



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 3 hours to complete.

Course Name	Philosophy IB
How this Course Start fits into the first term of the course	The Course Start is an introduction to philosophy. 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.
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 and interpreted the questions
Course Start learning objectives	• To test comprehension • To read, listen to and/or watch philosophy in preparation for philosophical discussion • To think of philosophical issues as being embedded in the world.
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: IB Philosophy

Our specification is: IB Philosophy 2025

What this course involves

What you will study: (HL do all items listed, Standard Level do those in **BOLD**)

1. A text: **Mill On Liberty (Paper 2)**
2. Core Theme: **Being Human (Paper 1)**
3. Optional Theme: **Epistemology (Paper 1)**
4. Optional Theme: Ethics (**Paper 1**)
5. Coursework: **Philosophical analysis of a non-philosophical stimulus. (2000 words)**
6. HL extension: "Philosophy and contemporary issues" (**Paper 3**)

This course involves doing a lot of **reading and listening to podcasts**.

There is one piece of coursework that everyone has to complete.

SL sit two exam papers and HL sit three.

You will have to answer essay questions in the exams, so we will practice lots of writing exercises to get you really confident with structuring your 25 mark essay answers.

Completing **Planned Study** (independent learning homework) of 2-4 hours per week.

This involves researching, reading, reading, listening, thinking, chatting to friends and family about philosophy, note-taking, planning, drafting and editing essays.

Discussing and developing good oracy and aural skills. 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 – IB Philosophy

Respond to the tasks on the attached sheet.

What are the aims? To introduce you to key concepts in Philosophy and some of the key themes studied in IB Philosophy. To get you to think about doing philosophy and applying philosophical thinking to the world.	How long should the bridging work take? Up to 3 hours, take longer if you like :)
How will the work be assessed? You will be asked to produce and discuss your answers in your first week's Philosophy lessons. Work will be taken in and monitored. A grade 1-3 will be given for each piece of work. 1 would be excellent, 2 pass and 3 would require further study. Bear in mind we are not expecting you to understand <i>everything</i>. We know you are novices who will blossom into experts.	What should you do if you find the work difficult? Firstly, attempt all the work. If elements are challenging you should seek other sources. Seeing something explained in different ways can help. Use the internet to guide you, including these websites: • Philosophypages.com • alevelphilosophy.co.uk/ • plato.stanford.edu/ [degree level]

Since you are interested in Philosophy you could dip into any number of the following:

Academic Works

- **Bertrand Russell**, *A History of Western Philosophy* [1996] [pdf online]
- **Bertrand Russell**, *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912) [pdf online]
- **Descartes**, *Meditations (1641)* [pdf online]
- **Thomas Nagel** *What Does It All Mean?: A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy* (1989)

Film and TV

- *Gattaca* [1997]
- *The Matrix* [1999]
- *Blade Runner* (1982)
- *Solaris* (1972) (not George Clooney!)
- *Schindler's List* (1993)
- *1984* (1984)
- *Pay It Forward* (2000)
- *Ex Machina* (2015)
 - *Artificial Intelligence* [2001]
 - *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* [2004]
 - *Westworld* (current)
 - *The Good Life* [current]
 - *A Handmaid's Tale* [Current]

Fiction

- **Jostein Gaarder**, *Sophie's World* [1991]
- **Voltaire**, *Candide* [1759]
- **Robert Pirsig**, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* [1974]
- **Philip Dick**, *Do Android's Dream of Electric Sheep* [1968]
- **Aldous Huxley**, *A Brave New World* [1932]
- **William Golding**, *Lord of the Flies* (1954)
- **Nick Hornby**, *How To Be Good* (2001)
- **Herman Hesse** *Steppenwolf* (1927)
- **Jean-Paul Sartre**, *Nausea* (1938)

Web/Podcasts/Blogs

- [The Philosopher' Magazine](http://ThePhilosopherMagazine.com)
- verybadwizards.fireside.fm
- [Philosophy Now](http://PhilosophyNow.com)
- Thepanpsycast.com
- [History of Philosophy Without any Gaps](http://HistoryofPhilosophyWithoutanyGaps.com)

Course Start Work for Philosophy

Compulsory work to be completed by your **first Philosophy lesson in September**

1. Look up the following philosophical terms. Note down the word and a brief explanation:

Epistemology	
Ethics	
Analytic argument	
Synthetic argument	
A priori	
A posteriori	
Proposition/Assertion	
Necessary/contingent truths	
Antecedent/consequent	
Objective/subjective	
False	
Proof	
Paradox	
Tautology	

Please write answers to these questions (2-7), using the reading material below to help you write your answers. (What is philosophy?)

2. What is metaphysics?

3. What are the different ways of understanding scepticism?

4. Why might there not be a universal theory of morality?

5. Summarise, (in three claims/assertions), Russell's ideas about the value of philosophy.

6. What's the difference between dialectic and debate?

7. Read/watch/listen to at least ONE of the 'Academic Works/Fiction/Film/TV/Web' resources on the previous page and be ready to discuss it during the first week of philosophy.

