



Department of Philosophy

**FIRST-YEAR UNDERGRADUATE
HANDBOOK**

2025/26

Read Me!

Welcome to the Department of Philosophy at York. We're very pleased that you are joining us, and we look forward to meeting you. We really hope that you find your course stimulating and rewarding.

This handbook is designed for First Year undergraduates. It explains what you need to know about beginning to study Philosophy. Read it carefully, keep it safe, and keep referring back to it during your first year. This information is also available digitally via the [Philosophy student web pages](#), together with other vital departmental information which includes a wider [Undergraduate Handbook](#) for all students.

Some of you will be studying philosophy for the first time. But whether or not you have studied philosophy before, university studies will be very different from any work you have done at school or college and we can't emphasise too strongly just *how* different it is. We expect you to take responsibility for your own ideas and your own progress, to become an independent scholar and thinker, and not just to absorb what we tell you and report it back to us. But that is why university study is so rewarding: you have the opportunity to really *think* and work out your ideas, and it is our job as a department to support you in doing that. It is not easy to think carefully about difficult topics. However, by the end of your three years at York you will have a set of skills which will not only allow you to engage with interesting philosophical debates, but are also applicable as you move on in your career and in life.

As you progress through your degree, you will have to be disciplined and self-motivated. You will need to manage your time effectively, think critically and carefully, and *use* what you learn to develop answers to new problems and work out your own position on philosophical issues. This is an exciting process, and good investment of effort during your first year will help you make a successful transition from school to university-level study.

This Handbook covers:

- Things to know and do before you arrive at York
- Your first week (15 - 19 September 2025)
- Departmental people and the Philosophy community
- Supporting your student experience
- Studying Philosophy at York
- Your course requirements
- Your first year modules

We'll see you very soon!



Dr Chris Jay
Director of the First Year Programme

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Things to know before you arrive

How can you prepare for your first Semester? This section makes some suggestions to help you get into the swing of university life.

University 'what to do first' information

You should have already received information from the University via your email about the [various things you need to do before you arrive](#), which include:

- Activating your university IT and email account;
- Online enrolment, university card and your student record;
- Arrivals day and your accommodation;
- Accessing your timetable;
- Campus orientation and freshers events;
- Accessing the University's [Virtual Learning Environment \(VLE\)](#) for teaching materials;
- Registration with a doctor's (GP) surgery.

The [University Welcome](#) page has lots of information about becoming a student at York. Please email philosophy@york.ac.uk if you have **not** received any central pre-arrival information.

Before arriving in the Philosophy Department

We know that what's most important to you is finding out what you can expect **before** starting to study Philosophy for the first time. Here are some specific action points to take in relation to your course:

- Read this Handbook!
- Find out where we are on the Heslington campus;
- Understand how we'll communicate with you about your course;
- Choose some Philosophy modules;
- Find out who your academic supervisor will be;
- If you wish, have a look at some preliminary reading (but you don't have to);

As well as reading this handbook, there's [more about the Department of Philosophy](#) on our website. Take a look at our web pages before you arrive at York; the departmental pages [About Us](#), and [For Current Students](#) will be most useful to you.

Where we are located on campus

The Philosophy Department is on the Heslington West campus, in the [Sally Baldwin Building, Block A](#). We're conveniently close to many of the central campus services, including the shops, library, and the Student Hub. The department has two floors, and a welcoming reception space with seating and work areas. It mainly comprises academic staff offices, administrative/wellbeing offices, and a seminar room where some of your classes will be held. The Philosophy Department building is usually accessible weekdays from 08:45 until 17:15 hours.

Communication

One of the main ways we will communicate with you is via your university email, so once your place is confirmed it's really important that this is one of the first things you activate. It's essential that you check this daily for important information from the Philosophy Department, especially once your course starts. You should check regularly outside of teaching periods too. We can't stress this enough, otherwise you might miss vital course information.

Choose some Philosophy modules

In your first year you may have to choose from a small selection of Philosophy modules. If this applies to you we will send you information and instructions on how to do this before you arrive. There is a short deadline by which you must make your choices, so please don't delay in submitting your selections if you're asked to do so. There are module descriptions of our first year modules later on in this handbook.

Your Academic Supervisor

You will get to know lots of people in the Philosophy Department, but one of the most important will be your Supervisor who is allocated to you just before you arrive. This is a member of academic staff who will be a consistent available point of contact within the Department during your time at York. The relationship with your supervisor is very important: they are your first point of contact if you have any problems, need advice or want to discuss course options.

You can expect to hear from your Supervisor for the very first time just before your arrival at York, and they will arrange to meet with you shortly after you arrive.

After this, Philosophy students will meet their supervisor at the start of each Semester to review progress and talk through any issues. However, you can speak to your supervisor at any time and the best way to contact them quickly is by email (e-mail addresses are given on the [Our people](#) pages of the Department's website).

