

Preparation Packet
For
PHIL 896: Directed Readings in
Philosophy

SFSU PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT M.A.
QUALIFYING EXAM

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PHIL 896 Guidelines

Contact the Graduate Coordinator if you have any questions about the guidelines below.

Taking PHIL 896

1. PHIL 896 is the Department of Philosophy qualifying exam for graduate students. The course tests the student's ability to comprehend, explain, compare, and explore the views of philosophers working on topics selected by the Department faculty. The course also satisfies the University's Written English Proficiency Requirement for graduate students.
2. PHIL 896 is a mandatory CR/NC course. It may be repeated once if NC is earned the first time. It must be completed with a CR before the student may officially begin work on the master's thesis. Students are permitted two attempts to pass PHIL 896. Students who fail a second time will be subject to disqualification from the program.
3. All students should confer with the Graduate Coordinator before enrolling in the course. Students who are Conditionally Classified are generally advised not to take the exam until all prerequisite work is completed. Students are encouraged to take PHIL 896 in their second or third semester of graduate-level work, and to have successfully completed three graduate seminars prior to attempting the course.
4. Students who fail the course for the first time will be contacted by the Graduate Coordinator for a mandatory conference. Students will not be allowed to retake the course without having this mandatory conference.
5. The passing grade for credit is a B-. Three faculty instructors grade the assignments for the course and confer to assign the final grades. The results of the course will be emailed to students within two weeks after the date of the final submission.
6. It is possible to pass the course with distinction, although this honor will not appear on your transcripts.

The Format of the Course

1. Summary:
 - a) Students will work on **one** topic throughout the semester.
 - b) Each topic will have **four** readings assigned to it.
 - c) Students working on the same topic will participate in **four** study sessions throughout the semester.
 - d) Following each study session, each student will submit a **summary** of the discussion at the session.
 - e) Additionally, each student will submit a **final exam** for the course.
2. An orientation session with the Graduate Coordinator will be held in the first two weeks of the semester.
3. Each semester, faculty volunteer to assign readings, lead a discussion section on those readings, and assess student work for the course. Prior to the start of the semester, the Graduate Coordinator will inform students of the three topics that the faculty volunteers have chosen for that semester, along with the readings for each. Each set will consist of **four** readings, and will have at least one contemporary and at least one historical selection.
4. Each student will work on **one of those topics** throughout the semester. Students begin the course by submitting a ranked list of the topics on which they wish to work to the Graduate Coordinator, who will then assign each student to a topic, taking these preferences into consideration. A student cannot undertake a topic on which they have taken a course as a graduate student at SFSU.
5. Students assigned to work on the same topic constitute a **study group** for that topic. Students from each study group will meet four times during the semester to discuss the assigned readings (including one meeting with the faculty volunteer for that topic). All meeting times will be posted by Graduate Coordinator prior to the start of the semester, although students may meet at other times, if all the members of a group and their faculty volunteer agree. Study group meetings will be via Zoom this semester.

Within a week of each meeting, each student will submit their own **summary** of the discussion at that meeting. These summaries each constitute 10% of the student's grade in the course.

Your summary should have the following format.

- a) The summary should state the text(s) that was discussed.
- b) It should begin with 1-2 sentences that summarize the overall discussion during the meeting.
- c) It should then be broken down into sections, and sections should be structured as follows:

- i. Each section should have a clear and concise header that is a statement that tells the reader what was discussed by the group with respect to a particular issue in the reading. For example:
 1. “The group discussed how Rawls defines *legal obligation* in Rawls's “Legal Obligation and the Duty of Fair Play.” We came up with the following proposals:” or
 2. “The group discussed the positions for which Smith argues in Smith’s “On Knowing God’s Nature.”
 - ii. Under that header statement, in bullet point or numbered form, the writer should present the reasons the group discussed in support of the positions taken with respect to the issue at hand in clear, concise sentences (2-3 sentences). For example:
 1. “Some group members concluded that Rawls’s account of the duty of fair play makes it the case that it would only rarely be permissible to disobey the law. Other group members concluded that Rawls’s account of the duty of fair play makes it the case that it would often be permissible to disobey that law, provided that the society whose laws those were was sufficiently systematically unjust.” or
 2. “Some group members took the conclusion of the argument to be that God does not exist, because his existence is incompatible with human suffering. Others took it to be that we cannot know the nature of God, because we cannot understand the role that suffering plays in maximizing the goodness of the world.”
6. Each student will also submit a **final exam** that summarizes the main theses and arguments of each assigned reading, and of how these readings relate to one another. Your final exam should be no longer than **3,000 words**. This exam counts as 60% of the student’s grade in the course, and the student must receive a B- or better on it to pass the course. Your exam should answer the following questions.
- For each assigned reading:
- a) What is the thesis for (or against) which the author is arguing in this paper? (If there is more than one thesis, state that and identify the theses.)
 - b) How does the author argue for this thesis or theses?
 - c) What, if any, are the subarguments that the author makes in support of the overall argument of the paper?
 - d) Does the author consider any objections to their argument? If so, identify these objections and briefly state how the author responds to these objections.

For the readings collectively,

- e) How do each other these readings relate to the others? Some ways to answer this question:
- i. Which readings present what arguments against which others?
 - ii. Which readings share conclusions?
 - iii. What is the logical space that these readings occupy with respect to one another? (E.g. do the articles have overlapping scope? Can the views expressed be located on a single dialectical spectrum?)
7. Students may collaborate in interpreting the material, providing feedback on each other's writing, etc., but must each write their exams individually.
 8. To preserve anonymous grading, faculty will not review drafts of the final exam. Students should also prepare their exams for anonymous grading before uploading, e.g. by ensuring that no identifying information is included in the body of the exam.
 9. Meeting summaries and the final exam must be submitted on **iLearn**.
 10. Late meeting summaries will be assessed a penalty of one-third of a letter grade per day late, and **will not be accepted more than one week late**.
 11. **Late exams will not be accepted**, except where an emergency has prevented the student from submitting their assignment on time. Students may be required to provide documentation of the emergency.
 12. If students have any questions about the organization of their study group, they should raise these questions with the Graduate Coordinator as soon as possible.

Academic Policies

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of cheating or fraud; it occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as his or her own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgment, but it also includes employing or allowing another person to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as his or her own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an “F” grade. All instances of plagiarism in the College of Liberal & Creative Arts will be reported to the Dean of the College, and may be reported to the University Judicial Affairs Officer for further action.

Disability and Reasonable Accommodation

Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/TTY 415-338-2472) or by email (dprc@sfsu.edu).

SF State Statement on Sexual Violence

SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Dean of Students. To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact: The SAFE Place - (415) 338-2208; http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/ Counseling and Psychological Services Center - (415) 338-2208; <http://psyservs.sfsu.edu/> For more information on your rights and available resources: <http://titleix.sfsu.edu>