



Course Start 2026

Course Start is independent learning you need to complete as a fundamental part of your introduction to the course. It should take you approximately 5 hours to complete.

Course Name	Philosophy A level
How this Course Start fits into the first term of the course	The Course Start is an introduction to our first unit, Epistemology. It teaches about what philosophy is and gives some examples about how to do it. It helps you to understand that philosophers are always prepared to investigate arguments against their own beliefs in order to avoid dogmatism. (It also tells you about what dogmatism is.... It's nothing to do with dogs).
How will my Course Start learning be used in lessons?	We will discuss your answers and talk about the importance of defining terms carefully and using them consistently. We will check your understanding by discussing your answers and hearing how other people understood the text. We will evaluate the arguments Russell gives and talks about the strengths and weaknesses of his views.
Course Start learning objectives	• To test comprehension • To read Philosophy in preparation for philosophical discussion • Learning about theories of perception • Learning about traditional knowledge definition and criticism
Study Skills	• Reading, research and comprehension • Appreciating philosophical terminology • Spotting philosophical arguments • Distinguishing between reasons and conclusions. • Learning how philosophers give reasons and analyse arguments

Expectations for: Philosophy A level

Our specification is: [AQA Philosophy A Level 7172](#)

What this course involves
You will study four units: Year 1: Epistemology Moral Philosophy Year 2: Metaphysics of Mind Metaphysics of God
This course involves doing a lot of reading and listening to podcasts. It is assessed by 2 x 3 hour exams. There are short answer questions worth 3 or 5 marks. There are long answers for 12 mark questions (about 1.5 pages). You will also be required to write a 25 mark essay for each topic (3-4 pages approx). So expect lots of reading and writing homeworks. You don't have to be 'good at writing' before you start the course, but you do have to be prepared to learn how to write philosophy and practise the skill.
Completing Planned Study (independent learning homework) of 5 hours per week. This involves researching, reading, note-taking, planning, drafting and editing essays
Philosophy is taught through discussion. So be prepared to discuss your ideas in lessons. This will involve whole and small group discussions. You will be asked to give presentations but most importantly, you will be expected to listen respectfully to the views of others and respond to their views philosophically. Be prepared for very enjoyable discussions!
Developing independent learning skills (e.g. time management, preparing for each week's lessons, completing learning tasks outside lessons) Philosophy is brilliant for developing critical thinking skills that enable you to spot mistakes in your own reasoning and the reasoning of others. Be prepared to change your mind and allow others to change theirs. Come prepared to disagree politely and enjoy assessing a diversity of opinions.

Course Start: PHILOSOPHY PREPARATIONS



Welcome to Philosophy at Varndean! The following tasks need to be completed before arriving at your first lesson. They should take you about 4.5 hours. It is important that you complete these tasks as it will help you with the course and also because it is the first impression that we have of you – make sure it's a good one!

Getting Equipped

In order to succeed at Philosophy you will need to come to the lessons prepared and you will need to keep your work organised. You will be required to make more notes, read more material, and prepare for lessons more than you are perhaps used to.

Notes are very important in Philosophy - you will be frequently asked questions in class about previous lessons, so it's essential that you have a system which works for you to keep your work organised.

You might prefer to use a digital device for note-taking, in which case you will need to have a way of organising your files. You will be able to access college WIFI and you'll be given a college Google Drive account which you can use for this.

In Philosophy you will be required to closely read material that is again more difficult than you are perhaps used to and we will be discussing such material. It is really useful to have highlighter pens to identify important points in handouts and other material you might find yourself. Again, to have highlighted the main points in a piece of writing is particularly useful when the time comes to revise.

