

Philosophy 358 (A01): Theory of Perception
SPRING 2025 [22477]

Scheduled class times

Monday & Thursday, 11:30-12:50 – David Strong Building, Room C130

Professor

Patrick Rysiew

Office Hours: Thursday and Friday, 1:00-2:20, or by appointment; Clearihue B321

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Course Description

Perception is among our principal sources of information about the world. It's something we tend to take for granted: we do it all the time, and generally do it very well, without having to think about it. This course is designed to introduce students to issues and questions that arise when we step back and try to understand perception, and to the major philosophical positions that have been staked out in trying to do so. Some of the issues addressed are epistemological – having to do with what entitles us to form the perceptual beliefs that we do. Others are psychological – having to do with how perception works, how we are to conceive of perceptual states and processes, and so on. There are also important connections between issues and theories in the philosophy of perception and developments and theories in the various cognitive sciences. Particularly towards the end of the course we will consider some of these as well.

This course will:

- introduce you to key concepts and issues in the philosophy of perception
- give you a basic understanding of major philosophical theories of perception
- introduce you to some important points of contact between philosophical treatments of perception and issues and views that arise within the various cognitive sciences
- improve your ability to critically engage with academic literature
- improve your philosophical writing skills

Texts

- 1) William Fish, *Philosophy of Perception: A Contemporary Introduction*, **second** edition (Routledge 2021), ISBN 9781138485433. Available through the [UVic Bookstore](#), from [the publisher](#), or via online retailers. The e-version is available through the [UVic Library](#).
- 2) Several additional readings will be made available via the course's Brightspace page.

Evaluation

Students' grades will be based on:

- a) A take-home, open-book midterm exam (30%).
- b) A paper, approximately 8-10 pages long (30%). Some topics will be suggested. Students may write on a topic of their own design, but only if they obtain the instructor's permission in advance.
- c) A take-home, open-book final exam (30%). The final exam will be cumulative.
- d) Several short assignments (10%). Approximately 8 of these will be given. Students must

complete at least 3, but can do up to 5. (The top 3 will be counted.) Which short assignments a student writes on is up to them. However, it is *strongly* recommended that students get a start on these early in the course. Topic questions will be distributed at start of a given week; students will have until the end of the week to complete them; responses will be a maximum of 250 words.

In order to be eligible to pass the course, students must successfully complete the midterm, the paper, and the final exam. Failure to complete one of these required components will result in a grade of ‘N’ for the course.

Beyond the student’s having adequately addressed the topic question(s) on which they write, evaluation of the short assignments, essays, and any essay question(s) appearing on the final exam will be based on: evidence of comprehension of the materials and issues addressed; evidence of original and critical thought with regard to that material; the extent to which the student stakes out a position and provides good reasons and arguments for it; the extent to which the student communicates their ideas clearly (using complete and grammatical sentences, correct terms, a clear essay structure, and so on). For the short assignments, essays, and final exam, any materials used must be properly cited in the standard way. *The use of outside materials, including any readings not assigned for the course, is permitted only if you have received the instructor’s permission ahead of time.*

Late assignments unaccompanied by a legitimate excuse will be penalized at the rate of 5% per day or portion thereof, to a maximum of 30%. Exceptions to this penalty will only be considered in cases where an alternate deadline was arranged ahead of time or lateness was caused by an unexpected or unavoidable circumstance, as described in the University’s [policies regarding academic concessions](#). If you are unable to meet a deadline because of conflicting responsibilities or unexpected or unavoidable circumstances *you must contact me as soon as you are aware of the circumstances or conflict.*

The standard [University grading scheme](#) will be used. Here is an excerpt:

Grade	Point Value	Percentage	Description
A+	9	90 – 100	An A+, A, or A- is earned by work which is technically superior, shows mastery of the subject matter, and in the case of an A+ offers original insight and/or goes beyond course expectations. Normally achieved by a minority of students.
A	8	85 – 89	
A-	7	80 – 84	
B+	6	77 – 79	A B+, B, or B- is earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student’s full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material. Normally achieved by the largest number of students.
B	5	73 – 76	
B-	4	70 – 72	
C+	3	65 – 69	A C+ or C is earned by work that indicates an adequate comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and/or participating in class activities.
C	2	60 – 64	
D	1	50 – 59	A D is earned by work that indicates minimal command of the course materials and/or minimal participation in class activities

			that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.
F	0	0 – 49	F is earned by work, which after the completion of course requirements, is inadequate and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.

Expectations

This course is in-person only; lectures will not be recorded. Students are expected to come to class, to come to class having read the assigned readings, and to be ready to talk and ask questions about the material. Students who miss a class are responsible for any material covered therein, as well as for finding out what announcements, if any, were made. In general, this course is reading- and writing-intensive. It is very important to keep up with the readings and assignments as we go along.

