? Before Tuesday, November 29, 2016 read MORTON, The End of the World (in the BOOK OF ASSIGNMENTS)

Homework no. 10 due before 11:55 pm on Thurs. Dec 1, 2016. The instructions are in Ch. 2 of your BOOK of ASSIGNMENTS on the class Moodle website.

Tuesday, November 29, 2016 - Revisit the 8 quiz questions from the first day of class and prepare a manifesto or questions for your Study Group’s encounter with Descartes’ Evil Demon.

Thursday December 1, 2016 radical skepticism – and hope - in music, art, film, and science fiction: Dr. Who’s journey through skepticism!
Students often find philosophy papers difficult to write since the expectations are very different from those in other disciplines, even from those of other disciplines in the humanities. What follows is some general advice about how to go about writing short (4 - 5 page) philosophy papers on pre-assigned topics.

**Before starting to write:** Make sure that you have read all of the relevant texts very carefully. Even though you have probably read these texts previously, it is a good idea to reread them in light of the question you plan to answer. Also make sure that you have spent some time thinking about the question itself. You want to make sure that everything you write is relevant to the question asked, and if you don’t understand the question, then you won’t be able to write an assignment that is to the point.

**How to conceive your paper and write your paper:** Answer the question, the whole question, and nothing but the question. First, address the question that is asked. (This again points to the need to understand what the question is asking.) Second, be sure that your answer is complete. If the question has different parts, be sure that you have addressed each part. Third, make sure that you do not pursue tangential issues. Your answer will be evaluated in connection with the question that was asked. Even a brilliant essay cannot get a good grade if it does not answer the question.

Philosophy papers usually involve both *exposition* and *evaluation*. In the expository part of the paper, your task is to explain the view or argument under consideration. Make sure that your explanation is as explicit as possible. The evaluation part of the paper is your chance to do some philosophy of your own. It is not enough merely to state whether you agree or disagree with the philosopher’s conclusion. You should engage with her reasoning. Some questions you might consider: does her argument succeed in getting to the desired conclusion? Which premises are the weakest points of the argument? What objections might be raised to these premises? Are there any ways that her argument could be bolstered to defend against such objections?
As you write, think about your intended audience. You should not write your paper as if it is a personal communiqué to me. Instead, imagine your audience as someone who is intelligent and interested in the subject but has not studied it. (Think of yourself, before taking this class, or perhaps of your roommate.)

When you use an unfamiliar or “technical” term (i.e. a term that we have given some specific meaning in this class) be sure to define it. In general, a thesaurus is not the friend of a philosophy student. Do not be afraid to re-use the same terms over and over, especially when they are key terms in an argument. Do not use different terms just for variety’s sake; unfortunately, synonyms listed by a thesaurus often vary in connotation and meaning. If you mean to talk about the same concept throughout, use the same term throughout.

As a rule, you should not use quotes. A series of quotes strung together, even creatively strung together, is not a paper. The main reason to quote a passage is to make it more convenient for you to talk about what the passage says (and to make it more convenient for your reader as well). Thus, you should not rely on a quotation to answer a key part of the question. Answer in your own words instead.

You should, however, include textual references. Whenever you make a claim about what is said in the text, it is appropriate to provide a specific reference to back up your claim. Do not make claims like “Socrates believes that …” without supporting them. For short papers using class texts, footnotes are not necessary; it is sufficient to make parenthetical references, such as (Meno 77b).

Write until you have said what you need to say, not until you hit the page limit. (Incidentally, if you find that you don’t have enough to say to reach the word limit, you’re probably missing something. The problem should be to confine your paper to the page limit, not to stretch out your paper to the minimum required.) You may end up with a first draft that is too long, but at a later stage you can go back through your work and see whether there are sentences or paragraphs that are not really necessary or that can be made more concise. The point is that you will be better able to evaluate what is truly important if you have included everything on your first draft.

Finally, do not try to compose your paper, from start to finish, in one session – especially not the night before it is due. Make sure that you have the chance to write a first draft and then let it percolate for a while. Very few people are able to dash off a good paper in one sitting!

