



# MODES OF INQUIRY



Fall 2025 | Tue/Thur 10:00am - 11:30am

## INSTRUCTOR

**Dr. Tanushree Agrawal**

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OFFICE HOURS: Held in Ikeda 402, by appointment using the following link: xxx

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

We go through our entire lives asking questions, exploring ideas, and trying to know things. Formally, this process is known as inquiry, and surprisingly, it does not imply that we will find answers to our questions! As we will discover, absolute answers, fact, or truth are elusive – but this hasn't stopped us from trying. 😊 During the past two or three thousand years, humanity has developed a variety of different approaches to inquiry. Some approaches are more suited to certain questions; some approaches are more suited to other questions. These approaches have persisted and developed because they have been successful (to a greater or lesser extent) in fostering discovery and communication. This class aims to increase your intellectual breadth by giving you ability to understand and use many different modes as you go through your own lives asking and trying to answer questions.

Specifically, we will study six important modes or methods of inquiry:

1. Axiomatic Inquiry: How do we use logic, step-by-step reasoning and critical thinking to make an argument? Distinguish between inductive and deductive reasoning. What counts as a good argument, and what traps are laid in a bad argument?
2. Philosophic Inquiry: This involves thinking about deep theoretical questions such as What is reality? What is good? What is knowledge? What is reason? What is ethics? What is consciousness?
3. Observational/Scientific Inquiry: What is the scientific method? What can we observe? What can we measure? Is objectivity possible? What has been left out of the sciences?
4. Historical Inquiry: What happened in the past? How do we create a "factual" narrative of the past? What does the past have to do with how we view the world now?
5. Interpretive/Social Scientific: How do we view the world and "interpret" our experiences based on our perspectives in the social world?
6. Imaginative Expressive: How do we define and interpret art? How can we creatively express an idea?

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## COURSE OBJECTIVES

Over the course of this quarter, you will:

- Understand the scope of human questioning, and the various ways in which people have tried to find answers to questions
- Develop a framework for critical thinking about knowledge and its acquisition
- Understand the assumptions that underlie the ways of inquiring within and across disciplines
- Explore the strengths and limitations of the different modes of inquiry, and get a sense of which modes may be better suited to address certain types of questions versus others
- Be able to see and articulate the differences and commonalities across various ways of thinking and building knowledge

Accomplishing these goals is both your responsibility and mine. I am committed to providing thoughtful lectures, videos, experiments and exams, being available to answer your questions, and making the course as worthwhile to you as possible. On your end, I ask that you commit yourself to deeply engaging with the course material, and with the assignments outlined in this syllabus.

Note that this is a *thinking-intensive class*. You will need to learn to discuss unfamiliar abstract conceptual issues with clarity and insight. One big challenge of this class is developing your personal language to communicate your thoughts about knowledge and about life. But it will be worth it!

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## COURSE MATERIALS

**BRIGHTSPACE WEBSITE:** Brightspace will be the primary hub for all activities, submissions, and communication in this course. There is no assigned textbook that you need to purchase. All readings will be made available to you.

## ASSIGNMENTS

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### CLASS PARTICIPATION (20%)

The intellectual skills necessary for critical analysis simply *cannot* be developed without effort. So:

You must bring **hard copies** of the readings to class.

You must keep a **reading journal** (notes of some kind) documenting your ongoing analysis of the assigned texts and reflections on class discussion. These journals are critical for the process of writing and thinking. Bring your notes to class; they will serve as starting points for discussion. And they will be essential during the written exams

You must participate in discussion in a **productive** manner.

1. Ask whatever questions you need to to make sure you understand the readings to the extent that you can form informed opinions about them (i.e., critique them).
2. Blatant statements of opinion are not helpful in academic discussion. Articulate an argument instead. Cite evidence to support your positions. When raising objections, analyze arguments, *not personalities!* Do not be distracted by irritating idiosyncrasies of the authors.
3. Do not be afraid to venture a hypothesis or an imaginative guess. You will ***never*** be penalized for saying the “wrong” thing in this class.

You must be **respectful** (of yourself, me, and your classmates)

1. Listen attentively without distractions during class.
2. Try your best to maintain an open mind, even when you disagree with ideas. Note that if the class is going well, then you *certainly* disagree with each other ;)
3. Do your part to make sure that people in our class feel valued, respected, and supported.
4. When responding to others’ critiques, try not to be defensive (this is hard, I know). Listen to their concerns with the hope of improving yourself, learning, and growing.

**FISHBOWL DISCUSSIONS:** An in-class activity that we will use quite often is the Fishbowl Discussion. Three or four students will be randomly selected to sit in a small inner circle with the rest of the class seated in a larger outer circle. The small group conducts a 20-minute discussion with each other while the rest of the students listen, take notes, and later pose questions and comment on what they have observed. The instructor will not be a part of this conversation in any way.

This will hold you accountable for completing the reading assigned for class that day. If you arrive to class unprepared, *it will definitely show* – you won’t know what to say and will have to just sit in silence while we all watch you, and that’s just painful for everyone.