We've more information further on in this handbook about contacting Philosophy staff and who to speak to with any questions.

Preparing to study

Before arriving, our new students often ask us about readings for their Philosophy course. The best way of studying philosophy is by *doing* it, not by learning *about* it, and this means reading (and thinking hard about) works of philosophy (as well as discussing ideas, of course). As Bertrand Russell put it: 'The student who wishes to acquire an elementary knowledge of philosophy will find it both easier and more profitable to read some of the works of the great philosophers than to attempt to derive an all-round view from handbooks'.

We have a list of things you *might* like to look at to get your philosophical brain warmed up in our [Reading Suggestions Appendix](#). ***These are not required readings for the course:*** all of the reading you need to do for your studies will be set when the module teaching starts, not in advance. In fact, most of the things on this list are not things you will be thinking about for any particular module. But we know that some people like to start reading something before they arrive, so please feel free to look at some of these suggestions if you'd like to.

Your first week at university

The first week of Semester 1 (Freshers Week) is Monday 15 September to Friday 19 September 2025 (overseas students will arrive a little earlier). We know you'll be feeling a little nervous (and excited) about this first week, so here's what to expect from Philosophy in those first few days.

Look at your online Timetable

Once you've completed your online enrolment and IT activation, you will be able to see your [online timetable](#) for Welcome and Orientation Events that will be taking place across the university (see the [University's Welcome page](#)), and importantly for you, those events in Philosophy. You will also be able to see what your teaching timetable looks like beyond Freshers Week. There is more information later in this handbook about the Modules you will be taking. (Please check your timetable regularly, though, as things *can* change.)

Attend the Philosophy welcome talk

This will take place on **Wednesday 17 September 2025 at 11:30 - 13:00 hours** in room [P/X/001 \(Physics, Lecture Theatre\)](#) and all new Philosophy undergraduates should attend. You will meet some key members of academic (and support) staff and find out more information about your first year studying Philosophy.

Meet your academic supervisor

As previously mentioned, you'll meet with your Philosophy academic [supervisor](#) this week. This first meeting is usually as a group with other first year Philosophy students who have the same supervisor as you - so it's a great opportunity to meet other course mates too! You'll be told where and when to meet your Supervisor in Freshers Week.

Come along to our welcome drinks reception

You will be warmly welcomed to this special social event for new Philosophy undergraduates on **Wednesday 17 September in the Department, Sally Baldwin Building, Block A from 17:00 until 19:00 hours**. We'll definitely provide the drinks and nibbles, and all you need to bring is the chatter and smiles! We look forward to seeing you there.

Collect your University card

This acts as your ID, room access, library and printing card - so it matters. Apply for your university card before you arrive. Collect yours from your college reception during arrivals weekend if you're living on campus. For all other information see the [University Card](#) web pages.

Complete the online Academic Integrity tutorial

This is a University requirement and all students **must** complete the compulsory online integrity tutorial. It's designed to ensure students have a basic understanding of academic integrity and what constitutes academic misconduct, and also introduces students to attribution and referencing. Academic misconduct is taken **very seriously** at the University of York, and so it's important that all students understand the consequences if academic misconduct is found to have been committed (even by accident, because you don't know how to avoid it). The tutorial is available via the [Virtual Learning Environment \(VLE\)](#). Why not do it as soon as possible? It will only take an hour or so.

People

Throughout your time studying with us you will meet a wide range of people in the Philosophy Department. You can find out more about our [departmental staff from our webpage](#). In addition to your [Supervisor](#), here are some other people you will meet soon after you arrive:

Your module leaders and tutors

Each module is led by a member of the academic staff who gives the lectures and is responsible for module administration. In the first year, they are assisted by seminar tutors who are carefully selected and trained research students. Module leaders and tutors will be happy to see you during their weekly [Office Hours](#). Note that the best way to contact module and seminar tutors is by email, or by dropping-in to their regular Office Hour.

Director of the First Year Programme

The first year of your course is particularly important in helping you settle into university life and studies, and there is an academic member of staff who oversees the first year in Philosophy as a whole. This is Dr Chris Jay, who can be contacted at christoper.jay@york.ac.uk. Chris's office is in the [Philosophy Department, Room A/111](#) (upstairs).

Student Services administrative team

The Student Services team look after everything behind the scenes on the student journey from the day you join us in the Philosophy Department until your Graduation. The Departmental Office and reception desk is open for enquiries Monday to Friday, 10:00 until 12:30 hours and 13:30 to 16:00 hours. Whatever your query, they are here to help and support your academic journey, so please don't hesitate to ask them if you're not sure about anything.

