PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS

ATAR COURSE

Year 11 syllabus

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

This syllabus is effective from 1 January 2015.

Users of this syllabus are responsible for checking its currency.

Syllabuses are formally reviewed by the School Curriculum and Standards Authority on a cyclical basis, typically every five years.

Content

Rationale

Philosophical thought shapes what people think, what they value, what they consider to be true, and how they engage with others and the world around them. It is one of the foundations of all academic disciplines. It seeks to shed light on questions, such as: what is real? what and how do we understand? how should we live? what is it to be human? and who am I? It deals with issues and problems that cannot be addressed adequately by appealing to experience and experiment alone. Philosophical inquiry requires that we question our assumptions, beliefs and our reasons for holding them. The Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course aims to empower students to make independent judgements on the basis of reason.

Doing philosophy is a practical activity. We do philosophy, for example, when we seek to define something, when we challenge assumptions, when we construct an argument, and when we think about what we are doing, how we are doing it and to what ends. The study of philosophy gives us a set of skills that better enables us to understand, evaluate and engage with our world, whether that is our personal or our social world, our world of work or the wider questions of how the world works.

The relation between the disciplines of philosophy and ethics in this course requires some explanation. Traditionally, ethics has been regarded as a branch of philosophy (alongside metaphysics and epistemology), so that reference to philosophy will normally include reference to ethics. The title 'Philosophy and Ethics' signifies that ethics has particular importance in this course. This status recognises that every member of a society faces ethical issues. A philosophical approach helps people to reflect on, and better understand, difficult ethical issues.

In philosophy and ethics, disagreement is common. Methods of inquiry and the skills of critical reasoning help us deal more effectively with disagreement. This course places considerable emphasis on students contributing constructively to a philosophical Community of Inquiry.

A philosophical Community of Inquiry at its simplest is a collaborative and cooperative process through which students learn with others, and from others, how to engage in philosophical discourse. Such discourse seeks to clarify, analyse, evaluate and define concepts and issues so as to help students understand and deal with complex questions raised by popular culture, by contemporary events and by the history of ideas. A philosophical Community of Inquiry uses the skills of critical reasoning to help students deal more effectively and tolerantly with disagreement.

Employers are increasingly searching for people who can analyse new situations and devise and evaluate appropriate strategies to manage them. The Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course develops thinking skills and moral discernment that students apply to a range of practical situations in their personal, social and working lives. The course is relevant to students focusing on the study of philosophy at university. It is of equal value to those following career paths that require the evaluation of arguments, such as law, or those needing to make complex judgements, such as in medical, pastoral or other human service occupations. The Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course is also relevant to those entering careers involving aesthetics, such as advertising and design.

Course outcomes

The Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course is designed to facilitate achievement of the following outcomes.

Outcome 1 – Philosophical and ethical inquiry

Students use investigative methods to think and argue philosophically.

In achieving this outcome, students:

- participate in open philosophical communities of inquiry
- explore philosophical and ethical concepts, ideas and ideals
- use critical reasoning methods to recognise, analyse, evaluate and develop arguments.

Outcome 2 – Philosophical and ethical perspectives

Students understand that there are philosophical and ethical approaches to making meaning.

In achieving this outcome, students:

- understand that there are different ways of knowing
- understand that there are different viewpoints on the nature of reality
- understand that people need to give good reasons for how they live.

Outcome 3 – Philosophy and ethics in human affairs

Students understand that philosophical and ethical thinking has a role in human affairs.

In achieving this outcome, students:

- understand that there are philosophical traditions
- understand that there are different world views
- understand the influence of philosophical ideas on contemporary culture.

Outcome 4 – Applying and relating philosophical and ethical understandings

Students reflect on, evaluate and respond to a range of human issues by selecting from a repertoire of philosophical and ethical strategies.

In achieving this outcome, students:

- evaluate different ways of knowing about a range of practical issues
- reflect on understandings of the nature of reality and human nature and their relationship to practical issues and situations
- use philosophical and ethical reasoning to respond critically to aspects of human activity.

Organisation

This course is organised into a Year 11 syllabus and a Year 12 syllabus. The cognitive complexity of the syllabus content increases from Year 11 to Year 12.