To prepare for these discussions, complete the readings assigned and take good notes, write down questions you want to ask, and things you may disagree with. Favor the types of questions that will generate discussion rather than the kinds of questions that are very nitpicky and detailed about the assignment, or closed-ended questions that can be answered with a yes or no. Plan ahead for how you're going to engage your classmates in the discussion. It's not only about you, but also about how you can have a conversation with others. Make sure to have hard copies of the readings and your class-prep notes available during class (i.e. laptops are not allowed during a Fishbowl Discussion). I encourage you to work with your classmates in preparing for each class.

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**COOKIE EXPERIMENT** (10% TOTAL; PROPOSAL 4%, REPORT 6%)

In this class, we will get a chance to see the scientific process in action and will conduct a hands-on experiment by baking cookies in pairs! More details will be provided during the semester.

**PROPOSAL:** You will be required to submit a short proposal for your experiment, which will be in the form of a worksheet where you list out your idea, hypotheses, variables, and methods (i.e., the ingredient list for your cookies, so I can buy them!)

**FINAL REPORT:** After running the experiment as a group (i.e., baking the cookies together), you will need to write up a final report with your data and findings.

**LATE POLICY:** There will be no late submissions allowed for the Proposal. The final report will be eligible for half credit if submitted by the last day of class.

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**EXAMS** (50%, 2 EXAMS EACH WORTH 25%)

There will be two exams (non-cumulative) that will test you on all content covered and assigned in this class. All exams will be **open-book** (you can have hard copies of your readings and notes during the test), held in class, and will be comprised of short essay questions.

**LATE POLICY:** There will be **no late exams** allowed. If you miss an exam, you CANNOT make it up, except under special circumstances (e.g., you have a doctor's note for a serious ailment).

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**SELF-KNOWLEDGE PROJECT** (20%)

When thinking about enhancing knowledge, one useful place to start is with the self. How do we inquire and learn more about *ourselves*? What modes can we use to enhance our own self-knowledge? Combining all the ideas from this class, your final project will be a creative piece that expresses who you are, and can be done in whatever format you choose (e.g., art piece, poem, film, family tree, social experiment, genetic analysis, etc.), focusing on one or multiple modes of self-inquiry. You will briefly present this project alongside your classmates in the form of an exhibition on the last day of class.

**LATE POLICY:** There will be **no late submission** allowed. If you miss the in-class exhibition, you CANNOT make it up, except under special circumstances (e.g., you have a doctor's note for a serious ailment).

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**GRADE BREAKDOWN**

Final letter grades in the course will be assigned according to the following percentage scale

A+	97.00+	B+	87.00-89.99	C+	77.00-79.99	D	60.00-69.99
A	93.00-96.99	B	83.00-86.99	C	73.00-76.99	F	0.00-59.99
A-	90.00-92.99	B-	80.00-82.99	C-	70.00-72.99		

Class Participation:	20%
Cookie Experiment:	10% (4% for proposal, 6% for final report)
Exam 1:	25%
Exam 2:	25%
Self-knowledge Project:	20%

## COURSE SCHEDULE

<u>Date</u>	<u>Day</u>	<u>Agenda</u>	<u>Checklist (for <i>before</i> class)</u>
Sep 3	Wed	Introduction	
Sep 4	Thur	<i>Brainstorm session</i>	
Sep 9	Tue	What is real? What can we know?	<input type="checkbox"/> Postman & Weingartner, 1971 <input type="checkbox"/> Humphrey, 2015 <input type="checkbox"/> Blackmore, 2018
Sep 11	Thur	From reality to knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> Hoffman, 2015 (Video) <input type="checkbox"/> Kissinger, 2021
Sep 16	Tue	The 6 modes of inquiry	<input type="checkbox"/> Wilson, 2000a
Sep 18	Thur	Science as knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> Chalmers, 2013a
Sep 23	Tue	Knowledge from falsification	<input type="checkbox"/> Chalmers, 2013b
Sep 25	Thur	Scientific revolutions	<input type="checkbox"/> Chalmers, 2013c <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Expt Proposal due 9/24 Wed</b>
Sep 27	Sat	<i>Field experiment!</i> 🧪 🤖	
Sep 30	Tue	The 6 modes revisited	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Expt Report due 9/29 Mon</b>
Oct 2	Thur	Sources of knowledge & pseudoscience	<input type="checkbox"/> Popper, 1960 <input type="checkbox"/> Ladyman, 2013 <input type="checkbox"/> Zimmer, 2025
Oct 7	Tue	<i>Pre-exam review</i>	
Oct 9	Thur	<b>EXAM #1</b>	

