

**King's University College
Department of Philosophy**

Philosophy 2550F: Trust, Truth and Lies: Reflections from Ordinary Language Philosophy

Instructor: Dean Proessel

Class hours: Fridays 11:30-2:30

Office Hours: Friday 10:30-11:30

Email: dproesse@uwo.ca

Course Description

This course examines selected writings from Austin, Wittgenstein and Cavell, among others, with a view to understanding what is otherwise known as “Ordinary Language Philosophy.” Such an approach to philosophy has been contested, with some commentators suggesting that it leads to quietism or conservatism, and that it promotes uncritical thought. We will strive to show that such claims are false. Ordinary language philosophy, it might be said, provides a new category of criticism: it strives to liberate us from the philosophical tendency towards *abstraction*, thus elucidating the *costs* of our temptation to idealized forms of knowledge and certainty. We will track this broad idea through a variety of themes, including philosophical skepticism, other minds, self knowledge, trust in communication, and the possibility of community. In so doing, we will strive to bring out what is perhaps the most important revolution of ordinary language philosophy: namely, ways in which these philosophers put the “human being back into language” and the “human *voice* back into philosophy,” thereby showing that our relation to the world and to others is inevitably bound up with our lives in language, with our willingness to “acknowledge” the other and to take responsibility for our use of language—all aspects of our quest for self knowledge and community in an uncertain world.

Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete this course will develop an understanding of the unique approach to philosophy known as ordinary language philosophy. They will come to understand why these philosophers focus on describing our “lives in language,” and how, in doing so, they challenge and diagnose the classical, Cartesian tradition of philosophy. This will provide students an opportunity to develop skills of critical analysis.

Course Requirements

Paper 1, 7 pages in length: 35% (Due October 16)
Paper 2, 7 pages in length: 35% (Due November 26)
Final exam, essay questions: 30% (To be Announced)

Late papers will be penalized at 3% a day.

Course Materials

All course readings will be made available through Brightspace.

Reading schedule

Week 1

The traditional “picture”: the tendency towards abstraction

Descartes’ *Meditations*, read Meditation 1

Philosophy of language: the referential theory of meaning

Week 2

Wittgenstein: The opening of *Philosophical Investigations*

Philosophical Investigations, Sections 1-39

Rush Rhees, “Wittgenstein’s Builders”

Week 3

Wittgenstein: “meaning is use,” grammar, forms of life

Philosophical Investigations, Sections 39-68, 89-133

Stanley Cavell, “Excursus on Wittgenstein’s Vision of Language”

Stanley Cavell, “The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Philosophy”

Week 4

Wittgenstein: following a rule

Philosophical Investigations, Sections: 143-242

Cora Diamond, “Rules: Looking in the Right Place”

Week 5

Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*: the dialectic between skeptic and idealist

On Certainty, Sections 1-65

Weeks 6 and 7

Stanley Cavell: external world skepticism

Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*. Read: "The Quest of Traditional Philosophy: Opening," and "The Quest of Traditional Philosophy: Closing"

Arata Hamawaki, "Cavell, Skepticism and the Idea of Criticism"

Week 8

Wittgenstein and Austin: other minds skepticism

Philosophical Investigations, Sections 243-315

Austin, "Other Minds"

Selections from *How to Do Things with Words*

Week 9

Cavell: from knowledge to acknowledgement

Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging" in *Must We Mean What We Say*

Cavell, Selections from *The Claim of Reason*

Week 10

Stanley Cavell: philosophy and human voice

Cavell, "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy" in *Must We Mean What We Say*

Arata Hamawaki, "Philosophic and Aesthetic Appeal: Stanley Cavell on the Irreducibility of the First Person in Aesthetics and in Philosophy"

Week 11

Wittgenstein on trust in conversation

On Certainty: Sections 66-299

Lars Hertzberg, "On the Attitude of Trust"

David Cockburn, "Trust in Conversation"

Week 12

Ordinary language and the possibility of community

Sandra Laugier, "Wittgenstein and Cavell: Anthropology, Skepticism and Politics" in *The Claim to Community*

Cavell, "Declining Decline"

**KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
GENERAL COURSE POLICIES
2026-27**

1. Academic Accommodations (Accessibility)

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found here [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

2. Academic Consideration for Student Absences

Students must be approved to write a makeup exam or for an extension of the assignment deadline. If you need to miss an exam or the deadline for the assignment, please follow these instructions.

There are two ways to seek academic consideration:

(i) Academic consideration based on medical or compassionate grounds

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate grounds), they should contact the Academic Advising Office. As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration.

For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate (SMC) is the appropriate documentation. The SMC is available at <https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/pdfs/student-medical-certificate.pdf>

- King's students: The Academic Advising Office website is located in DLH 104. The Academic Advising website is <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising>.
- If your home faculty is Huron or at Western, please submit your documentation to your faculty's academic counselling office.
- Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

You may submit requests for academic consideration through the **Student Absence Portal**, linked on this website: <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising/academic-consideration-requests-and-student-absence-portal>

(ii) Academic consideration through an undocumented absence

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per half-course (0.5) weight.

- Note that instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline to confirm this assessment.
- If instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs. (For example, if students need to submit X of Y assignments, this flexibility already provides consideration.)
- Undocumented absences can not be used as the basis for academic consideration for December or April exams.

For further information on the academic consideration policy, please see https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

c) Absences from Final Exams

If you miss the Final Exam, **contact your Academic Advising Office** as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the “Special Examination” (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a multiple exam situation (i.e., you are scheduled to write more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details (under [Special Examinations](#)).

d) Religious Accommodations

Students should consult the University’s list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and their Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

3. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King’s University College:
<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/accessibility-services>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King’s University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/campus-life/student-supports/>

Good2talk is an online and phone resource for students, available 24/7, with services in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

Western’s Mental Health Services site provides a complete list of options on how to obtain help: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental-health/index.html>

Academic Support Services at King's University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/academics/academic-supports/>

4. Statement on Gender-Based Sexual Violence

King's and Western are committed to reducing incidents of gender-based sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: [Mental Health and Wellness at King's](#).

You can reach supports at King's by emailing care@kings.uwo.ca or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a Social Worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western's Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by email (health@uwo.ca) or by calling 519-661-3568. Additional support services can be found <https://www.uwo.ca/health/gbsv/support/index.html>

5. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Use of Electronic Devices: Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom: King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see https://kings.uwo.ca/sites/2025/assets/files/campus/Kings_Code_of_Student_Conduct.pdf

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

6. Statement on Academic Offences

King's is committed to academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.pdf

It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. **Check with you instructor to check which tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in each course.** Note that although some courses may permit the use of such tools, it does not mean use of such tools is permitted in other courses.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system; see <https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/Originality Reports - TurnItIn.html>.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

7. Copyright of Course Material

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member. Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

8. Use of Recordings

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

9. Policy on Attendance

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course, after due warning has been given. On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course.