How to write an introduction: Don’t begin with a very general opening statement: “Plato was one of the world’s greatest philosophers…” or “The definition of virtue is something that philosophers have debated for centuries…”

Do briefly tell your reader what your paper is about and what your main thesis is. Notice that there is a difference between telling your reader what you are going to talk about and telling your reader what you will argue. Compare these two introductory paragraphs:

In the *Meno*, Meno presents Socrates with a paradox about inquiry. There is no way to inquire into something that you don’t know, since you don’t know how to begin, but there is also no way to inquire into something that you already know, since you already have the
knowledge in question. Thus, we reach the paradoxical conclusion that inquiry is impossible. Socrates attempts to unravel Meno’s paradox by presenting his theory of recollection. In what follows, I will discuss Meno’s paradox and Socrates’ criticism of it.

In the *Meno*, Meno presents Socrates with a paradox about inquiry. There is no way to inquire into something that you don’t know, since you don’t know how to begin, but there is also no way to inquire into something that you already know, since you already have the knowledge in question. Thus, we reach the paradoxical conclusion that inquiry is impossible. Socrates attempts to unravel Meno’s paradox by presenting his theory of recollection. In what follows, I will argue that Socrates does not adequately defend his theory of recollection. However, I will also suggest that even if we were to accept the theory of recollection, this would not provide an adequate answer to Meno’s paradox.

The second of these introductions is superior to the first. Notice that only the second presents an actual thesis statement. Sometimes you will be in a better position to write an introduction after you have written the main body of your paper, for you will then have a better idea of what your argument really is.

**How to write a conclusion**

Don’t feel as though you must summarize all of your results. You have written a short paper; the reader recalls your argument and will only be annoyed if you repeat yourself. Don’t end with a hedged claim like “Though Socrates’ argument is strong, his opponents also have good points.” Also try to avoid the temptation to end with an empty prediction about continued debate: “Though Meno’s definition of virtue is a good one, the philosophical debate over what it means to be virtuous will no doubt continue.”

Do find some nice way of wrapping up your essay. This does not mean that you should claim that every facet of the issue has been addressed. Sometimes a conclusion sets out problems that still remain. There is nothing wrong with defending a qualified conclusion, such as “Socrates’ theory of recollection can be defended against this criticism,” rather than an unqualified conclusion, such as “Socrates’ theory of recollection is entirely correct.” In fact, you will probably not have argued for the latter conclusion in your paper, since it requires that you have shown not only that some criticisms fail, but also that there are not any other criticisms that might succeed against Socrates’ theory. Make sure that you do not claim that you have shown more than have actually shown in your paper. (It is especially tempting to exaggerate your accomplishments in a grand-finale-style concluding paragraph; resist this temptation.)

For example, here is a conclusion that avoids exaggeration:

> As Socrates’ discussion with the slave suggests, it is plausible to suppose that someone can discover, without being taught, a geometrical claim that they did not already know. However, as I have argued, we cannot generalize from the case of geometrical knowledge to knowledge of other sorts of facts. Thus, Socrates fails to provide an adequate reason to believe his claim that all learning is recollection.

[Notice that the conclusion does not claim that Socrates’ claim is shown to be false, but only that Socrates has not adequately defended it.]
Once you have a draft: The principal virtue in philosophical writing is clarity. As you reread each sentence of your draft, ask yourself: “Is this point expressed clearly?” Your prose should be simple, direct, and to the point. As you re-read your paper, think about whether it is organized in the best way. Would it be more effective if this paragraph went here, and that one went there? Very often, our first efforts need a rather serious structural overhaul. Also, look for opportunities to improve your paper, such as adding an example here, rewriting an awkward sentence there, and so on…

Proofread your paper carefully. Spelling mistakes and grammatical errors can distract a reader and divert her attention from your argument. It may also give her the impression – a false one, perhaps – that you simply don’t care enough about your work to run it through a spell-check program. Very often, what distinguishes an excellent paper from a merely decent paper is the depth and quality of their explanations. The decent paper may not make any obvious mistakes or omit anything crucial; it often just does not communicate its message as clearly and effectively as the excellent paper does. Thus, always try to find ways of strengthening your explanations. Examples will help here. Almost all philosophy relies on the use of examples, both for illustrative and persuasive purposes.

Grades: As a professor of mine used to say, “There is, and can be, no direct correlation between the grade you receive on a paper and the amount of time or effort you have spent on the paper; which is not to say that hard work does not produce results, but only that some people can do with great ease what others cannot do at all or can only do with great effort. In an hour, Mozart could produce a piece of music that I would be unable to match even if I spent my whole life working at it.” Also remember that the grade that you get on the paper represents my judgment of the quality of the results – not what you meant to say, but what you actually say.

