

Contemporary Political Thought :: Handbook :: Spring 2021



Table of Contents

I.	Participation and attendance (5%)	2
II.	Muddy Points and CF Feedback (5%)	3
A.	Muddy Points	3
B.	CF Feedback	3
III.	Socratic Pod (10%)	4
IV.	Class Facilitation (30%)	6
A.	CF Presentation (10%)	6
B.	CF Paper (20%)	7
V.	Critical Reflection (10%)	10
VI.	Group Work (10%)	12
VII.	Editorial (30%)	14
	Step 1: Propose a pitch (2%)	15
	Step 2: Pair up with an opponent	16
	Step 3: Discuss your argument with an opponent (2%)	16
	Step 4: Editorial Workshop (2%)	16
	Step 5: Final submission (24%)	16

I. Participation and attendance (5%)

Attendance is expected. You are required to have your **camera on** and to be visible for the entire duration of the class.

Absences: If you miss a class for whatever reason, you have one week from the day your return to class to write a **make-up paper** in which you answer all the questions I provided (on Canvas) to guide your readings for that day. If no questions were offered for that day, you are to write a 600-word paper critically examining the reading, that is, identifying the author's goal in the text, thesis and main arguments, and engaging with part of the ideas and arguments (e.g., articulating an objection or discussing something the author mentions only in passing; see the instructions for the Critical Reflection for more details).

Your final participation grade in the course, which is on a 1-10 scale, will be lowered by **half a point** (0.5) for every class absence you do not make up for. Coming to class late also negatively affects your participation grade.

Participation: Come prepared to participate by doing the reading, reflecting upon the course material, and bringing to class any questions and thoughts about the text.

Class participation does not simply entail speaking, but also listening in an engaged and respectful manner to the thoughts of your classmates. Your active participation in your classmates' Class Facilitation is of special importance.

Visiting your TAs or me during our office hours counts as participation.

Not showing up to class or showing up without being visible negatively affects your participation grade.

You will be assigned a provisional participation grade at the end of February, so you have some idea where you stand.

II. Muddy Points and CF Feedback (5%)

A Google form link will be available under each module that you will have to complete by the end of the day after most classes. This form's purpose is twofold:

A. Muddy Points

You will take a minute to submit online a quick note on what you didn't quite understand that day (what you're confused about, what remains a little blurry or "muddy" in your mind). If we were meeting in person, I would distribute a small piece of paper and you would have 1-2 minutes to write down a sentence or two. That's all I need.

The goal of this assignment is to help me take the class's temperature about the day's meeting and know what to go over again at the beginning of our next class.

B. CF Feedback

In addition, for all applicable days, you will evaluate the Class Facilitators' presentation, assigning a grade to each individual student on a 1-10 scale (10 for 'excellent'). Your evaluation will be based on the evidence each CF student gives in class that they seriously prepared and thoughtfully engaged with the material. In particular, you will pay attention to:

- The clarity, precision, and strength of their reconstruction of the author's argument
- The clarity and usefulness of their explanation of key concepts
- Their general mastery of the text
- Their ability to answer or at least thoughtfully grapple* with my and your questions (if we didn't have time for these, you obviously cannot count it against them)

* As I note in the syllabus, good philosophy does not necessarily entail having answers to everything. One may well (indeed, I sometimes will) admit *failure* to understand parts of the text, and one should ask hard questions, even when one is not able to answer them. Of course, it's not enough to say one didn't understand something. The key is to carefully explain what one understands, and up to what point one follows the author's thought, and then why at a certain point one gets lost and confused.

The purpose of this assignment is (a) to ensure you are fully engaged with your fellow students' Class Facilitation and (b) to crowdsource students' performance grade.

The grade for this activity is Pass/Fail. You can only submit Muddy Points and CF feedback for classes you actually attended.

The syllabus and handbook quiz (week 1) counts toward this assignment.

III. Socratic Pod (10%)

You will each be a part of a “**Socratic pod**” with 3 other students, whom you’ll meet online every week throughout the semester. The goal of this assignment is to help you collaboratively prepare and engage with the material, through Socratic discussions in which you ask open-ended questions, listen closely to each other, think critically, and articulate your own thoughts in response to the thoughts of others (this method is also called *maieutics* or “intellectual midwifery”).

