

Senior Philosophy Elective: Thinking Clearly in a Complex World

Credit & Duration

- **Credit:** 0.5 (one half-credit)
- **Length:** One semester (approximately 16 weeks)
- **Grade Level:** 12th grade (seniors)

Course Description

This course introduces high school seniors to the practice of philosophy in a way that is clear, accessible, and directly connected to everyday life. Rather than tracing the full history of philosophy or focusing on a single philosopher in depth, the course offers a focused introduction to four key areas:

- Philosophy of Ethics
- Philosophy of Law
- Philosophy of Mind
- Metaphysics

Students will learn how to analyze arguments, ask better questions, evaluate reasons for and against a position, and reflect on their own beliefs and choices. The purpose is not to prepare students to major in philosophy at the university level, but to provide them with thinking tools they can apply in any field of study and in the decisions they will face as adults.

Course Goals

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Recognize and explain basic philosophical questions in ethics, law, mind, and metaphysics.
2. Read short, accessible philosophical texts and summarize the main ideas in their own words.
3. Identify assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses in everyday arguments (in media, conversations, and public debates).
4. Apply philosophical thinking to real-world situations, including issues in school, family life, work, and society.
5. Express their own views clearly in speaking and writing, while respectfully engaging with differing perspectives.

Core Units & Weekly Outline

Weeks 1–2: Introduction to Philosophy & Reasoning

- What is philosophy? Why does it matter for everyday life and for university preparation?
- What counts as a good reason? Basic concepts: argument, premise, conclusion, evidence.
- Common reasoning mistakes (informal fallacies) using real-world examples (advertising, social media, news).

Activities:

- Class discussions on “What questions keep you awake at night?”

- Short exercises analyzing arguments from articles or videos.

Weeks 3–5: Philosophy of Ethics – How Should We Live?

- Everyday ethical questions: honesty, responsibility, respect, fairness.
- Different ways of thinking about right and wrong (e.g., consequences vs. principles, character and virtue).
- Case studies: cheating, digital behavior, friendship, work, helping others, use of technology.

Activities:

- Small-group discussions using real or hypothetical scenarios.
- Short reflective essays: “A difficult decision I faced and how I made it.”
- Role-play or structured debates on a chosen ethical issue.

Weeks 6–7: Philosophy of Law – Rules, Justice, and Authority

- Why do we have rules and laws? What makes a law fair or unfair?
- The relationship between personal conscience and public rules.
- Simple examples from school policies, local laws, or historical cases.

Activities:

- Analyze a school rule or policy from a philosophical standpoint.
- Write a short position piece: “What makes a punishment fair?”

- Class discussion: rights vs. responsibilities.

Weeks 8–10: Philosophy of Mind – Who Am I, Really?

- What is a “self”? Are we just our brains? Are we more than our thoughts?
- Consciousness, identity, emotion, and decision-making.
- How our beliefs about the mind affect how we treat ourselves and others.

Activities:

- Guided reflection: “What makes me the same person over time?”
- Short readings on mind and self (in modern, accessible language).
- Group discussion about free will, habit, and personal change.

Weeks 11–13: Metaphysics – What Is Real?

- What do we mean when we say something is “real”?
- Worldviews: how people build a picture of reality (scientific, philosophical, personal).
- Questions of meaning, purpose, and what makes a life “worthwhile.”

Activities:

- Students map their own “worldview” visually (diagram or chart).
- Short writing: “What do I believe about reality, and why?”
- Class conversation on different perspectives, handled respectfully.

Weeks 14–15: Integration and Application

- Revisiting key concepts from ethics, law, mind, and metaphysics.
- How philosophical skills support college readiness: reading, writing, discussion.
- Applying philosophical thinking to current issues (chosen with student input).

Activities:

- Students choose a topic (e.g., social media, AI, privacy, justice, education, environment) and analyze it using tools from the course.
- Group presentations or structured dialogues.

Week 16: Final Reflection and Assessment

- Final in-class essay or project: “How philosophy changed the way I think.”
- Student self-assessment: what they learned, what surprised them, and what they will take into college and adult life.
- Class discussion and course wrap-up.

Types of Reading and Materials

To keep the course accessible:

- Short excerpts from modern authors or simplified summaries of classic thinkers.
- Articles, opinion pieces, and real-world examples (news stories, scenarios, policies).
- Teacher-created handouts explaining concepts in straightforward language.

Assessment Structure

Suggested weighting (can be adjusted to district policy):

- Class Participation & Discussion: 25%
- Short Written Reflections (1–2 pages each): 30%
- Quizzes on Key Concepts and Terms: 20%
- Final Project or Essay: 25%

Classroom Environment

The course should foster:

- Respectful dialogue, where students can disagree without hostility.
- Curiosity, where it is safe to ask questions and to say “I’m not sure yet.”
- A practical link between philosophy and real life, so students can see why these questions matter.