Our key contact emails:

philosophy@york.ac.uk - for all general enquiries

philosophy-ug-assessment@york.ac.uk - for all assessment enquiries

Department of Philosophy
University of York
Heslington
York YO10 5DD
Tel: 01904 323251

The wider Philosophy community

We hope that you will make lifelong friends whilst studying Philosophy with us. We pride ourselves in being a welcoming and inclusive family, and aside from the academic side of things, here's a taste of what the Philosophy community offers:

The Philosophy Society

York is lucky to have a very active student-run [Philosophy Society](#), and joining the Society is an excellent way of meeting other students and pursuing your philosophical interests outside the seminar room. They're a friendly group and organise social events, film shows, talks, discussions and all sorts of other things.

Departmental Community Coordinators (DCCs)

The Philosophy Department appoints two undergraduate Community Coordinators annually to help promote and run student-led activities within the department itself. Our DCCs for this 2025/6 academic year will be Clem Lopez Moneta Ramila and Scarlett Adams. During each semester they will hold a range of social events, peer-to-peer study sessions, wellbeing sessions, coffee mornings, and careers events - all of which are popular with Philosophy students.

Our student representatives and student ambassadors

We take the voice of our student body very seriously here in the department. If you are passionate about making a difference to the way we do things in Philosophy, listening to what your peers say, and promoting the ideas and views of all students, then you should consider becoming a paid YorkSU academic representative. Our reps are a crucial part of the Philosophy community.

Also, student ambassadors are vital in promoting Philosophy and the University to the public. Our paid ambassadors assist at University open days, departmental visit days and other public events, and we are always grateful for their perspective on the student experience.

Going further afield ...

Philosophy isn't solely department-based! There are opportunities for students to head off-campus during their studies. Previously there have been trips to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, at West Bretton, and you will be invited to an organised trip to Bolsover Castle in Derbyshire in late October 2025 - look out for details on your email about that trip shortly.

Our socials...

The Department has its own social media presence on [Facebook](#) (<https://www.facebook.com/PhilosophyYorkUK>) and on [X](#) (@uoyphilosophy)

Supporting the student experience

Student Wellbeing Officers

We understand that each student journey is unique, and it can be especially difficult to navigate your studies when significant life events occur. This is why each academic department has a Student Wellbeing Officer (SWO) who is there to offer advice, guidance and support if you're experiencing personal or academic issues that are affecting your ability to engage with student life. SWOs help you to navigate University [wellbeing services](#) as well as other sources of support. Our SWO is [Lauren Bramley](#) (lauren.bramley@york.ac.uk), and she offers friendly and supportive advice in a welcoming environment for Philosophy students.

Student Hub

The [University Student Hub](#) is dedicated to helping all students with cost of living worries, money management, student finance queries, information on private housing and academic progress issues. Additionally, there's dedicated support for other [Student Communities](#) which can be accessed via the Hub. Whatever advice it is that you need, completion of the [self-referral form](#) will ensure you are directed to the relevant experts.

Disability Services

[University disability services](#) are here to offer advice and support to students, as well as to promote inclusivity across the University. If you have used Student Support in the past - either at school or college - please get in touch with the Disability team once you arrive as your records and any practical support previously provided will *not* be automatically implemented once you are a university student.

International students

There is specific welcome information [for international students](#) which you will find helpful in your first few days and weeks at York. Once here and studying, and when queries do arise, the Student Hub has a dedicated team of experts who can help with [International Student](#) queries.

University of York Students' Union (YorkSU)

See the [University Student Union website](#) for information on YorkSU activities, events, and the student voice. They are also available for independent advice and support on academic progress matters.

Studying Philosophy at York

The main aim of the work on your Philosophy course is to equip you to think seriously and independently about philosophical questions, and to form and defend your own answers to them.

We know this isn't easy, and you shouldn't expect to understand difficult philosophical concepts after reading something for the first time - it takes practice to grapple with these questions, which are sometimes more complex than they appear at first. You should give a significant amount of time to private study - reading and thinking on your own. However, it's also vital that you learn to discuss philosophical ideas orally and in writing. Explaining your ideas to others (fellow students and staff), developing supportive arguments, and listening to their views will help you to develop the necessary skills to help you answer those philosophical questions.

At York, students take six modules each year: three in Semester 1, and three in Semester 2 with the first year consisting of a certain set of modules (although many programmes allow some module choice in Semester 2). In your second year you will find that you can choose from a wider range of modules from different areas of philosophy, and by the third year you will choose modules that really explore philosophical thinking at a much deeper level.

