



Course Syllabus

The Art of Arguing Well: Logic Matters in Everyday Life!

Course Summary:

This class will equip students to understand and use reason and logic, one of the most important abilities and tools we have to understand what is happening and to sort out our decisions.

Students will learn what reasoning and logic are, and how to start to apply those valuable tools in their lives. **We will focus on the Informal Fallacies as they have the most relevant application to our everyday lives.** They will be encouraged to be critical thinkers, meaning they will not take claims at face value but will commit to applying reason and logic to determine if things are true or not.

This course is a foundation course at Sound Reason Academy, and it is highly recommended before taking other courses. Furthermore, arguing well – using reason and logic well – is an extremely important and desperately needed life skill, and yet is it not taught in general education in the U.S. as a requirement at ANY LEVEL, middle school through college!

Course Experience:

Daily life brings decisions. Some decisions are more important than others, but all decisions are based upon a really important skill called reasoning. There are few things as important that we can do as parents as equip our children to reason well. Furthermore, as a student and person in a culture, you should be eager to learn how to identify false claims from true ones. Each person should really want to know how best to evaluate the ‘forks in the road’ that we will have to choose and good reasoning and logic skills will inform that decision.

In this class, students will get introduced to - and learn the basics of - reason and logic. Here are a few of the questions that will be answered and explained:

- What is the difference between reason and logic?
- What is critical thinking and why is it important?
- Are there different kinds of logic?
- What is a good and useful way to argue versus a bad and counter-productive way to argue with others?
- Why are some things more worthy of arguing about than others?
- What are the main logical fallacies of relevance?



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There are many issues in the U.S. culture which beg for good reasoning and logic to be applied to them for clarity of understanding. Nothing is more valuable than being able to think about important matters and to try to come to good, sound, reasoned conclusions. This is especially true for young people who are starting to explore the world and seeking to understand the things they experience and the claims they hear. This applies to all domains in life – political, religious, business, social, etc.

Students will learn the basics of logic and will understand how to use premises to support a conclusion. They will learn what fallacies are and how to identify them using real life examples.

Students will be expected to participate in the discussions we have, and to apply what they have learned. There are no prerequisites required for this class...just a thirst for learning! Homework is optional. The lessons are designed for high school aged students or advanced middle school, and questions are encouraged. Classes are structured for up to 10 students in four, one-hour lessons.

This class will be loosely-based on the excellent book, “The Art of Argument: An Introduction to the Informal Fallacies” by Larsen and Hodge.

Prerequisites & Age & Ability Recommendations:

No prerequisites are recommended for this class. This course is appropriate for advanced middle school children to adults.

Content Review by Week:

Intro: (Week 1)

- What is the difference between reason and logic? (Logic is a tool that is used in reasoning, but to reason is broader. Example: If you see two ducks on pond A and six ducks on pond B, you will say, 'Pond B has more ducks than pond A' - you used simple reasoning. We use reason regularly regarding physical things we experience each day, but logic is a process and method we use in our minds to understand things that are often abstract like rules or laws.)
- What is critical thinking and why is it important? (Critical thinking does not mean being critical of others! Rather, it is applying reason and logic to situations, problems or difficulties we encounter in order to find the best answer. We will encourage critical thinking as a way of life. Examples: The road is closed so what is the best way to our destination? My bicycle broke down and I need to use it - what do I do? I hear that is a dangerous area, so how do we navigate it? I earn so much money each week, so what are my living options?)

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- What is a good and useful way to argue versus a bad and counter-productive way to argue with others? (Generally speaking, it is good to keep arguments in the realm of principles and stay away from personal observations. It is good to argue in an inquisitive way with the motivation to learn or understand something. Good arguing normally happens in a non-emotional discussion. Examples: How come the store is only open to 3 pm? Why do we have to harvest the fruit at this time of the year? Why do they think it is important to spend money on that?)
- Are some things more worthy of arguing about than others? (What do you student's think? Is arguing over the flavor of ice cream we should buy as worthy as arguing over whether we should not talk to a particular friend due to an incident that happened?)
- Are there different kinds of logic? (This will cover inductive formal (deductive) versus informal (inductive) logic. Sub-topics include formal logic's format of premises and conclusions; the types of answers we are looking for [valid or invalid, formal; or strong or weak, informal]; the confidence in our conclusions [certainty, formal; probability, informal].)
- An introduction to the kinds of fallacies we will be covering in the following weeks.

Fallacies of Relevance: (Week's 2-4)

- What are the main logical fallacies of relevance?

What are fallacies of relevance and how do they work?

What are the "Against the Source" or Ad Fontem arguments? (We will cover six of these type fallacies, including Ad Hominem, which is saying bad things about the opponent to avoid the argument.)

What are the fallacies which appeal to emotion rather than to facts? (We will cover six of these types of fallacies, including the Appeal to Fear fallacy.)

What are the fallacies that distract us from the topic we are discussing? (We will cover four of these "Red Herring" fallacies, including the Strawman fallacy.)

Fallacies of Presumption: (Week 5)

- What are the main logical fallacies of presumption?

What are fallacies of presumption and how do they work?



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What are the fallacies which presume or assume points in the argument, which points are false or misleading? (We will cover five of these, including Begging the Question and Is-Ought.)

What are the fallacies which state incorrect or unknowable conclusions based on inductive reasoning? (We will cover four of these fallacies, including Sweeping Generalization and Hasty Generalization.)

Fallacies of Clarity: (Week 6)

- What are fallacies of clarity and what are the primary one's people commit?

How do the fallacies of clarity work? (We will cover four of these fallacies including Equivocation and Distinction without of Difference).

What Items or materials are provided with the course?

- This syllabus.
- A student version of each class's content will be made available prior to the class on the Materials page for the class on the web site, so students don't have to take notes (creating a logic account on the web site is required to access these documents).
- Homework is not required but will be provided upon student's request. If a student requests homework, the answers will also be available in documents on the Materials page for the class on the web site, so students don't have to take notes (creating a logic account on the web site is required to access these documents).
- It is recommended but not required that students purchase the excellent book, "***The Art of Argument: An Introduction to the Informal Fallacies***" by Larsen and Hodge. The course is largely based on that book.