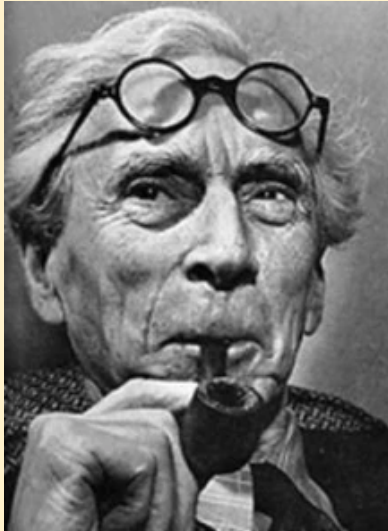
You will need to bring paper and pens to lessons to make notes! The paper should be loose leaf hole punched so that it can be organised in your file. Please do not use notebooks as these do not enable you to keep the material we give you, or the supplementary material you research, in the right place in your notes. Bringing a range of different coloured pens is a good idea as this can help you make more interesting notes. Bring these to your first lesson:

- A ring binder folder with subject dividers
- A4 hole punched paper
- Writing pens
- Highlighter pens

TASK 1: Reading Philosophy - Understanding Perception

Philosophy involves careful reading and careful writing. Read the following opening chapter from Bertrand Russell's "The Problems of Philosophy" and answer the questions. **You must hand your answers in at your first lesson.**

APPEARANCE AND REALITY by Bertrand Russell



Is there any knowledge in the world which is so certain that no reasonable man could doubt it? This question, which at first sight might not seem difficult, is really one of the most difficult that can be asked. When we have realized the obstacles in the way of a straightforward and confident answer, we shall be well launched on the study of philosophy -- for philosophy is merely the attempt to answer such ultimate questions, not carelessly and dogmatically, as we do in ordinary life and even in the sciences, but critically after exploring all that makes such questions puzzling, and after realizing all the vagueness and confusion that underlie our ordinary ideas.

In daily life, we assume as certain many things which, on a closer scrutiny, are found to be so full of apparent contradictions that only a great amount of thought enables us to know what it is that we really may believe. In the search for certainty, it is natural to begin with our present experiences, and in some sense, no doubt, knowledge is to be derived from them. But any statement as to what it is that our immediate experiences make us know is very likely to be wrong. It seems to me that I am now sitting in a chair, at a table of a certain shape, on which I see sheets of paper with writing or print. By turning my head I see out of the window buildings and clouds and the sun. I believe that the sun is about ninety-three million miles from the earth; that it is a hot globe many times bigger than the earth; that, owing to the earth's rotation, it rises every morning, and will continue to do so for an indefinite time in the future. I believe that, if any other normal person comes into my room, he will see the same chairs and tables and books and papers as I see, and that the table which I see is the same as the table which I feel pressing against my arm. All this seems to be so evident as to be hardly worth stating, except in answer to a man who doubts whether I know anything. Yet all this may be reasonably doubted, and all of it requires much careful discussion before we can be sure that we have stated it in a form that is wholly true.

To make our difficulties plain, let us concentrate attention on the table. To the eye it is oblong, brown and shiny, to the touch it is smooth and cool and hard; when I tap it, it gives out a wooden sound. Anyone else who sees and feels and hears the table will agree with this description, so that it might seem as if no difficulty would arise; but as soon as we try to be more precise our troubles begin. Although I believe that the table is 'really' of the same colour all over, the parts that reflect the light look much brighter than the other parts, and some parts look white because of reflected light. I know that, if I move, the parts that reflect the light will be different, so that the apparent distribution of colours on the table will

change. It follows that if several people are looking at the table at the same moment, no two of them will see exactly the same distribution of colours, because no two can see it from exactly the same point of view, and any change in the point of view makes some change in the way the light is reflected.

For most practical purposes these differences are unimportant, but to the painter they are all-important: the painter has to unlearn the habit of thinking that things seem to have the colour which common sense says they 'really' have, and to learn the habit of seeing things as they appear. Here we have already the beginning of one of the distinctions that cause most trouble in philosophy -- the distinction between 'appearance' and 'reality', between what things seem to be and what they are. The painter wants to know what things seem to be, the practical man and the philosopher want to know what they are; but the philosopher's wish to know this is stronger than the practical man's, and is more troubled by knowledge as to the difficulties of answering the question.