Religious Holidays Policies. In supporting religious diversity, Elon has a policy and procedures for students who wish to observe religious holidays that are in conflict with the academic calendar, allowing students an excused absence. Students who wish to observe a holiday during the semester must complete the online Religious Observance Notification Form (RONF), available at the following website within the first two weeks of the semester. http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/religious_life/ReligiousHolidays.xhtml This policy does not apply during the final examination period. Students are required to make prior arrangements with the instructor for completion of any work missed during the absence. Once the completed RONF is received, the Truitt Center will confirm the excused absence with notification to the instructor and the appropriate academic dean, along with a copy to the student. Students may contact the Truitt Center staff with any questions (336-278-7729).

Elon Honor Code. Elon’s honor pledge calls for a commitment to Elon’s shared values of Honesty, Integrity, Respect and Responsibility. To be clear about violations of these values, students should be familiar with the Judicial Affairs policies in the student handbook, including violations outlined at: http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/handbook/violations/default.xhtml.

Students with questions about the specific interpretation of these values and violations as they relate to this course should contact this instructor immediately. Violations in academic-related areas will be documented in an incident report, which will be maintained in the Office of Student Conduct, and may result in a lowering of the course grade and/or failure of the course with an Honor Code F. Violations specifically covered by academic honor code policies include: plagiarism, cheating, lying, stealing and the
facilitation of another’s dishonesty. Multiple violations will normally result in a student’s temporary suspension from the University.

**Elon Disabilities Services.** If you are a student with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course, please register with Disabilities Services in the Duke Building, Room 108 (278-6500), for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs.

http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/support/disabilities_services.xhtml

**Elon Writing Center.** Elon’s Writing Center is staffed by trained peer-consultants who can help you with all of your writing projects (for any class or major and for any extracurricular, personal, or professional purposes), so take advantage of this excellent academic resource and include a visit to our Writing Center as part of your own writing process. In one-on-one, 45 minute sessions, our consultants will work with you on any kind of writing (such as research or analysis papers, PowerPoint or poster presentations, resumes, or job applications) at any stage of the writing process (such as understanding an assignment; brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing; developing a research question or starting your research; or writing in-text citations and bibliographies/works cited). Through our “Librarian Connection” program, we can also introduce you to a librarian if you’d like additional research assistance.

The main Writing Center, located in 108 Belk Library, is open extensive hours:

M-Th 10am-10pm Fri 10am-4pm Sun 2pm-10pm The Writing Center also staffs satellite Writing Centers in the Multicultural Center (Moseley 221-B) and in the Business School (see The Writing Center website for more details).

If you have questions, please contact The Writing Center Director, Dr. Paula Rosinski, at prosinski@elon.edu or X5842.  http://www.elon.edu/writingcenter

**Student Options Related to Enrollment in this Course; Enrollment Students** should confirm their enrollment in this course through their On-Track account. Students who do not appear on the course roll or do not show the correct course/section listed on On-Track should consult with their instructor immediately.

**Policies on Dropping or Withdrawing from this Course** Students may drop a course during the designated drop/add period through their On-Track account. A course that is dropped during the designated drop/add period will not appear on the student’s transcript or grade report. After the designated drop/add period, students may withdraw from a course without penalty through the first half of the semester, following dates published in the academic calendar. Withdrawing from a course during this period will result in a mark of “W” that will appear on the student’s academic transcript. Students may withdraw at: http://www.elon.edu/e-web/administration/registrar/DropAddClassesOnline.xhtml

NOTE: Students should not assume that they will be officially withdrawn from a course based on their failing to attend class or their notifying a faculty member of their intent to withdraw. The student has the responsibility for following the official process of withdrawing from a class. Students who do not properly withdraw from a course will receive a grade of F. Students may not withdraw from a course after the published deadline. Any exception to this policy is the responsibility of the appropriate academic dean’s office. When granted, withdrawal from a course after this time will result in a grade of “W” or “F” depending on the student’s grade at the time. For additional information on university course policies, students should consult their Academic Catalog: http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/catalog/
This is the rubric for writing an excellent paper in “What Can We Know?” Amy Kind’s essay also has great advice. Your written work is evaluated according to its content, its coherence, and its insights.