Socratic pods meet 24 hours before class for at least 30 min. During these meetings, you will share your notes on the readings, clarify your understanding of the text, try to answer the questions I posed, focusing on the one specially assigned to your group*, and come up with others. In particular, you will: identify the problem the author is trying to solve, reconstruct their main thesis and arguments, and discuss anything you (a) don’t understand or are not sure about and (b) find particularly thought-provoking. You may arrive at a clear statement of your own position then, but it’s totally fine if you don’t: the class discussion will further help you understand the text and articulate your thoughts.

* I almost always provide questions to guide your reading. I plan to entrust particular Socratic Pods with answering particular questions (perhaps there are 8 questions, 1 for each Socratic Pod to focus especially on). You could then expect to be “on call” for the issue in question; but you don’t have to prepare anything concrete beyond that.

Students in each Socratic pod can organize as they wish. For instance, you can split the text in 3 or 4 parts and charge each student to focus on one passage; you can share all your notes on a Google doc; you can take turns leading the discussion (with the understanding that the leader has put extra work into preparing).

At the end of each Socratic pod meeting, one person in the group will summarize the discussion in a 400-500-word note (aka. “**Socratic memo**”) that includes:

- Present pod members’ names
- Your planned labor division prior to the meeting (who did what?)
- Your attempts (successful or not) to clarify particular concepts or passages
- Your answers to the questions I posed and esp. the one I may have singled out for you
- The passages and issues you focused on and what came out of it

While these memos may include bullet points, they must be fully written (in full sentences only). You’ll upload your memo on Canvas before class. Tatiana and I will give feedback on those memos early on so you know whether you’re on the right track. You can thus expect more detailed instructions to come.

Socratic memos are graded on a 1-5 point scale (5 = complete).

Please let me know as soon as possible if you have any **issues** in your Socratic pod. Since the assignment is essentially collaborative, it requires and hinges on everyone's active collaboration. I thus reserve the right to bar any student from taking part in the activity if I come to find that they are, say, missing meetings, not pulling their weight, or otherwise undermining the pod's collaborative dynamic.

Your **Socratic pod grade** includes:

- Your group's Socratic memos grade
- Your individual grade, as determined by your Socratic peers' monthly assessment of your contribution to the group

After 4-5 weeks, I will ask you if you want to reshuffle the Socratic Pods.

IV. Class Facilitation (30%)

A. CF Presentation (10%)

Two or three Class Facilitators (CF) help me lead part of the class. Class Facilitators will know the entire material for the day inside out, which requires having carefully read the text(s) several times and properly highlighted and annotated it.

CF analyze in depth for the class a particular passage which, most of the time, I select for you (see the CF Summaries document).

The class will generally proceed thusly: First, I briefly recap the previous class and answer any lingering questions (asking those is important and counts toward participation). Then I introduce the day's reading and present the author's main goal and arguments up until the one that the CF are focusing on.

The CF are to do the following in under 10 minutes:

- a. Identify and carefully reconstruct the author's arguments in the passage selected for you. Your job is to analyze in depth this one particular section and to carefully and methodically present the concepts and arguments that unfold in that particular passage.
- b. Explain and illustrate key concepts and distinctions.
- c. Pose a question for the class to discuss.

You should but are not required to use a PPT and/or handout.

Since your CF paper also includes a critical evaluation of the argument, you are welcome to try it out with the class (not as part of your presentation), although you don't have to. See below for details on critical evaluations.

CF are required to meet with Emma to prepare their analysis, presentation, and PPT/handout.

CF need not attend their Socratic Pod meetings for that day.

Students self-sign up for their CF day by January 31. You can already sign up, so the longer you wait, the less choice you will have. See the CF Summaries document to get a sense of what the readings are about.