<u>Date</u>	<u>Day</u>	<u>Agenda</u>	<u>Checklist (for before class)</u>
Oct 14	Tue	<i>No class! 🍁 Happy Fall Break 🍁</i>	
Oct 16	Thur	<i>**No class in lieu of 9/27 field experiment**</i>	
Oct 21	Tue	Knowledge in the mind	<input type="checkbox"/> Wilson, 2000b <input type="checkbox"/> Bennett, 2023
Oct 23	Thur	Knowledge in genes & culture	<input type="checkbox"/> Henrich, 2016a
Oct 28	Tue	Social knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> Henrich, 2016b
Oct 30	Thur	Historical accounts of "truth"	<input type="checkbox"/> Wilholt, 2008 <input type="checkbox"/> Banner, 2021 <input type="checkbox"/> Broadbent, 2017 <input type="checkbox"/> Hall & Tandon, 2017
Nov 4	Tue	Religion	<input type="checkbox"/> McGrath, 2019 <input type="checkbox"/> Hossenfelder, 2021 (Video)
Nov 6	Thur	The arts as a source of knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> Pizarro et al, 2006 <input type="checkbox"/> Eisner, 2008 <input type="checkbox"/> Bakhshi et al., 2009
Nov 11	Tue	<i>Creativity &amp; hidden truths: In-class art activity 🎨</i>	
Nov 13	Thur	Aesthetic knowledge & emotions	<input type="checkbox"/> Leder et al., 2004 <input type="checkbox"/> Silvia, 2010 <input type="checkbox"/> Gorodeisky & Marcus, 2022
Nov 18	Tue	Where do we go from here?	<input type="checkbox"/> Wilson, 2000c <input type="checkbox"/> Henrich, 2016c <input type="checkbox"/> Lindblom, 1994
Nov 20	Thur	<i>Pre-exam review</i>	
Nov 25	Tue	<b>EXAM #2</b>	
Nov 27	Thur	<i>No class! 🙏 Happy Thanksgiving 🙏</i>	
Dec 2	Tue	<i>Brainstorm session</i>	
Dec 4	Thur	<b>CLASS EXHIBITION</b>	

## COURSE POLICIES

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### EXCUSED ABSENCES

If you have a scheduling conflict or an emergency arises that affects your ability to complete any of the graded components of the course, please contact me as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements. You must provide documentation for a university-approved reason, such as hospitalization, family emergency, etc. Note that you must notify me AND obtain my permission to miss the exam PRIOR to its occurrence; otherwise, you will receive a zero for that exam grade.

If you are not sure whether your reason for missing class counts as an approved reason, please ask me! I am often willing to excuse absences when you communicate with me in a timely manner.

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### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

*All students are expected to adhere to standards of academic integrity.* Cheating of any kind on any assignment will not be tolerated. It is disrespectful to your peers, the university, and to me. If you are unsure what might constitute a violation of academic integrity, consult me and/or the Soka website on academic honesty: <https://catalog.soka.edu/academic-honesty>. Any evidence of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students. Consequences for academic misconduct may include a failing grade in the course and official action (e.g., academic probation or suspension) by the University.

My advice to you is to always err on the side of caution. If you have questions about whether something is okay or might constitute academic dishonesty, just ask! I am happy to provide clarification and would much rather have a pleasant conversation with you before you submit an assignment than discuss concerns about academic integrity after you turn it in

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### UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES REQUIRING SPECIAL ACCOMODATIONS

Can you not see or hear very well? Is English your second or third language? Do you have to miss class because of work, childcare, or parole appointments? Is money tight, and you can't afford books right now? Can you concentrate better if you stand or walk around in class? If, at any point in the block/semester, a disability or personal circumstances affects your learning in this course, please contact me. I am committed to helping you succeed in this class as this course is intended for all students, including those with mental or physical disabilities, illness, injuries, impairments, or any other condition that tends to affect one's equal access to education negatively. If at any point in the term, you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, and experience of this course, you are welcome (but not required) to contact me. For services and resources on physical, mental and social well-being, contact our on-campus counselor or the Student Health Center. If you have a documented condition (physical or psychological) and experience educational barriers due to your

condition, I encourage you to contact Disability Services as soon as possible to explore what accommodations may allow you to access your education fully. None of these resources will disclose your specific condition to your instructors without your permission.

## RESOURCES FOR YOU

### WRITING ASSISTANCE

If you find yourself struggling with some aspect of the writing process or even just wanting a little extra feedback on your work, I highly encourage you to check out the Soka University Writing Center (<https://www.soka.edu/writing-center>).

### TIME MANAGEMENT

For some helpful tips and tricks related to improving time management skills and creating good study habits, check out <https://www.soka.edu/writing-center/time-management> and <https://sites.rhodes.edu/time-management-tools/apps-managing-time-study>. There's even a link to some handy apps!

### COUNSELING SERVICES

If you wish to speak to a counselor about any psychological and/or emotional distress that you are experiencing, you can get in touch with the Soka University Counseling Services (<https://www.soka.edu/student-life/living-sua/counseling-services>). April Nelson Afoa is Soka's primary counselor on campus. Students can request an appointment by contacting the counselor directly at [Counseling@soka.edu](mailto:Counseling@soka.edu) or by calling (949) 480-4192.

### NATIONAL HOTLINES

- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233
- National Eating Disorders Association Information and Referral Helpline: 1-800-931-2237
- National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673
- National Suicide Hotline: 1-800-273-8255
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Treatment Referral Helpline: 1-877-726-4727