You have a thesis, and it is a substantial claim that you mean to investigate or wish to defend or disprove. You show that you know alternatives to your position that reasonable people might propose. When you quote or cite an author, it is accurate and appropriate to your content, rather than a mere paraphrase in your own words. In your judgment your thesis is worth writing about, and it’s worth reading. Your reader would agree that it’s worthwhile. Your argument matters, and you explain why it matters. Of course, no part of your content is plagiarized or appears plagiarized. You give credit where credit is due and don’t pretend that someone else’s work is your own.

**COHERENCE:** Grammar and syntax make sense. You argue clearly and cogently from evidence and credible premises to your well-reasoned stated conclusion.

Your paper is clearly written and makes sense. Your argument clearly flows from one paragraph to the next. The writing isn’t choppy or vague or confusing to the reader about what you mean to say. This almost always requires several rewrites. You’ve got a coherence problem if the paper shows lack of proofreading, misspellings, or grammar / syntax errors resulting in incoherent sentences or sloppy, vague, and confused writing. A first (and only) draft usually has coherence problems because the writer hasn’t taken the time required to think about and express ideas clearly and with arguments which make sense.

**INSIGHT:** You guide discussion of the issue or problem in the assignment that helps the reader to think further about it. You handle ideas well and navigate different interpretations, helping your reader to put the problem or issue in context. Insight shows your best thinking. Insight is the result of your sustained hard thinking about your thesis and essay. Insight is not being radical or original. Real insight sees beyond conventional generalities and platitudes. With insight, you ask the right question, at the right place, which opens new possibilities. Don’t over-simplify or retreat from complexity and uncertainty. Insight takes TIME and WORK – can’t be done last-minute.

Here is your checklist for items due in “What Can We Know?” Enter these items and due dates on a Google calendar or other app that will remind you when each items is due.-- Martin Fowler

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>POINTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homework No. 1 (200 word essay)</td>
<td>11:55 pm on Tues. Sept. 6, 2016</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amy Kind and Syllabus quiz</td>
<td>11:55 pm on Thurs. Sept. 8, 2016</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Essay (1200 words)</td>
<td>11:55 pm on Fri. Sept. 9, 2016</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework No. 2</td>
<td>11:55 pm on Thurs. Sept. 15, 2016 on Moodle And submit your homework no. 2 on Eli Review</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELI REVIEW</td>
<td>Submit your peer review of classmate’ homework by</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td>Due Date</td>
<td>Points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homework no. 3</td>
<td>11:55 pm on Tuesday, September 20, 2016</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ELI REVIEW</strong></td>
<td>Submit your peer review of classmates' homework by 11:55 pm on Tuesday, September 27, 2016</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homework no. 4</td>
<td>11:55 pm on Thurs. Sept. 29, 2016</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2nd paper (15 pts. 1200 words)</strong></td>
<td>11:55 pm on Fri. September 30, 2016</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homework No. 5</td>
<td>11:55 pm on Thurs. October 13, 2016 and submit homework on Eli Review.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ELI REVIEW</strong></td>
<td>Submit your peer review of classmates’ homework by 11:55 pm on Tuesday, the 18th of October, 2016</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plato Quiz (homework no. 6)</td>
<td>11:55 pm on Fri. October 28, 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homework no. 7</td>
<td>11:55 pm on Thurs. October 27, 2016 and submit homework on Eli Review.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ELI REVIEW</strong></td>
<td>Submit your peer review of classmates' homework by 11:55 pm on Tuesday, November 1, 2016.</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homework no. 8</td>
<td>11:55 pm on Thurs. November 3, 2016</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your group’s 150 word pecha kucha film project proposal</td>
<td>11:55 pm on Friday, November 4, 2016</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit evaluations of TUES. NOV. 8 presentations</td>
<td>11:55 pm on Tuesday Nov. 8, 2016</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Submit evaluations of Tues. Nov. 10, 2016 presentations.</td>
<td>11:55 pm on Thursday November 10, 2016.</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homework No. 9</td>
<td>11:55 pm on Thursday November 10, 2016.</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homework No. 10</td>
<td>11:55 pm on Tues. Nov. 15 2016</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3rd paper (20 pts.)</strong></td>
<td>11:55 pm on Thurs. Dec.8, 2016.</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation:</td>
<td>Discussion, attendance, 4 Eli reviews.</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pecha kucha group presentation</td>
<td>Done with the class, followed by a good discussion and question session. Tues. Nov. 8 or Thurs. Nov. 10</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>100 pts.</td>
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