To return to the table. It is evident from what we have found, that there is no colour which pre-eminently appears to be *the* colour of the table, or even of any one particular part of the table -- it appears to be of different colours from different points of view, and there is no reason for regarding some of these as more really its colour than others. And we know that even from a given point of view the colour will seem different by artificial light, or to a colour-blind man, or to a man wearing blue spectacles, while in the dark there will be no colour at all, though to touch and hearing the table will be unchanged. This colour is not something which is inherent in the table, but something depending upon the table and the spectator and the way the light falls on the table. When, in ordinary life, we speak of *the* colour of the table, we only mean the sort of colour which it will seem to have to a normal spectator from an ordinary point of view under usual conditions of light. But the other colours which appear under other conditions have just as good a right to be considered real; and therefore, to avoid favouritism, we are compelled to deny that, in itself, the table has any one particular colour.

The same thing applies to the texture. With the naked eye one can see the grain, but otherwise the table looks smooth and even. If we looked at it through a microscope, we should see roughnesses and hills and valleys, and all sorts of differences that are imperceptible to the naked eye. Which of these is the 'real' table? We are naturally tempted to say that what we see through the microscope is more real, but that in turn would be changed by a still more powerful microscope. If, then, we cannot trust what we see with the naked eye, why should we trust what we see through a microscope? Thus, again, the confidence in our senses with which we began deserts us.

The *shape* of the table is no better. We are all in the habit of judging as to the 'real' shapes of things, and we do this so unreflectingly that we come to think we actually see the real shapes. But, in fact, as we all have to learn if we try to draw, a given thing looks different in shape from every different point of view. If our table is 'really' rectangular, it will look, from almost all points of view, as if it had two acute angles and two obtuse angles. If opposite sides are parallel, they will look as if they converged to a point away from the spectator; if they are of equal length, they will look as if the nearer side were longer. All these things are not commonly noticed in looking at a table, because experience has taught us to construct the 'real' shape from the apparent shape, and the 'real' shape is what interests us as practical men. But the 'real' shape is not what we see; it is something inferred from

what we see. And what we see is constantly changing in shape as we, move about the room; so that here again the senses seem not to give us the truth about the table itself, but only about the appearance of the table.

Similar difficulties arise when we consider the sense of touch. It is true that the table always gives us a sensation of hardness, and we feel that it resists pressure. But the sensation we obtain depends upon how hard we press the table and also upon what part of the body we press with; thus the various sensations due to various pressures or various parts of the body cannot be supposed to reveal *directly* any definite property of the table, but at most to be signs of some property which perhaps *causes* all the sensations, but is not actually apparent in any of them. And the same applies still more obviously to the sounds which can be elicited by rapping the table.

Thus it becomes evident that the real table, if there is one, is not the same as what we immediately experience by sight or touch or hearing. The real table, if there is one, is not *immediately* known to us at all, but must be an inference from what is immediately known. Hence, two very difficult questions at once arise; namely, (1) Is there a real table at all? (2) If so, what sort of object can it be?

It will help us in considering these questions to have a few simple terms of which the meaning is definite and clear. Let us give the name of 'sense-data' to the things that are immediately known in sensation: such things as colours, sounds, smells, hardnesses, roughnesses, and so on. We shall give the name 'sensation' to the experience of being immediately aware of these things. Thus, whenever we see a colour, we have a sensation of the colour, but the colour itself is a sense-datum, not a sensation. The colour is that of which we are immediately aware, and the awareness itself is the sensation. It is plain that if we are to know anything about the table, it must be by means of the sense-data -- brown colour, oblong shape, smoothness, etc. -- which we associate with the table; but, for the reasons which have been given, we cannot say that the table is the sense-data, or even that the sense-data are directly properties of the table. Thus a problem arises as to the relation of the sense-data to the real table, supposing there is such a thing.

The real table, if it exists, we will call a 'physical object'. Thus we have to consider the relation of sense-data to physical objects. The collection of all physical objects is called 'matter'. Thus our two questions may be re-stated as follows: (1) Is there any such thing as matter? (2) If so, what is its nature?

The philosopher who first brought prominently forward the reasons for regarding the immediate objects of our senses as not existing independently of us was Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753). His *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous, in Opposition to Sceptics and Atheists*, undertake to prove that there is no such thing as matter at all, and that the world consists of nothing but minds and their ideas. Hylas has hitherto believed in matter, but he is no match for Philonous, who mercilessly drives him into contradictions and paradoxes, and makes his own denial of matter seem, in the end, as if it were almost common sense. The arguments employed are of very different value: some are important and sound, others are confused or quibbling. But Berkeley retains the merit of having shown that the existence of matter is capable of being denied without absurdity, and that if there are any things that exist independently of us they cannot be the immediate objects of our sensations.

