Philosophy & Reason Guide

Why study Philosophy and Reason?

Philosophy & Reason is concerned with developing the ability to reason, and the role of reasoning in developing coherent world views. The contribution that the study of Philosophy and Reason makes to students lies in their attainment of the knowledge, skills and processes of rational thought. These directly affect the students’ quality of life, not only in determining the rational nature of their own decisions but also their responses to the views of others.

The relevance of the Philosophy & Reason course to tertiary studies and employment opportunities is marked in those areas where formal or informal reasoning is required. Formal languages and proof techniques are a major component in computer science, information technology courses and associated careers. The skills of analysis, argument presentation and rational justification are extremely useful for all areas of tertiary study, and have been consistently identified by business and community leaders as necessary for modern working life.

What do students learn?

The full course of study for Philosophy & Reason consists of three strands, each offering a range of units and topics for study. Some units from all three strands must be included in a course of study, but the choice within each is wide.

Strand 1: Critical Reasoning

In the Critical Reasoning strand, students analyse and evaluate argument from everyday sources; identify issues, argument type, viewpoint; determine strength and fallacious nature of argument; examine the nature of scientific reasoning; and present argument and debate. This is an intensely practical area, involving analysis of reasoning in written and oral form with widely ranging subject matter. The knowledge and skills gained by students in this area equip them to analyse information rationally. These skills have wide application for students in other subjects studied at school, in tertiary studies, and as active participants in their society.

Units in this strand include Let’s be Reasonable, Tell me Why, What are the Odds, and That’s Debatable.
Strand 2: Deductive Logic

Deductive Logic introduces students to modern symbolic languages as an effective system for the analysis and evaluation of propositions and arguments. The focus on deductive testing and proof strategies has immediate application to formal reasoning. Students are introduced to the methods of problem analysis, solution proposal and strategy choice. The relevance of logic languages and deductive techniques to the practical world is evident to the student because the course allows for experience with computer programming languages.

Units in this strand include Propositional Logic, Monadic Logic, Dyadic Logic, and Contemporary and Traditional Logic.

Strand 3: Philosophy

In the Philosophy strand, the student acquires knowledge of the major philosophies; applies critical techniques to these philosophies; presents analysis and viewpoint justification; and identifies philosophies behind modern issues. The study of Philosophy & Reason allows the student to recognise the relevance of various philosophies to different social, ethical and religious positions, and realise that decisions in these areas are the result of an acceptance of both a certain body of beliefs and of a specific mode of reasoning. Study in this area is especially useful because its continued emphasis on consistency and justification allows the student to apply the reasoning skills of the previous two areas.

Units in this strand include Choice and Action, Ways of Knowing, Society and the Individual, and Thinkers and Schools of Thought.

How do students learn?

The Philosophy & Reason course is one in which the student is constantly applying reasoning techniques of varying complexity to subject matter defined in each unit of work. The student learns to solve problems and puzzles in the classroom. Students practise presenting oral and written viewpoint and justification as individual or team exercises. Resources used by students are drawn heavily from real life, and the student learns in this course by constant participation.

How are students assessed?

Assessment in Philosophy & Reason is criterion-based and is designed to help students to demonstrate achievement in the objectives of the syllabus. A range of assessment techniques is used by schools to determine the relationships between student achievement and the exit criteria of the course.

These criteria are:

- knowledge
- application
- communication.

Students are assessed by methods most consistent with the nature of the work and the syllabus objectives. Assessment techniques used by schools include exams, multiple-choice tests, essays, assignments (written and oral), practical exercises and projects.
How can parents help?

Parents can help students by providing a supportive and challenging learning environment. By showing interest and encouraging students in their work, parents/caregivers will support them in their studies.

Parents can help their children as they study Philosophy & Reason by taking an active interest in the practical applications of the course, and by encouraging students to talk about and explain what they are doing in the course. Much of the subject matter arises from the present-day world and its issues and concerns. Parents can help their students by taking an interest in and discussing with their students the range of views that are held in the community.

Parents can also help their children to develop a systematic approach to managing class notes and other information and resources, to manage time effectively and to meet deadlines for assessment tasks. Parents are welcome to visit the school to establish contact with their child’s Philosophy & Reason teacher. The syllabus and the school work program are available to all parents at the school, to help them to understand the work that their students will be undertaking, and to familiarise them with assessment requirements and deadlines.