Structure of the syllabus

The Year 11 syllabus is divided into two units, each of one semester duration, which are typically delivered as a pair. The notional time for each unit is 55 class contact hours.

Unit 1 – Reason and persons

Students examine reasoning, inference, doubt, and proof: the construction of world views; ideas of mind, body and personhood; ideas of action, intention, motives, free-will and determinism; and the elements of a personal ethic.

Unit 2 – Reason and culture

Students examine ideas of beauty and aesthetics: the interpretation of art and literature; the idea of culture; intuition and emotion; and personal relationships and friendship.

Each unit includes:

- a unit description – a short description of the focus of the unit

- unit content – the content to be taught and learned.

Organisation of content

The Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course develops student learning through three content areas:

- How do we know?

- What is real?

- How do we live?

Representation of the general capabilities

The general capabilities encompass the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that will assist students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century. Teachers may find opportunities to incorporate the capabilities into the teaching and learning program for the Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course. The general capabilities are not assessed unless they are identified within the specified unit content.

Literacy

While much of the explicit teaching of literacy occurs in the English learning area, it is strengthened, made specific and extended in the Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course, where students are routinely required to communicate ideas and arguments of varying levels of complexity using both oral and written media. They must generate responses that clarify, analyse and evaluate verbal and written arguments using both conventional written structures and the Community of Inquiry.

Numeracy

Using mathematical skills across the curriculum both enriches the study of other learning areas and contributes to the development of a broader and deeper understanding of numeracy. In the Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course, students number arguments in terms of their constituent components and map them diagrammatically. Students are also required to identify examples of deductive reasoning by cross referencing particular argument structures with logical formulae, to determine their respective validity.

Information and communication technology capability

The information and communication technology (ICT) capability supports and enhances student learning across all areas of the curriculum. In the Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course, students are encouraged to further their skills through the routine deployment of ICT during research investigations, creating presentations, and using blog and online discussion forums. They are also challenged to be critical and responsible consumers of technology and digital media. The ethics component of the course particularly promotes reflection and discussion about whether technology, in all its different permutations, can be considered to be a public good and whether it has the potential to be a utopian or dystopian feature, depending on the context.

Critical and creative thinking

Activities that foster critical and creative thinking should include both independent and collaborative tasks, and entail some sort of transition or tension between ways of thinking. In the Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course, students are presented with a problem and are challenged to progress their own thinking and understanding (and that of their peers), using the Socratic method. The Community of Inquiry is the central platform for philosophical and ethical exchange, where students have license to be critical of each other's ideas providing their critiques are sustainable and can augment community understanding of a topic.

Personal and social capability

Teachers will find opportunities to incorporate explicit teaching of personal and social capability depending on their choice of learning activities. The Community of Inquiry invites the focus of inquiry to be directed by student generated questions, which in turn reflect the interests of the students.

Ethical understanding

Ethical issues arise across all areas of the curriculum, with each learning area containing a range of content that demands consideration from an ethical perspective. Ethical dilemmas, hypothetical thought experiments, and real life scenarios all set a context for discussion within the Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course. Students consider, analyse and evaluate a range of ethical decision-making models, structures of justice and fairness, systems of government, social contract theories, and secular and religious world views. They are challenged to apply particular ethical theories to real-life situations and to evaluate their potential merit and relevance.

Intercultural understanding

Although intercultural understanding focuses primarily on the development of skills, behaviours and dispositions, it also draws on students' growing knowledge, understanding and critical awareness of their own and others' cultural perspectives and practices derived from learning area content. In the Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course, students are required to draw extensively on the thinking of Ancient civilisations; on both Analytic and Continental traditions and on contemporary schools of thought representing different cultural and epistemological interests and influences. They are exposed to and asked to make sense of global 'expert' opinions and are challenged to systematically deconstruct and reinterpret these in the context of their own social, historical, cultural, economic and geographic experiences.

Representation of the cross-curriculum priorities

The cross-curriculum priorities address the contemporary issues which students face in a globalised world. Teachers may find opportunities to incorporate the priorities into the teaching and learning program for the Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course. The cross-curriculum priorities are not assessed unless they are identified within the specified unit content.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priority provides opportunities for all learners to deepen their knowledge of Australia by engaging with the world's oldest continuous living cultures. Discussions in the Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course that will naturally lead into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and contemporary perspectives may typically include concepts of: justice, fairness, liberty, equality, rights and tolerance; ideas of social identity and of common good; moral concepts in different cultures; ideas about social responsibility and obligations to the individual, society, citizenship and civic involvement; and ethical issues of life and death.

Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia

An understanding of Asia underpins the capacity of Australian students to be active and informed citizens working together to build harmonious local, regional and global communities, and build Australia's social, intellectual and creative capital. It also builds understanding of the diversity of cultures and peoples living in Australia, fosters social inclusion and cohesion and is vital to the prosperity of Australia. There are many opportunities for students to consider Asian perspectives within the Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course.

Sustainability

Sustainability education is futures-oriented, focusing on protecting environments and creating a more ecologically and socially just world through informed action. Actions that support more sustainable patterns of living require consideration of environmental, social, cultural and economic systems and their interdependence. There are opportunities for students to consider issues of sustainability within the Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course.

Unit 1 – Reason and persons

Unit description

This unit enables students to examine reasoning, inference, doubt, and proof: the construction of world views; ideas of mind, body and personhood; ideas of action, intention, motives, free-will and determinism; and the elements of a personal ethic.

Unit content

This unit includes the knowledge, understandings and skills described below.

How do we know?

Critical reasoning

- recognising and evaluating an argument, written in natural language, in terms of its premises, inferences and conclusions

- recognising statements in a variety of texts as either argumentative, descriptive, narrative or explanatory

- understanding modus ponens and modus tollens

Methods of inquiry

- the distinction between empirical evidence and rational proof

- inductive and deductive arguments

- observation and thought experiment

- types of inquiry: dialectic

Imagination and interpretation

- the relationship between reason and imagination

- the distinction between perception, rational reflection and various sources of imagination

Analysing, clarifying and evaluating concepts

- the concepts of mind, body and personhood

- the concepts of action, intention, will, motives and reasons

- the idea of free will

What is real?

Scientific world view

- science as a way of classifying the world and constructing our understanding of what is real in human nature

- different ideas of human nature

Conceptions of ultimate reality

- conceptual difficulties with free-will, determinism and agency (human action)
- the concepts of change and causation

Persons

- the concept of being 'an individual'
- the relationship between individuals and societies
- the social element in individual identity
- the ideas of personal identity, gender, race, class and ethnicity

How should we live?

Governance

- the distinction between contractual and non-contractual relationships

Communities and cultures

- the ideas of justice, fairness and power relations, including race, gender and class

Self and others

- the nature of virtues and vices and their relationship to the development of character and ethical action
- the concept of care
- the role of principled decisions in ethics, including:
    - the Golden Rule
    - the greatest happiness principle
    - the categorical imperative

Unit 2 – Reason and culture

Unit description

This unit enables students to examine ideas of beauty and aesthetics: the interpretation of art and literature; the idea of culture; intuition and emotion; and personal relationships and friendship.

Unit content

This unit includes the knowledge, understandings and skills described below.

How do we know?

Critical reasoning

- distinguishing between strong and weak arguments, written in natural language, in terms of inferential strength and the concept of cogency

- identifying some of the major informal fallacies, including the genetic fallacy, ad hominem arguments, hasty generalisation, argument from irrelevant authority, argument from ignorance and equivocation

- identifying the formal fallacies of denying the antecedent and affirming the consequent

Methods of inquiry

- the use of observation, hypotheses and theories in constructing explanations

- the role of metaphor and analogy in inquiry

- types of inquiry: hermeneutics

Imagination and interpretation

- the concept of interpretation

- imagination as a necessary element in interpretation

- criteria for good interpretations, including coherence, consistency, comprehensiveness and consilience

- the process of interpreting works of art and literature

Analysing, clarifying and evaluating concepts

- aesthetic concepts, including beauty, taste, and judgement

- the use of symbols, signs and signification (semiosis) to understand the world

- disputes about realism and the limits of interpretation, including modernism and postmodernism

What is real?

Scientific world view

- perception and aesthetic appreciation

- the question of objectivity and subjectivity

Conceptions of ultimate reality

- the use of symbols and concepts to understand the way things are

- the ideas of truth, representation and reality and their interrelationship

Persons

- interrelationships between personhood, emotion and reason

- how works of art and literature help the understanding of human nature and identity

How should we live?