There are two different questions involved when we ask whether matter exists, and it is important to keep them clear. We commonly mean by 'matter' something which is opposed to 'mind', something which we think of as occupying space and as radically incapable of any sort of thought or consciousness. It is chiefly in this sense that Berkeley denies matter; that is to say, he does not deny that the sense-data which we commonly take as signs of the existence of the table are really signs of the existence of *something* independent of us, but he does deny that this something is non-mental, that it is neither mind nor ideas entertained by some mind. He admits that there must be something which continues to exist when we go out of the room or shut our eyes, and that what we call seeing the table does really give us reason for believing in something which persists even when we are not seeing it. But he thinks that this something cannot be radically different in nature from what we see, and cannot be independent of seeing altogether, though it must be independent of *our* seeing. He is thus led to regard the 'real' table as an idea in the mind of God. Such an idea has the required permanence and independence of ourselves, without being -- as matter would otherwise be -- something quite unknowable, in the sense that we can only infer it, and can never be directly and immediately aware of it.

Other philosophers since Berkeley have also held that, although the table does not depend for its existence upon being seen by me, it does depend upon being seen (or otherwise apprehended in sensation) by *some* mind -- not necessarily the mind of God, but more often the whole collective mind of the universe. This they hold, as Berkeley does, chiefly because they think there can be nothing real -- or at any rate nothing known to be real except minds and their thoughts and feelings. We might state the argument by which they support their view in some such way as this: 'Whatever can be thought of is an idea in the mind of the person thinking of it; therefore nothing can be thought of except ideas in minds; therefore anything else is inconceivable, and what is inconceivable cannot exist.'

Such an argument, in my opinion, is fallacious; and of course those who advance it do not put it so shortly or so crudely. But whether valid or not, the argument has been very widely advanced in one form or another; and very many philosophers, perhaps a majority, have held that there is nothing real except minds and their ideas. Such philosophers are called 'idealists'. When they come to explaining matter, they either say, like Berkeley, that matter is really nothing but a collection of ideas, or they say, like Leibniz (1646-1716), that what appears as matter is really a collection of more or less rudimentary minds.

But these philosophers, though they deny matter as opposed to mind, nevertheless, in another sense, admit matter. It will be remembered that we asked two questions; namely, (1) Is there a real table at all? (2) If so, what sort of object can it be? Now both Berkeley and Leibniz admit that there is a real table, but Berkeley says it is certain ideas in the mind of God, and Leibniz says it is a colony of souls. Thus both of them answer our first question in the affirmative, and only diverge from the views of ordinary mortals in their answer to our second question. In fact, almost all philosophers seem to be agreed that there is a real table. They almost all agree that, however much our sense-data -- colour, shape, smoothness, etc. -- may depend upon us, yet their occurrence is a sign of something existing independently of us, something differing, perhaps, completely from our sense-data whenever we are in a suitable relation to the real table.

Now obviously this point in which the philosophers are agreed -- the view that there is a real table, whatever its nature may be is vitally important, and it will be worthwhile to

consider what reasons there are for accepting this view before we go on to the further question as to the nature of the real table. Our next chapter, therefore, will be concerned with the reasons for supposing that there is a real table at all.

Before we go farther it will be well to consider for a moment what it is that we have discovered so far. It has appeared that, if we take any common object of the sort that is supposed to be known by the senses, what the senses *immediately* tell us is not the truth about the object as it is apart from us, but only the truth about certain sense-data which, so far as we can see, depend upon the relations between us and the object. Thus what we directly see and feel is merely 'appearance', which we believe to be a sign of some 'reality' behind. But if the reality is not what appears, have we any means of knowing whether there is any reality at all? And if so, have we any means of finding out what it is like?