I note in the syllabus that you should always write the course number in your emails to me. When you email me about your Class Facilitation, **always CC the other CF and Emma, and always write "POLS 2332 CF [name of author, e.g., Marx]" in the email subject.**

Each student's CF presentation is graded on a 1-10 scale (10 for 'excellent at a-b above') and is worth 10% of the final grade. That grade includes:

- 6%: Your classmates' peer evaluation of your performance (see CF feedback, supra)
- 3%: Your co-CF's assessment of you as a partner in the assignment
- 1%: Your completed CF Assessment

Within 24 hours of your CF, you will submit your **CF Assessment** on Canvas. In it you answer the following questions:

- How would you describe your interactions with your co-Class Facilitator leading up to your presentation?
- Describe your contribution to the team effort.
- How do you feel about your CF performance? What did you do well? What would you have done differently?
- Suggest an overall grade for each of your partners re. preparation and performance (using the grading scale below)
- Did you enjoy the experience?
- Is there anything you think we could do to improve the assignment?

10. Class Facilitator organized our meetings and came totally prepared to each, having done the readings and absorbed all the ideas and arguments. Without this CF, our presentation would not have gone so well. CF was crucial to our preparation and motivation, and to putting the presentation together.

9. CF came well prepared to our meeting, having done the readings and absorbed all the ideas and arguments. CF helped putting the presentation together, and demonstrated good understanding of all the material, issues, and arguments during our preparation and in class.

8. CF came prepared to each meeting and did their fair share in putting the presentation together, though they mostly relied on others in class.

7. CF had to be reminded to do their share in putting the presentation together and ended up failing to pull their weight. CF did just okay in class, mostly relying on others.

6. CF displayed lack of motivation and preparation at our meetings, forcing me/us to do more work.

5. CF was arguably free riding.

4 and below. CF was free riding or otherwise obstructing the team's progress. The assignment would have gone better without this CF.

B. CF Paper (20%)

After your Class Facilitation, you will produce a **CF Paper**, that is, a critical paper that is 900-1,100 words, double spaced, has a good, informative title (not "CF Paper" or "On Arendt's Truth and Politics" but something like "Deepfakes' assault on democracy"), and includes a word count at the beginning.

Your document (word or PDF) will be due on Canvas no later than 3 days (72 hours) after class.

You should meet with Tatiana to prepare your CF paper, and you shouldn't wait after your Class Facilitation to do so.

In your CF paper, you do the following:

1. Identify one important *political/philosophical claim* for which the author is arguing.

2. Reconstruct the best possible *argument(s)* that the author gives for this claim. Make sure to use some direct quotes in the process.
3. Critically *evaluate* (one of) the argument(s).

Half the paper should be devoted to (1)-(2); half to (3). Let me repeat it because most CF papers I read only devote about 1/3 or even ¼ of their paper to (3): **half of your paper should be devoted to critically evaluating one of the arguments.**

To critically evaluate an argument is to say whether it is good or bad and why.

- There are several ways that an argument might be bad. It may be that the reasons given don't actually lend support to the conclusion, or that some of the reasons offered in support of the conclusion are false. It may be that you think the conclusion is true, but that the argument for that conclusion is not the best available. In such a case, you may support the claim with what you take to be a better argument. If you put forth an objection, it's usually a good idea to imagine the best response the author might give and respond to that as well.
 - One thing to avoid when evaluating a text is to say "the author needs to say more about x or y." In all likelihood, the author has said more about x and y elsewhere—you just haven't read these other texts. If you want to say what the author should have said about x and y, go ahead and do that, then explain how that affects what one should think about the author's argument.
 - Another pitfall is to systematically ask for empirical evidence: if you think it's relevant, go look for the empirical evidence in question and see whether it supports or undermines the author's argument.
- If you find the argument compelling, one thing you can do is draw out its broader implications: perhaps it has practical policy implications about how we should deal with a contemporary problem; or it may be that if we accept this argument as cogent, then we must give up some other widely endorsed claim. Another thing you can do is draw interesting connections with current events or another text/theory and show how the argument serves to illuminate these events or that other theory.

Whatever you do, focus on developing just one central idea, and no more than 2. That is, avoid listing unrelated issues or objections (but you can bring up several points in support of your one idea).