Governance

- the concept of rights

- freedom of expression and its limits

- privacy and its limits

- government interference and surveillance

Communities and cultures

- the concept of culture, including shared values and social roles

- the concept of self-expression and its relation to culture

Self and others

- the concept of friendship

- the I-thou relationship as a fundamental element of ethics

School-based assessment

The Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) Manual contains essential information on principles, policies and procedures for school-based assessment that needs to be read in conjunction with this syllabus.

Teachers design school-based assessment tasks to meet the needs of students. The table below provides details of the assessment types for the Philosophy and Ethics ATAR Year 11 syllabus and the weighting for each assessment type.

Assessment table – Year 11

Type of assessment	Weighting
Critical reasoning Typically these are short answer questions which require students to demonstrate skills in critical reasoning and methods of inquiry. All questions, items, example arguments and instructions are written in natural language. At least two critical reasoning tasks must be administered under test conditions.	20%
Philosophical analysis and evaluation Typically these are extended answers which require students to summarise, clarify, and critically evaluate the cogency of arguments put forward in dialogues and texts. This typically involves making judgements about inferential strength, the acceptability of premises and relevance of examples used to support claims. Two types of philosophical analysis and evaluation of arguments are used in this course. Tasks are based on either • a Community of Inquiry dialogue between two contributors OR • an article/extract dealing with any combination of ethical, epistemological and/or metaphysical topics/themes or issues. At least one of each type of philosophical analysis and evaluation task must be administered under test conditions.	30%
Construction of argument Typically this is an extended writing format, such as an essay, which requires students to: define terms and concepts, put forward a premise or thesis, employ examples and counter-examples, justify the development of the argument, avoid contradiction, synthesise contrary claims and establish a conclusion that follows from the premise and the examples. This process uses/applies the elements of arguments developed in critical reasoning and philosophical analysis and evaluation. At least two construction of argument tasks must be administered under test conditions.	20%
Examination Typically conducted at the end of each semester and/or unit. In preparation for Unit 3 and Unit 4, the examination should reflect the examination design brief included in the ATAR Year 12 syllabus for this course.	30%

Teachers are required to use the assessment table to develop an assessment outline for the pair of units (or for a single unit where only one is being studied).

The assessment outline must:

• include a set of assessment tasks

• include a general description of each task

• indicate the unit content to be assessed

- indicate a weighting for each task and each assessment type

- include the approximate timing of each task (for example, the week the task is conducted, or the issue and submission dates for an extended task).

In the assessment outline for the pair of units, each assessment type must be included at least twice. In the assessment outline where a single unit is being studied, each assessment type must be included at least once.

The set of assessment tasks must provide a representative sampling of the content for Unit 1 and Unit 2.

Assessment tasks not administered under test/controlled conditions require appropriate validation/authentication processes.

Grading

Schools report student achievement in terms of the following grades:

Grade	Interpretation
A	Excellent achievement
B	High achievement
C	Satisfactory achievement
D	Limited achievement
E	Very low achievement

The teacher prepares a ranked list and assigns the student a grade for the pair of units (or for a unit where only one unit is being studied). The grade is based on the student's overall performance as judged by reference to a set of pre-determined standards. These standards are defined by grade descriptions and annotated work samples. The grade descriptions for the Philosophy and Ethics ATAR Year 11 syllabus are provided in Appendix 1. They can also be accessed, together with annotated work samples, through the Guide to Grades link on the course page of the Authority website at www.scsa.wa.edu.au

To be assigned a grade, a student must have had the opportunity to complete the education program, including the assessment program (unless the school accepts that there are exceptional and justifiable circumstances).

Refer to the WACE Manual for further information about the use of a ranked list in the process of assigning grades.

