

Course	PHIL60010
Title	Research Skills
Tutor	Dr Catharine Abell

Curriculum Content:

The course unit will consist of three main areas:

1. Key texts: critical analysis and discussion of key texts

Several seminars will be devoted to the discussion of selected key texts in philosophy. The aims of these sessions are to develop students' ability to analyse and develop cogent and creative criticisms of philosophical texts, to place particular views and arguments within a more general philosophical debate, and to take responsibility for sustaining fruitful and inclusive seminar discussions.

2. Dissertation Research Design

Information and advice will be provided concerning rules and regulations, plagiarism, identifying a topic and a supervisor, identifying relevant texts, how to write a research proposal, and how to plan one's research. There will also be class discussion of what constitutes good philosophical writing. Students will engage in small-group discussions of their own proposals, addressing such questions as: can the aims of the proposed research be met within the time constraints and the word limit? Is the philosophical thesis to be defended sufficiently interesting/novel/controversial? Is due attention being paid to the existing literature? Students will be encouraged to reflect on how their proposals could be developed in order to form the basis of an AHRC doctoral award scheme proposal. They will also write an assessed critical literature review and dissertation plan.

3. Student Presentations

Each student will present a 20-minute paper on their chosen dissertation topic, followed by a discussion. This presentation will take the form of a critical evaluation of a recent journal article or book chapter that is relevant to the student's chosen dissertation topic. All students will have prepared by reading the proposed article/chapter in advance. These presentations play a key role in the development of students' philosophical research skills as required for the completion of dissertations.

Teaching and Learning Methods:

Teaching will be seminar based, with a two hour seminar for a total of 16 weeks (spread over two semesters). Seminars will cover PDP/dissertation research design, in addition to presentations and discussions.

Assessment

Assessment activity	Length required	Weighting within unit
Presentation (Semester 2)	20 minutes	20%
MRes research proposal + bibliography (to be approved by prospective supervisor prior to submission) (Semester 1)	1500 words*	25%
Critical literature review and Dissertation Plan	3000 words	40%

(Semester 2)		
Seminar preparation and participation (Semesters 1 and 2)	n/a	15%

* *Word limit does not include bibliography.*

Aims:

- To identify and address students' research training needs.
- To enable students to plan their research and to write a proposal.
- To give students the skills required to manage their own personal development, training, and progress through their graduate studies.
- To equip students to write their Dissertation.
- To introduce students to a range of central philosophical texts outside their main areas of interest.
- To get students to lead, sustain, and participate in philosophical discussions that are not aided by a tutor.
- To get students to present a short philosophical paper, with appropriate visual aids, and answer questions about it.
 - To foster a cohesive, research-oriented intellectual environment amongst our MRes students.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

On completion of this unit successful participants will:

- Have identified a range of research training needs and taken reasonable steps to address some of them.
- Have found a suitable Dissertation topic and a supervisor who is willing to supervise a dissertation on that topic.
- Have written an MA research proposal and have formulated a plan for completing their dissertation within 3 months of completing the unit.
- Have understood, critically analysed and discussed some central philosophical texts.
- Be able to lead, participate in and sustain seminar discussions.
- Be able to present and publicly discuss a short philosophical paper
- Have written a critical literature review and dissertation plan which: identifies the key question(s) to be addressed by the dissertation; identifies and evaluates the main approaches to answering the question presented in the existing philosophical literature; outlines the position to be defended in the dissertation and the argument that will be put forward for that position; and presents a planned structure for that argument.

Key Transferable Skills:

On successful completion of this course unit, participants should have developed:

- Problem solving skills.
- Analytic and critical skills.
- The ability to argue from evidence.
- The ability to communicate ideas effectively.
- The ability to set appropriate goals and to work independently and/or cooperatively.