Such questions are bewildering, and it is difficult to know that even the strangest hypotheses may not be true. Thus our familiar table, which has roused but the slightest thoughts in us hitherto, has become a problem full of surprising possibilities. The one thing we know about it is that it is not what it seems. Beyond this modest result, so far, we have the most complete liberty of conjecture. Leibniz tells us it is a community of souls: Berkeley tells us it is an idea in the mind of God; sober science, scarcely less wonderful, tells us it is a vast collection of electric charges in violent motion.

Among these surprising possibilities, doubt suggests that perhaps there is no table at all. Philosophy, if it cannot answer so many questions as we could wish, has at least the power of asking questions which increase the interest of the world, and show the strangeness and wonder lying just below the surface even in the commonest things of daily life.

Task 2: Answering Questions on Perception Reading

- 1. How is answering questions in philosophy different from answering them in everyday life? Pick one answer that best expresses Bertrand Russell's views from the answers below.**
 - a. Answering questions in everyday life is less interesting than answering questions in philosophy.
 - b. Philosophical questions are about ultimate issues, everyday questions are just practical.
 - c. Answering questions in philosophy is done very carefully and critically rather than carelessly and rigidly as we often do in everyday life.
 - d. Answering questions in philosophy can never be right or wrong but in everyday life it can be.
 - e. Answering questions in Philosophy makes you wise; answering questions in everyday life solves your problems.

- 2. Which of the following are reasons Bertrand Russell gives for not believing that there is one colour that we can attribute to the table? Pick as many answers as you think are correct from the list below.**
 - a. The colour does not appear evenly distributed on the table.
 - b. People in different cultures see colour in different ways.
 - c. The distribution of colours on the table changes with movement.
 - d. The colour of the table will look different to a man wearing blue spectacles.
 - e. The colour of the table would look different at night.

- 3. Why does the painter have to learn "the habit of seeing things as they appear"? Pick as many answers that you think express Bertrand Russell's views from the list below.**
 - a. Because the painter wants to reproduce that way things appear rather than the way they are.
 - b. Because painters see the world differently, but need to paint it the way others see it in order to communicate.
 - c. Because painters need to make their work look attractive.
 - d. Because being a good painter is really difficult and you cannot do it by habit.
 - e. Because the way things are is essentially the way things appear to be.

- 4. What according to Bertrand Russell do we ordinarily mean when we speak of objects as having colour? Pick as many answers that you think express Bertrand Russell's views from the list below.**
- a. We mean the sort of colour that an object would have if it was observed scientifically.
 - b. We mean the sort of colour that an object would have if it was observed by people who all belong to the same culture.
 - c. We mean the sort of colour an object would have whether it was observed by a human being or a different species.
 - d. We mean the sort of colour an object has if we all used linguistic concepts in the same way.
 - e. We mean the sort of colour an object would have if observed by an ordinary person with a clear view in the day time.
- 5. What is the difference, according to Bertrand Russell, between the 'real shape' and the 'apparent' shape of the table? Choose the one answer that best fits Bertrand Russell's views.**
- a. The real shape is an inference from what we see; the apparent shape is the way the table really is.
 - b. The apparent shape is an inference from what we see; the real shape the way the table really is.
 - c. The real shape is an inference from what we see; the apparent shape is the way the table appears.
 - d. The apparent shape is an inference from the real shape; the real shape is the way the table really is.
 - e. The real shape is an inference of the apparent shape which is the way the table is.
- 6. What does Bertrand Russell mean when he says the 'real table' is not known 'immediately to us at all'? Pick one answer.**
- a. That we cannot know the 'real table' without the mediation of the senses.
 - b. That the 'real table' is not the same as our experiences of sight, touch or hearing.
 - c. That the table we experience is at most a sign of some underlying 'real table' that causes our sensations of it.
 - d. That there is no such thing as a 'real table' outside of our sensations.
 - e. That 'real table' can only be revealed to us by God.

7. What, according to Bertrand Russell, do we mean when we use the term 'matter'? Pick one answer.

- a. Something that is conscious and occupies space.
- b. Something that is unconscious and occupies space.
- c. Something that does not occupy space but is conscious.
- d. Something that occupies space and is not conscious.
- e. Something that is space conscious.

