

A level Philosophy

Introduction – an outline of the course

Welcome to A level Philosophy. In this course you will have the opportunity to study four topic areas within Philosophy; epistemology, moral philosophy metaphysics of God and the mind.

At the end of Year 13 you will be assessed by two written exams. These exams have a variety of questions ranging from 3 marks definition questions to 12-mark essays. Each exam lasts 3 hour and is worth 50% of your overall grade. You will be judged on your knowledge and understanding of philosophy, as well as your ability to analyse and evaluate philosophical arguments.

What will we be studying in the first half term?

In September you will start by looking at epistemology which is the study of knowledge. The first topic is called 'what is knowledge?' Followed by 'perception as a source of knowledge.'

What is knowledge?

In this topic we will be looking at how we define and justify knowledge. The key epistemological definitions such as 'belief', 'knowledge', 'truth', and 'justification' and key concepts such as 'necessary and sufficient conditions' are studied in this unit. Firstly, we have to establish that there are different types of knowledge and be aware of what these are and how this knowledge is acquired. Once this has been established, is it possible to see how we can make sure or test that this knowledge is true and of value. This will include considering whether we can trust the world around us after all, if we are in a dream world controlled by an evil demon, as Descartes suggests, the only thing I can know is that we exist; 'I think therefore I am.'

Perception as a source of knowledge

Once we are clear on what knowledge is, one can start to consider where knowledge originates from. One source is perception. This allows us to consider if what we see can be trusted. For example, a stick appears bent in water. However, this is an illusion. If this is the case can we trust our perceptions of the world?

What can I do that will help me prepare for A level Philosophy?

Complete some background reading and listen to debates on this subject. It is important to understand how philosophers develop ideas and debate these in discussions.

Read chapter 1 and 2 in this book to understand the beginnings of Philosophy:

http://eddiejackson.net/web_documents/An%20Introduction%20to%20Philosophy%20-%20Fullerton.pdf

BBC 4 has some excellent podcasts you can listen to: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01f0vzr>

Summer Gap Task and where to find this

The best way to prepare for your A level Philosophy is to complete the summer gap task that has been set.

On the [school website](#), if you click on Sixth Form and follow the list until you see Year 11 into 12 Gap Tasks. Click on this and find the Philosophy task.

The gaps tasks are to help you understand what this new subject of Philosophy is about. The first task is to help you understand the history of Philosophy starting with the ancient Greek philosophers. The second task makes sure you understand the concepts which are discussed in the first topic in the Philosophy A level. The third task is to encourage you to think like a philosopher and tackle some philosophical problems. The fourth task is to give you an experience of how philosophers write. The language may be challenging, but stick with it, as Descartes' thoughts are interesting. It was published in 1641 originally in Latin so may appear very formal for that reason.