This is the rubric Tatiana will use to assess your paper:

The paper identifies the author's main concern and goals and accurately states one of the central theses.		10
The paper accurately spells out the argument (premises and inferential structure) that supports the thesis previously identified, demonstrating clear and nuanced understanding of the text.		30
The paper thoughtfully engages with the issues and argument, demonstrating insightfulness and critical ability.		50
The paper is clearly written and properly edited (no typos).		5
The paper satisfies the submission and formatting requirements.		5

Penalty for lateness (-3 points per day).		
Total		100

Rewrites: If you want, you will have 2 weeks, upon reception of your graded CF paper, to rewrite it in light of Tatiana's comments (this is *optional*). Email it to her in a word doc titled "YourFirst LastName_POLS 2332 CFAuthor_Rewrite." Please copy and paste your initial CF paper and her comments at the end of your rewrite (in the same document, after a page break). Your final CF paper grade will average your initial grade and your post-revision grade. No comments will be provided on the rewrite. Don't expect a big grade bump if you don't work hard on addressing Tatiana's comments.

V. Critical Reflection (10%)

Each student will produce a 600-word Critical Reflection (CritRef for short) that brings together:



Joshua Oppenheimer's documentary films *The Act of Killing* (2012) and *The Look of Silence* (2014) – which you are required to watch on/by Thursday February 11; and everything we read in the “Speaking” unit of the course before then.

In your CritRef, you are to:

1. Raise a question (e.g., how can genocides happen)
2. Identify a thesis, i.e., a *philosophical/political claim* made by Oppenheimer and/or some of the other authors
3. Reconstruct the (best possible) *argument(s)* that the author gives for this claim
4. Critically *evaluate* this/these argument(s) using Oppenheimer or another author

Your CritRef must:

- Be at least 3 paragraphs long: the first one includes [1] and [2], the second one is devoted to [3], and the third (and, if applicable, fourth) paragraph(s) focus(es) on task [4].
- Include actual signposts in the text indicating where you do what: [1], [2], [3], [4].
- Devote half of its length to the fourth task. Let me repeat it: **half of your CritRef should be devoted to critically evaluating the argument.**

The CritRef will be due **Monday, February 22**, before class (upload on Canvas).

Let me repeat my advice on how to critically evaluate an argument: it means to say whether the argument is good or bad and why.

- There are several ways that an argument might be bad. It may be that the reasons given don't actually lend support to the conclusion, or that some of the reasons offered in support of the conclusion are false. It may be that you think the conclusion is true, but that the argument for that conclusion is not the best available. In such a case, you may support the claim with what you take to be a better argument. If you put forth an objection, it's usually a good idea to imagine the best response the author might give and respond to that as well.
 - One thing to avoid when evaluating a text is to say “the author needs to say more about x or y.” In all likelihood, the author has said more about x and y elsewhere—you just haven't read these other texts. If you want to say what the author should have said about x and y, go ahead and do that, then explain how that affects what one should think about the author's argument.
 - Another pitfall is to systematically ask for empirical evidence: if you think it's relevant, go look for the empirical evidence in question and see whether it supports or undermines the author's argument.

- If you find the argument compelling, one thing you can do is draw out its broader implications: perhaps it has practical policy implications about how we should deal with a contemporary problem; or it may be that if we accept this argument as cogent, then we must give up some other widely endorsed claim.

Whatever you do, focus on developing just one central idea, and no more than 2. That is, avoid listing unrelated issues or objections (but you can bring up several points in support of your one idea).

The Critical Reflection will be assessed using the following rubric (for 10% of the final grade):

The Critical Reflection <i>introduces</i> the issue efficiently and concisely. In particular, it <i>motivates the reflection</i> by presenting a problem or issue that calls for reflection.		2
The CritRef <i>identifies one important philosophical-political claim</i> for which one author is arguing.		2
The CritRef accurately <i>reconstructs the argument</i> (premises and inferential structure) that supports the thesis previously identified, demonstrating clear and nuanced understanding of the texts/films.		6
The paper articulates a solid <i>critical evaluation</i> of the argument that was just reconstructed, demonstrating thoughtful engagement and critical ability.		10
Total		20

Here's a CritRef from a previous Philosophy of Law course which received a 10/10 (note that this assignment didn't ask for an introduction):

"Catharine MacKinnon's central argument in "Not a moral issue" is that pornography is central to male supremacy, because it sexualizes the subordination of women. How can pornography do that? MacKinnon explains: "Gender is sexual. Pornography constitutes the meaning of that sexuality. Men treat women as who they see women as being. Pornography constructs who that is" (p. 326).