8. What does George Berkley deny? Pick one answer.

- a. Matter
- b. Mind
- c. God
- d. Sense perception
- e. Existence

9. What, according to Bertrand Russell, do almost all philosophers agree on about the existence of the table? Pick one answer.

- a. That it is extremely hard to define.
- b. That it is essentially physical.
- c. That it is something independent of our individual experience
- d. That is essentially mental.
- e. That it is an idea in the mind of God.

10. What does Bertrand Russell conclude is the main thing that Philosophy can do? Pick one answer.

- a. Make you strange and confused.
- b. Make the world more interesting.
- c. Make you wise.
- d. Give you transferable skills.
- e. Give you a headache.

11. According to Bertrand Russell “The one thing we know about the table is that it is not what it seems”. Do you agree? Write three paragraphs, each with a clear point, example and comment outlining your arguments for and/or against Russell’s view.

Task 3: Starting to Define Knowledge

Part 1: The Traditional Definition of Knowledge (JTB)

For centuries, philosophers agreed that for you to truly *know* something, three specific conditions must be met. This is called the **Justified True Belief (JTB)** theory of knowledge. It can be written as a formula:

Knowledge = Justification + Truth + Belief

Your Task:

Write a brief, 1–2 sentence explanation for why *each* of the three ingredients is necessary.

Belief: Why can't you "know" something if you don't even believe it?

Truth: Why can't you "know" something that is factually false?

Justification: Why doesn't a lucky guess (like guessing the winning lottery numbers in advance) count as actual knowledge?

Part 2: Testing the JTB Formula

Read the following scenario and answer the questions below:

Maya looks out her window and sees her neighbor's driveway is wet. She thinks to herself, "It is raining outside." In reality, it is raining outside, and that is exactly why the driveway is wet.

1. Does Maya **believe** it is raining?

2. Is it **true** that it is raining?

3. Is Maya **justified** in her belief? (Does she have good evidence?)

4. Based on the JTB theory, does Maya **know** it is raining? Explain your answer.

Part 3: The Twist – Enter the Gettier Case

In 1963, a philosopher named Edmund Gettier turned the philosophy world upside down by showing that you can have a Justified True Belief, but it *still* doesn't feel like real knowledge. These are called **Gettier Cases**.

Example: The Broken Clock Scenario

Read the following scenario carefully:

*Sam walks into a room, looks up at the grandfather clock, and sees that the hands point to exactly 3:00 PM. Based on this, Sam forms the belief that it is 3:00 PM. As it turns out, it **is** exactly 3:00 PM. However, unknown to Sam, the clock actually stopped working exactly 24 hours ago.*

1. Go through the JTB checklist for Sam: Is his belief **true**? Is it **justified**? Does he **believe** it?

2. Does Sam actually *know* it is 3:00 PM? What would make you say so?
Explain your reasoning in a short paragraph.

Part 4: Deconstructing the Flaw

Look closely at the "Broken Clock" scenario from Task 3 and the "Rain" scenario from Task 2.

Your Task:	In your own words, explain the difference between Maya's justification and Sam's justification. Why does Maya's scenario feel like genuine knowledge, while Sam's scenario feels like a trick of good luck?

Hint: Think about the connection between the *evidence* the person is using and the *actual truth* of the situation.

Bonus: Design Your Own Gettier Case (The Ultimate Challenge)

Now it's your turn to be the philosopher. Try to create your own fictional "Gettier Case" scenario.

Your scenario must meet the following rules:

1. A character must believe something to be true.
2. They must have what looks like excellent, reasonable evidence (justification) for that belief.
3. The belief must actually turn out to be true.
4. **The Catch:** The true thing must be true because of a total coincidence or a completely different reason than the character thinks, meaning they don't *actually* know it.

Task 4: Your Own Philosophising

Go to [The Panpsycast Podcast guest page of their website](#), click on a link of someone you think 'looks' interesting and listen to the episode.

They will be asked the question '**What is Philosophy?**' Write down the guest's answer to that question and then say if you agree with the answer or not.

We will discuss the question of what philosophy is in our first lesson so come prepared to join in with the discussion.



See you in September:)