There are also a few more questions to complete at the end of the doc:)

What is philosophy?

Many answers have been offered in reply to this question and most are angling at something similar. Philosophy is all of rational inquiry except for science. Perhaps you think science exhausts inquiry. About a hundred years ago, many philosophers, especially the Logical Positivists, thought there was nothing we could intelligibly inquire into except for scientific matters. But this view is probably not right. What branch of science addresses the question of whether or not science covers all of rational inquiry? If the question strikes you as puzzling, this might be because you already recognize that whether or not science can answer every question is not itself a scientific issue. Questions about the limits of human inquiry and knowledge are *philosophical* questions.

We can get a better understanding of philosophy by considering what sorts of things other than scientific issues humans might inquire into. Philosophical issues are as diverse and far ranging as those we find in the sciences, but a great many of them fall into one of three big topic areas, **metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics**.

Metaphysics

Metaphysical issues are concerned with the nature of reality. Traditional metaphysical issues include the existence of God and the nature of human free will (assuming we have any). Here are a few metaphysical questions of interest to contemporary philosophers: **What is a thing? How are space and time related? Does the past exist? How about the future? How many dimensions does the world have? Are there any entities beyond physical objects (like numbers, properties, and relations)? If so, how are they related to physical objects?** Historically, many philosophers have proposed and defended specific metaphysical positions, often as part of systematic and comprehensive metaphysical views. But attempts to establish systematic metaphysical world views have been notoriously unsuccessful.

In just the past few decades metaphysics has returned to vitality. As difficult as they are to resolve, metaphysical issues are also difficult to ignore for long. A better way to understand metaphysics as it is currently practiced is through a better understanding of how various claims about reality logically hang together or conflict. Metaphysicians analyze metaphysical puzzles and problems with the goal of better understanding how things could or could not be. Metaphysicians are in the business of exploring the realm of possibility and necessity. They are explorers of logical space.

Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge and justified belief. **What is knowledge? Can we have any knowledge at all? Can we have knowledge about the laws of nature, the laws or**

morality, or the existence of other minds? The view that we can't have knowledge is called **scepticism**. An extreme form of scepticism denies that we can have any knowledge whatsoever. But we might grant that we can have knowledge about some things and remain sceptics concerning other issues. **Many people, for instance, are not sceptics about scientific knowledge, but are sceptics when it comes to knowledge of morality.** Some critical attention reveals that **scientific knowledge and moral knowledge face many of the same sceptical challenges.**

Even if we lack absolute and certain knowledge of many things, our beliefs about those things might yet be more or less reasonable or more or less likely to be true given the limited evidence we have.

Epistemology

is also concerned with **what it is for a belief to be rationally justified**. Even if we can't have certain knowledge of anything (or much), questions about what we ought to believe remain relevant.

Ethics

While epistemology is concerned with what we ought to believe and how we ought to reason, Ethics is concerned with what we ought to do, how we ought to live, and how we ought to organize our communities. Sadly, it comes as a surprise to many new philosophy students that you can reason about such things. **Religiously inspired views** about morality often take right and wrong to be simply a matter of what is commanded by a divine being. **Moral Relativism**, perhaps the most popular opinion among people who have rejected faith, simply substitutes the commands of God for the commands of Society. Commands are simply to be obeyed, they are not to be inquired into, assessed for reasonableness, or tested against the evidence. Thinking of morality in terms of whose commands are authoritative leaves no room for rational inquiry into how we ought to live, how we ought to treat others, or how we ought to structure our communities. Philosophy, on the other hand, takes seriously the possibility of rational inquiry into these matters. We don't have a universal theory in science, why would there be a universal theory in morality?

So we might think of metaphysics as concerned with "What is it?" questions, epistemology as concerned with "How do we know?" questions, and ethics as concerned with "What should we do about it?" questions.

The Value of Philosophy

You can find information on this in **Bertrand Russell's, *The Problems of Philosophy* chapter 15, *The Value of Philosophy***. [see cover sheet]

"Physical science, through the medium of inventions, is useful to innumerable people who are wholly ignorant of it; thus the study of physical science is to be recommended, not only, or primarily, because of the effect on the student, but rather because of the effect on mankind in general. Thus utility does not belong to philosophy. If the study of philosophy has any value at all for others than students of philosophy, it must be only indirectly, through its effects upon the lives of those who study it. It is in these effects, therefore, if anywhere, that the value of philosophy must be primarily sought ... those questions which are already capable of definite answers are placed in the sciences, while those only to which, at present, no definite answer can be given, remain to form the residue which is called philosophy." - Russell

<http://www.ditext.com/russell/russell.html>

We humans hold on to beliefs like a security blanket. They give us comfort whether we can prove they are true or not or even whether they have been proven to be untrue, we still cling to them or return to them in times of need.