MacKinnon relies on an understanding of gender as a social construct, that is, a set of practices, beliefs, and attitudes that we all learn, interiorize and inhabit (as "gendered selves"). Her point is that pornography tells the story of what it means to be a man or a woman, through sexual representations of femininity/masculinity and scripts of appropriate sexual behavior for each gender.

In pornography, women are "presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things or commodities," "in postures or positions of sexual submission, servility, or display," "in scenarios of degradation, humiliation, injury or torture" (Antipornography Civil Rights Ordinance). The difficulty, for MacKinnon, is to show that pornography not only represents male domination of women, but significantly contributes to its entrenchment.

For her argument to work, it must be the case that pornography has (or *is*) a kind of practical authority on gender construction, that people really learn gender politics and sexual practices through it. If this is true though, then pornography both tells a lie (that women are inferior) and makes it come true: "Women live in the world pornography creates. We live its lie as reality" (p. 335). This is why, according to MacKinnon, pornography is not a moral issue of private tastes: it is a political issue—a matter of women's equal standing."

VI. Group Work (10%)

The goal of the Group Work is to present 'the philosophy behind', and thereby provide critical insights into, a number of issues that are discussed today in American politics. The class is divided into 8 groups of 4 or 5 students, each devoted to the analysis of one of 12 particular issues:

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Trumpism | 7. The COVID-19 pandemic |
| 2. Reparations | 8. The Right to Healthcare |
| 3. Police Abolition | 9. Sex Work |
| 4. Prison Abolition | 10. Living Wage |
| 5. Climate Justice | 11. Universal Basic Income |
| 6. Gun Control | 12. Pick your own topic |

Each student will pick their preferred topic: I will create 12 groups in the People tab under Group Work and you will self-assign to the group of your choice. Once everyone has signed up, those who are not in a complete group of 4 will need to negotiate among themselves so that we end up with **8 groups, 8 topics** (or less if the class is not full).

Each topic except #7 and 12 has its corresponding bibliography. Before the Workshop, each student will have to read and take notes on these sources. The ultimate goal is to construct a **philosophical primer** on the issue in question, that is, a concise and clear presentation which anyone could understand and find useful to think through the issue. So, think of the outcome of the assignment as a sort of **multi-purpose political philosophy toolkit for democratic citizens**. Each group's philosophical primer will take the form of a **7-9 minute video clip or podcast** which you'll upload onto Canvas. You may also provide the class with an accompanying 1-2-page flyer.

The Workshop on March 8 will allow each group to start working on their philosophical primer. You will analyze and synthesize the readings, discuss the issue with your teammates, and plan the project and labor division. This is a collaborative endeavor and it's important that everyone pull their weight.

You have (near-complete!) creative discretion over the design of your philosophical primer, but it must include, in no particular order:

- (1) A clear presentation of the philosophy behind the issue and articulation of thoughtful arguments in favor of and/or against a particular position on the issue
- (2) A critical assessment of some relevant politicians' and/or activists' positions and proposals on your issue

Last time I did this assignment, students came up with a wide range of philosophical primers, from didactic documentaries, to activists pamphlets, to TV news programs with opponents debating the issue.

Note that you can get all sorts of assistance from [Recording Studios \(Links to an external site.\)](#) at Northeastern Library, such as room reservations, equipment, and tech assistance.

Things to keep in mind:

- ◆ No philosopher *name-dropping*. Your audience is laypeople, not me. You may well mention philosophers we have read in class, but you need to explain every idea / concept / argument, assuming your audience has never heard of it.
- ◆ Your primer's *added value* lies in your providing tools to think philosophically (deeply, critically) through a particular issue. Your presentation of the philosophy behind the issue should show that paying attention to this philosophy (ideas and arguments) helps shed light on the issue and give a better sense of the position one should have on the issue itself.
- ◆ Your assessment of politicians' positions and proposals can be somewhat qualified or suggestive. You and your groupmates will likely disagree on the right stance about a particular issue. A primer that ends up expressing ambivalence about politicians' proposals, articulated along the lines of a 'on the one hand... on the other hand' model, is fine.