Appendix 1 – Grade descriptions Year 11

A	**Critical reasoning** Identifies and explains the parts of a formal argument (modus ponens and modus tollens) in terms of deductive validity. Assesses cogency from statement acceptability and inferential strength accurately. Assesses and explains with reference to definitions why an argument contains an informal or a formal fallacy. Identifies and explains the difference between narrative, argumentative, explanatory and descriptive statements. **Philosophical analysis and evaluation** Identifies the topic and main conclusion of an argument and explains the philosophical tradition in which an argument is placed. Identifies and clarifies definitive elements of critical reasoning that have an impact on an argument. Evaluates the cogency of an argument with strong critical support. **Construction of argument** Constructs cogent arguments using acceptable premises and strong and/or deductively valid inferences supported by clear and relevant examples and/or counter-examples. Uses philosophical topics, language and concepts in a sophisticated manner to provide critical support for a position. Writes with structure and clarity, and displays originality of thought.

B	**Critical reasoning** Identifies complex forms of formal arguments and labels them correctly as either modus ponens or modus tollens. Assesses the acceptability of most statements and the strength of most inferential moves correctly, making accurate evaluations of cogency most of the time. Identifies and labels an argument as containing either an informal or a formal fallacy with some reference to definitions. Identifies most narrative, argumentative, explanatory and descriptive statements correctly. **Philosophical analysis and evaluation** Identifies the topic and the main conclusion of an argument and states the philosophical tradition in which an argument is placed. Identifies and clarifies most elements of critical reasoning that have an impact on an argument. Evaluates the cogency of an argument with reference to premises and inferences. **Construction of argument** Constructs cogent arguments using acceptable premises and strong inferences supported by some relevant examples and/or counter-examples. Refers to philosophical topics, language and concepts in a standard manner to support a position. Writes with structure and displays some complexity of thought.

C	**Critical reasoning**
	Identifies simple formal arguments and labels them correctly as either modus ponens or modus tollens.
	Explains the acceptability of simple statements and correctly assesses some inferential moves in an attempt to evaluate cogency.
	Identifies most informal and formal fallacies using correct terminology.
	Identifies narrative and descriptive statements correctly but confuses some argumentative and explanatory statements.
	Philosophical analysis and evaluation
	Identifies the topic and the main conclusion of an argument with limited reference to philosophical tradition.
	Identifies and clarifies some elements of critical reasoning that have an impact on an argument.
	Explains the cogency of an argument with limited reference to premises and inferences.
	Construction of argument
	Constructs moderately cogent arguments using some acceptable premises and moderately strong inferences supported by some general examples.
	Makes generalised claims about philosophical topics, language and concepts in order to provide some support for a position.
	Writes with some structure and purpose but displays ambiguity of thought in places.

D	**Critical reasoning**
	Confuses the distinction between the formal arguments of modus ponens and modus tollens.
	Asserts the acceptability of statements and inferential moves in an attempt to evaluate cogency.
	Confuses informal and formal fallacies.
	Confuses the difference between narrative, descriptive, argumentative and explanatory statements.
	Philosophical analysis and evaluation
	Sometimes identifies the general topic and the main conclusion of an argument without reference to philosophical tradition.
	Asserts the presence of elements of critical reasoning that appear in an argument.
	Asserts the cogency of an argument.
	Construction of argument
	Constructs weak arguments that make few relevant claims and/or commit serious errors of reasoning.
	Makes some claims relevant to a philosophical topic and/or concepts without providing support for a position.
	Writes with little or no structure and/or recounts the thoughts of others.

E	Does not meet the requirements of a D grade and/or has completed insufficient assessment tasks to be assigned a higher grade.

Appendix 2 – Glossary

This glossary is provided to enable a common understanding of the key terms in this syllabus.

Consilience	The concept that knowledge exists in an orderly and unified interdisciplinary state, and that all interpretations and conclusions in any inquiry should be a part of that orderliness and unity.
Dialectic	1. A Socratic conversation or dialogue in which contradictory claims about basic beliefs or first principles are analysed and evaluated, with the stronger claim judged as the best way to proceed in an inquiry [from Plato]. 2. A process of resolving logically opposite yet equally compelling claims about an idea or concept so that such claims exist no longer in dichotomy but as synthesised knowledge [from Hegel].
Dialogue	The use of conversation as philosophical inquiry by extending obligations and rights to the participants, for example, the Community of Inquiry.
Hermeneutics	The philosophical study of interpretation and meaning that involves considering others' perspectives beside our own, as well as the relationship between the part and the whole in text and context.