

## I Instructor Information

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**Name:** Dr. Bradley Rettler

**Office:** Ross Hall 128

**Office Hours:** Tuesday 11-12, Wednesday 1-3, and by appointment

**E-mail:** brettler@uwyo.edu

**Classroom:** EN 2015

**Meeting Times:** TR 9:35-10:50

## II Course Description

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Reason better when deciding what to believe, and when deciding what to do. This course provides the tools you need, drawing from several areas: cognitive psychology, behavioral economics, logic, probability, and decision theory. We will consider empirical evidence about ‘heuristics and biases’—spontaneous judgments that can be predictably irrational. And we will study what good deductive, causal, and probabilistic reasoning looks like. But the goal is entirely practical: to develop effective reasoning skills with clear applications in your personal and professional lives. The course is for anyone interested in improving their reasoning ability and their ability to construct and recognize compelling arguments. These skills may be helpful in a wide variety of university subjects and extra-academic pursuits.

## III Required Readings

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*Reason Better* by David Manley. Available on the TopHat platform. You should have already received an email invitation.

## IV Evaluation

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Attendance and Participation: 10%. I will take attendance for each class meeting. You are allowed two absences; each additional absence will result in a deduction of 5 points from your attendance and participation grade. (The only exception to this is if you have more than two absences excused by the Dean’s office and no unexcused absences.) Additionally, participation is strongly encouraged.

TopHat homework: 20% total. There are roughly 10 questions per chapter. These questions will be graded for accuracy. If you miss a homework assignment or are late, your grade will be zero. (The TopHat system doesn’t allow submission of questions after the deadline.) No exceptions except *documented unforeseen emergencies*. Because homework assignments are easy and worth 2% of your grade each, we do not drop the lowest homework assignment.

Thought Log: 20% total. I want you to think about your thinking, and everyone else's thinking! Do this by keeping a reasoning log. Keep track of instances of reasoning that you think are worth reflecting on. Did you get in an interesting argument with your parents? Witness a frustrating exchange on Facebook? Read a good op-ed in the New York Times? Trying to decide which internship to take? Whether to go to that concert you bought tickets for a month ago when now you're loaded with work? Think you've noticed a weird cognitive glitch? You will turn in 5 of these log entries. Describe for me the reasoning instance and your reflections on it. If it's related to something we've talked about in the course, great! Tell me how it relates. If you don't think we've mentioned it, that's great too! Maybe you'll discover something important. These aren't meant to be long. Good reflections might be as short as 300 words (~1 page). Aim for interesting and thoughtful. To get full credit, you must do two things successfully: a) describe the reasoning; and b) explain to me why you think it's relevant to consider in the context of a Critical Reasoning course. Two are due by the end of October (or they're 10% off per day late), two more by November 26, and the last one by December 10.

Midterm exam: 20%. There will be one midterm exam, covering chapters 1-4.

Final exam: 30%. There will be one cumulative final exam.

## V Changes

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This syllabus is a guide. Circumstances may alter the reading and/or test schedules. All changes will be announced in class and posted on WyoCourses. You are required to check WyoCourses and your email at least once a week.

## VI Expected Schedule

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SEE WYOCOURSES FOR THE UP-TO-DATE SCHEDULE!

September 10, 12 Chapter 1: Reasoning

September 17, 19 Chapter 2: Mindset

September 24, 26 Chapter 3: Clarity

October 1, 3 Practice Problems

Department of Philosophy, University of Wyoming  
PHIL 2420 TR 9:35-10:50 EN 2105

October 8, 10	Chapter 4: Deduction
October 15	Midterm Review
October 17	Midterm Exam
October 22, 24	Chapter 5: Evidence
October 29, 31	Chapter 6: Generalizations
November 5, 7	Chapter 7: Causes
November 12, 14	Chapter 8: Updating
November 19, 21	Chapter 9: Theories
November 26	Sharing and Discussion of ThoughtLogs
November 28	THANKSGIVING—No Class
December 3, 5	Chapter 10: Decisions
December 10	Final Exam Review
December 19	Final Exam, 10:15 am - 12:15 pm