Group Work Timeline:

March 1 – Sign up for your topic; get in touch with your teammates (How do you want to divide labor for the workshop? What do you want to achieve that day? Schedule your upcoming meetings)

March 8 – In-Virtual-Class Workshop: Each group will brainstorm and start planning their video presentation. Prof. Delmas and the TAs are here to help.

8 – March 26: You work with your team to further plan and create your group presentation.

March 26 – **Philosophical Primers are due** (upload a stable video link on Canvas).

March 29 – Watch the 7 other Philosophical Primers and critically engage with them on the Discussion Forum during class (no class meeting).

April 2 – Submit by midnight in one single doc: (1) Report; (2) Assessment of Other GW; and (3) Compilation of your Discussion posts. (Further instructions to follow.)

VII. Editorial (30%)

The general objective of this assignment is to bring political theory to life and experience its significance for today's pressing issues, as well as to help refine your persuasive writing skills. So, the final assignment for the class will not be a long final paper but instead a 1,000-1,300-word Editorial. This doesn't mean you don't need to do any background research. But it means you need to distill your research into a pithy format—original, insightful, and accessible to the public (i.e., jargon-free and pleasant to read). Write on something you care about.

Editorial contest:

The best 3 Editorials will be published on the Ethics Institute's [Ethics in the World](#) webpage. This is how the selection process will work: as I grade your submissions at the end of the semester, I will select the 8 or so best Editorials. I will give authors 2 weeks to revise their Editorial in light of my comments before resubmitting the Editorial in blind fashion (without identifying information). Then I will send those to Emma and Tatiana who will rank the submissions. I will make the final call based on their and my rankings.

The best preparation for this assignment consists in reading opinion pieces and editorials throughout the semester and thinking about what makes them particularly interesting and/or persuasive. Read from as many different publications as you can lay your hands on, from Northeastern News to The New York Times, Boston Globe, The Atlantic, etc.

In your Editorial, which you will write for a general audience, you will:

- address a timely issue and explain it in simple and precise language
- state a position on that issue
- offer the best argument possible in its favor
- use a philosopher we read in class to make your argument (making sure to explain why their ideas provide a uniquely illuminating lens through which to tackle the issue)

Your Editorial probably might benefit from articulating, but need not necessarily include:

- a response to a widely accepted argument in favor of the opposing opinion (do not cheat by setting up a "straw man" argument, which can easily be knocked down)
- a solution to the problem you've identified

It's important that you write for a **general audience**:

- (1) Assume the reader's general **ignorance** about the issue you're discussing and explain it very clearly. You may write for the U.S. public and use the first-person plural pronoun "we" to refer to Americans, but even then, you should explain everything you talk about as if your Editorial was going to be published in the most widely read newspaper of another country. That means you need to explain the news, memes, and cultural references (e.g., "Karens" or "RINO").
- (2) Second, you should write to try to **convince** someone who is not already in agreement

with you. A good portion of the news commentaries you read are probably texts that “preach to the choir” (your favorite pundit’s or activist’s tweets, or posts with a definite ideological slant): I’d like you to try hard to not to write like this. Instead, try and write for the purpose of winning your opponent over. This doesn’t mean, if you’re a prison abolitionist, that you should address your piece to a staunch law-and-order champion, but it does mean you should write for the liberal who just wants prison reform. It can also be useful to imagine your Editorial would be published, say, in your local newspaper, and read by lots of people with different political leanings.

The advice in (1) to explain everything clearly and precisely is just plain good writing advice. Here’s another one: **don’t use the passive voice**. Why? Either you omit the actual subject (“I was offered a scarf”) and the reader is left wondering who’s doing the action; or it does mention the active subject (“I was offered a scarf *by my friend*”), in which case it sounds clunky and would sound better in the active voice (“my friend offered me a scarf”). Sometimes the passive voice is appropriate, but since you may not be a good judge of that, I urge you to just avoid it altogether.