Three quick tips for doing well in the course

1. *Come to class* -- when you must miss, try to let the instructor know ahead of time; afterwards, talk to a class-mate about what happened; ask for their lecture notes and/or visit the instructor in office hours.
2. *Do the readings ahead of time, and read ‘actively’* – pay attention to what you’re reading, ask yourself what point(s) the author(s) is trying to make, why this matters, what questions you’d like to ask the author, and so on.
3. *If you’re having trouble with any of the course material, speak to the instructor right away* -- office hours are not just for crises; they are meant to provide you with an additional everyday means of improving your understanding of the course material.

Academic Integrity and Professional Conduct

Chat GPT and similar technologies are not permitted for this course. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated. It is each student’s responsibility to know the University’s regulations in this regard. The Policy on Academic Integrity is published in [the University Calendar](#). You can also consult the [Libraries’ plagiarism guide](#) or the [Tri-Faculty Standards for Professional Behavior for Students](#), which draws together a number of existing UVic policies in one place for ease of reference. Professionalism is expected from all students enrolled in courses in the Faculty of Humanities. As part of professionalism, students, faculty and staff are expected to be familiar with University policies, including the Tri-Faculty Standards.

Intellectual property of materials on the LMS website

All assignments for this course and all materials posted to the LMS website are the intellectual property of the instructor and the University of Victoria. Do not circulate this material or post it to note-sharing sites without the instructor’s permission. Posting course materials to note-sharing sites or otherwise circulating course materials without the permission of the instructor violates the Policy on Academic Integrity (link above). Any evidence that you are circulating materials without permission will be referred to the Chair of the Philosophy Department for investigation.

Academic Supports

The University has a number of academic support services that may help you in this course, including the [Centre for Academic Communication](#), the [Library’s Research Support page](#), and the [Library’s “Ask Us” service](#). Information about academic supports can also be found through the [University’s Learn Anywhere site](#).

Academic Accommodations

The University of Victoria is committed to creating a learning experience that is as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this course, please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with me. If you believe you will require academic accommodations to address barriers to your education in this course and you have not already registered with the [Centre for Accessible Learning](#), please [do so](#). The Centre for Accessible Learning is the office designated to make arrangements for accommodations. You can find information about academic accommodations through the Centre for Accessible Learning's website.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

What follows is provisional and subject to revision at the instructor's discretion. Any changes to the schedule will be announced in class. As a default, readings for a given subject/week are listed in the order in which you should read them.

Week 1 (Jan. 6, 9): Introduction to the Course, and to the Subject

- there are no assigned readings, but students should get a copy of the textbook, familiarize themselves with the course Syllabus and Brightspace page, and start on readings for next week

Week 2 (Jan. 13, 16): Getting Started

- Fish, Ch. 1
- Gregory, "Perceptions as Hypotheses" (Brightspace)

Week 3 (Jan. 20, 23): Sense-Datum Theories

- Fish, Ch. 2
- Ayer, "The Argument from Illusion" (Brightspace)

Week 4 (Jan. 27, 30): The Representational Principle and Intentional Theories

- Fish, Ch. 3
- Dretske, "Experience as Representation" (Brightspace)

Week 5 (Feb. 3, 6): Continued

MIDTERM POSTED: THURSDAY FEB. 6

Week 6 (Feb. 10, 13): Adverbialism and Qualia Theories

- Fish, Ch. 4
 - *optional: Tye, "The Adverbial Theory: A Defense of Sellars against Jackson" (Brightspace)*

No classes Feb. 17-21: Reading Break

***MIDTERM DUE: MONDAY FEB. 17**

Week 7 (Feb. 24, 27): Naïve Realism

- Fish, Ch. 5

***SUGGESTED PAPER TOPICS DISTRIBUTED: THURS. FEB. 27**

Week 8 (March 3, 6): Non-Visual and Multi-Modal Perception

- Fish, Ch. 8 and 9
- Reid, selections (Brightspace)

Week 9 (March 10, 13): Continued

***DEADLINE FOR APPROVAL OF NON-SUGGESTED PAPER TOPICS: THURS. MARCH 13**

Week 10 (March 17, 20): Perception and Cognitive Science

- Fish, Ch. 6
- Noë & O'Regan, "On the Brain-Basis of Visual Consciousness" (Brightspace)
 - optional: Milner & Goodale, "The Visual Brain in Action" (Brightspace)

Week 11 (March 24, 27): Action and Embodiment

- Merleau-Ponty, "Selections from *Phenomenology of Perception*" (Brightspace)
- Ballard, "On the Function of Visual Representation" (Brightspace)
 - optional: Noë, "Experience without the Head" (Brightspace)

***PAPER DUE: THURS. MARCH 27**

Week 12 (March 31, April 3): Catch-up, Review

***FINAL EXAM:** The Term 2 exam period runs April 7-25. The scheduling of the final exam will be set by the University as the end of term approaches.

Some important administrative dates:

- Sun, Jan. 19: last day for 100% reduction of fees
- Wed., Jan. 22: last day to for adding second-term courses
- Sun., Feb. 9: last day for 50% reduction of tuition fees. 100% of tuition fees will be assessed for courses dropped after this date
- Fri., Feb. 28: last day for withdrawing from first-term courses without penalty of failure

I acknowledge and respect the lək'wəḡən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.