Russell says this about the security blanket:

“The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the cooperation or consent of his deliberate reason. . . The life of the instinctive man is shut up within the circle of his private interests. . . In such a life there is something feverish and confined, in comparison with which the philosophic life is calm and free. The private world of instinctive interests is a small one, set in the midst of a great and powerful world which must, sooner or later, lay our private world in ruins.” - Russell

The primary value of philosophy according to Russell is that it loosens the grip of uncritically held opinion and opens the mind to a liberating range of new possibilities to explore.

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2. How Philosophy is Done

As a kind of inquiry, philosophy is aimed at establishing knowledge and understanding. Once we raise a philosophical issue, whether about the nature of justice or about the nature of reality, we want to ask what can be said for or against the various possible answers to our question. Here we are engaged in formulating arguments. Some arguments give us better reasons for accepting their conclusions than others. Once we have formulated an argument, we want to evaluate the reasoning it offers. If you want to know what philosophers do, this is a pretty good answer: **philosophers formulate and evaluate arguments.**

Once a philosophical position is considered:

- We want to ask what arguments can be advanced in support of or against that issue.
- We then want to examine the quality of the arguments. Evaluating flawed arguments often points the way towards other arguments and the process of formulating, clarifying, and evaluating arguments continues.
- This method of question and answer in which we recursively formulate, clarify, and evaluate arguments is known as **dialectic**. Dialectic looks a lot like debate. **The goal of a debate** is to win by persuading an audience that your position is right and your opponent's is wrong. **Dialectic, on the other hand**, is aimed at inquiry. The goal is to learn something new about the issue under discussion.

Dialectic is sometimes referred to as the Socratic Method after the famous originator of this systematic style of inquiry.

Arguments: Structure and Evaluation

The common sense everyday way to assess a claim for truth or falsity is to consider the reasons for holding it or rejecting it.

An argument gives a reason for taking something to be true. **Arguments consist of two or more claims, one of which is a conclusion.** The conclusion is the claim the argument purports to give a reason for believing. The other claims are the **premises**. **The premises of an argument taken together are offered as a reason for believing its conclusion.**

Some arguments provide better reasons for believing their conclusions than others. In case you have any doubt about that, **consider the following examples:**

1. Sam is a line cook.
2. Line cooks generally have good kitchen skills.
3. So, Sam can probably cook well.

1. Sam is a line cook.
2. Line cooks generally aren't paid very well.
3. So, Sam is probably a millionaire.

Assuming the premises in the first argument are true, we have a good reason to think that its conclusion is true. The premises in the second argument give us no reason to think Sam is a millionaire. So **whether or not the premises of an argument support its conclusion is a key issue.**

Now consider these examples:

1. London is in England.
2. England is south of Scotland.
3. So London is south of Scotland.

1. London is in Wales.
2. Wales is west of England.
3. So London is west of England.

Again, the first of these two arguments looks pretty good, the second not so much. But **the problem with the second argument here is different.** If its premises were true, then we would have a good reason to think the conclusion is true. That is, **the premises do support the conclusion. But the first premise of the second argument just isn't true.** London is not in Wales. So the latter pair of arguments suggests another key issue for evaluating arguments. **Good arguments have true premises.**

That is pretty much it. A good argument is an argument that has true premises that, when taken together, support its conclusion.

So, evaluating an argument involves just these two essential steps:

- Determine whether or not the premises are true.
- Determine whether or not the premises support the conclusion (that is, whether we have grounds to think the conclusion is true if all of the premises are true).

8. Evaluate the following arguments, using the rules above.

- Are the conclusions supported by the premises?
- Are the premises true?

1. If Harry Potter is human, then Harry Potter is mortal
2. Harry Potter is a human.
3. Therefore, Harry Potter is mortal

1. All monkeys are primates
2. All primates are mammals
3. So all monkeys are mammals

1. If Sue misses her plane, she will be late for the conference.
2. Sue is late for the conference.
3. Therefore, she missed her plane.

1. All stars are bodies that shine steadily.
2. All planets are stars.
3. All planets are bodies that shine steadily.

Yay you've finished, now go for a long walk and let your mind wander:)

Success Criteria for Course Start

1. All answers are completed in detail with clear reference to the reading and evidence of wider reading using the resources from the instruction sheet. Deeper thinking in response to questions utilising one's own thoughts and examples with no material copied verbatim from the sheet. Justified answers that demonstrate a good understanding of the logic of argument through analysing details of arguments. Able to converse fluently about extra resources.
2. All answers are attempted to a good standard. Some attempt at sourcing wider reading and applying this to questions. Some deeper thinking which demonstrates an ability to analyse the logic of arguments using example and/or evidence. Reference to the information sheet for support, with some evidence of wider reading, but used in a fluent, thoughtful manner rather than copied directly. Answers provide some justification using evidence/examples with some analysis of reasoning. You are able to converse effectively about the extra resource.
3. Some answers are attempted, but not all. Responses are brief and omit key terminology made apparent in the sources. Some explanations are presented but lack clarity or depth. Examples or reasoning are stated but unexplored. Sections are extracted verbatim from the information sheet. Not able to provide any meaningful knowledge of extra resources.