Anastasia Berg, editor of public philosophy at *The Point*, offers more writing advice:

“A writer should always bear in mind who they’re writing for. In our case a question we ask often is, Would this really provoke our readers to look at something differently, consider something they haven’t before, shed new light on a matter of concern for them, or would it just confirm whatever opinions and prejudices they already have with, say, the aid of some theoretical apparatus? Another thing to keep in mind is whether the writer wants to reach a non-specialized audience and if so, are they doing what they need to hold that kind of audience’s attention—and this does not just mean translating the technical terms into more familiar ones, or doing more explaining. Our audience doesn’t come to us for very rudimentary philosophy lectures but for sophisticated, unpredictable lines of thought that make contact with their lives and interests.”¹

The Editorial is scaffolded into 5 steps:

[Step 1: Propose a pitch \(2%\)](#)

Upload a 150-word “pitch” on Blackboard by **Thursday, April 1**. A pitch includes a topic, a thesis statement, and a hook (i.e., an original approach to an issue). Mention which author you plan to use and how. The pitch is graded on a 3-point scale and worth 2% of the final grade.

Here is some selected advice from editors of public philosophy venues.²

- From Anastasia Berg: “A pitch is meant to give us a sense of the piece, a good pitch does that well. So the question is really what’s important to convey about a prospective piece: at best, there’s an argument or, perhaps a little more minimally, a point that the author is trying to get across. It’s not just *about* something (“I want to write about

¹ See: <https://blog.apaonline.org/2020/12/10/public-philosophy-editors-on-pitching/>

² Ibid.

Voltaire and the election.”), but is making some sort of claim (“Reading Voltaire can help us appreciate an election dynamic we’d otherwise remain blind to”). Then in addition to judging whether the claim is banal or original, weak or persuasive, we ask whether it makes contact with recognizable concerns of the reader. Will the writer be able to convince a reader that they should care about what they’re writing about?”

- From Adriel M. Trott: “A good pitch makes a philosophically interesting claim that appeals to a wider audience. It can put a well-known philosophical idea to work in a novel way, or it can be a new philosophical idea that is especially relevant to discussing a particular situation.”

Step 2: Pair up with an opponent

On **Wednesday, April 7**, you’ll present your topic and position in 15 words or less and pair up with an opponent to prepare step 3.

Step 3: Discuss your argument with an opponent (2%)

Having found an opponent, that is, someone who disagrees with your position (not just with your argument but with your view), you will spend at least 30 minutes speaking with them: try to argue your position and fend off their objections. Then write 200-400 words explaining how and why, if at all, the discussion changed your view. Submit your Post-Opportunity Reflection (“POR”) on Canvas by **Monday April 12**, by midnight. The POR is graded on a 5-point scale and worth 2% of the final grade.

Step 4: Editorial Workshop (2%)



You will need a polished draft of your Editorial ready for **Thursday, April 15**. You will work in pairs to exchange feedback on your Editorial. Your feedback to your peers is graded and counts as 2% of the final grade. You must attend virtual class to participate in this assignment.

Step 5: Final submission (24%)

The Editorial must be submitted by **Monday, April 26** on Canvas. References should be in footnotes or hyperlinked, not in the text. Make sure the Editorial has a good title and a word count at the beginning. The Editorial is worth 24% of the final grade.

I won’t provide you with a grading rubric, in recognition of the many different formats and styles you may use. But your Editorial will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

- (1) The strength of its central thesis and argument(s): it should make a solid, clear, and compelling case for the view defended;
- (2) Its overall quality as an Editorial: it should be timely, engaging, and well-written.

At the Workshop, I will ask you to pay attention to these elements in your classmates’ Editorial:

- Clarity: is the topic well defined/properly identified? Is the author’s position/adversary position clear?
- Organization: Is the text well organized? Do the ideas connect well together? Can you

- summarize the author's opinion/contribution in a couple of sentences?
- Argumentation: Can you help them elaborate or refine or trim down their main argument? Is it original? Does the author try to say too many things? Does the author make good use of the philosopher we read in class? What would improve the overall quality of the Editorial?

Ask these questions about your own Editorial during the drafting process.