Through formal teaching, independent study, skills workshops, lectures, seminars and tutorials we will help you develop the tools you need to become fully-fledged philosophers! But also very importantly, those tools can be used widely beyond philosophy, too. Here's some further information about your learning journey:

Seminars and tutorials

These are an essential part of our teaching as seminars/tutorials are classes with other students and a tutor to discuss some specific module material. Preparation and contribution is essential to make the most of these meetings. Seminars give you the chance to develop your skills by discussing concepts with others. Smaller classes such as these provide you with the opportunity to communicate ideas clearly; develop, explain and evaluate arguments; listen carefully to others and understand what they are saying; and work together to develop and deepen your understanding. Seminars are not at all about always being right with your ideas, or winning an argument, but about working collaboratively to develop your philosophical skills.

Lectures

The majority of our modules have formal lectures which support the smaller seminar classes. Lectures usually take place before seminars, and they aim to give you an introduction to the subject under discussion, and stimulate you to think harder about it by raising questions and possible lines of criticism for you to reflect on. They will not tell you all that you need to know; instead, they introduce key concepts and arguments, so you should think of them as guiding and supporting your own reading, and thinking, about a subject.

Attendance at teaching sessions

Attendance at lectures, seminars, tutorials and workshops is compulsory and logged. You must give an acceptable explanation by emailing your module tutor for

any unavoidable absence (eg illness or other compassionate circumstances). This is a basic courtesy to your academic tutor. Please note that we would never share your reason for absence with other students.

Private Study

You will find that you have about three to ten hours per week of formally scheduled teaching in philosophy, depending on your particular degree programme. This may not seem like very much but *each teaching (or 'contact') hour will require you to undertake significant periods of private study* (reading, note-taking, essay preparation and *thinking*). Contact hours are *intensive* and they should be used to develop and refine your ideas. You will need plenty of time to prepare in advance of teaching sessions, and also to reflect after these discussions.

Use your private study time carefully and systematically: read and think hard about the topics studied and also record your ideas in writing, building up structured notes. This will help your understanding (you may think you understand a topic, but try writing about it...!); and of course it is good preparation for written assessments. Where you need support or clarification beyond or outside of seminars, make use of academic staff office hours.

Office Hours

This is a time each academic sets aside every week to see students on a drop-in basis, so you usually don't need to make an appointment. Office hours provide you with the opportunity to ask questions, or ask advice, to discuss problems or just talk philosophy. Each academic will set a regular weekly Office Hour at the beginning of each semester: you'll find details of these times in the department foyer and [on our website](#). If you want to speak to a tutor or your [Supervisor](#) at a time other than their drop-in Office Hour they would also be happy to speak to you, and it's best [to email them](#) in the first instance for an appointment.

Crucially, Office Hours should be used to supplement your private study. We cannot stress enough just how important Office Hours are, **and you should use them throughout the entirety of the module in each semester**. These are some of the most useful contact times you will have, because you get to set the agenda and talk about what *you* find most interesting or difficult in the module. These are also great opportunities to try out ideas and talk philosophy - they're not just a resource for when you are stuck or when the time comes to write an essay!

Working Collaboratively

Although you will get to know and work with other students in various teaching contexts, we strongly believe that a vital part of your learning journey will be through less formal peer-to-peer support. This could be students in your cohort or in a different year, but essentially it's others whom you are comfortable talking to and with whom you can discuss philosophy. Our [Departmental Community Coordinators](#) are fantastic student ambassadors for this type of peer-to-peer support. The mutual benefits of these friendships are numerous. For example they act as sounding boards for each other's ideas and arguments - helping each other to formulate those ideas and arguments orally and in writing (instead of relying on what lecturers or tutors say in class), and ultimately help you to feel part of an intellectual community rather than just an individual working away in isolation. Philosophy is all about exchanging and challenging ideas, and nobody reaches their full potential in the discipline without talking to others about what they are working on. Professional

philosophers do it almost constantly, and you should get into the habit of doing it early on.

Written work

Writing philosophy well does not come easily; it is a skill that everyone has to learn, and even experienced philosophers find it hard at times. The important things are to write *clearly* and to *argue* for a *particular answer* to the question you have been set, explaining carefully why you think this is correct. Unless you have specifically been asked to do so, do not just report what another writer has said, or describe all the possible answers to the question. Don't be woolly, or try to sound profound at the cost of clarity. You should argue for a firm conclusion.

In the first year you will receive written feedback on all your 'summative' or assessed essays, and in most cases tutors will offer you a tutorial to discuss their comments, or a feedback tutorial on 'formative' practice assessment work. *Always* take these opportunities to learn. But please don't think of written work as something that you do only for assessment: practising writing clearly and accurately is an essential part of your private study. You might find it useful, for example, to write up your notes at the end of each week into a short essay on the topic covered.

At a more basic level, make sure that you understand the words you use, that your writing is grammatical, and that your spelling is correct. This may seem obvious, but it is important to get these basic points right, and your tutors will mark your work down if it is full of errors. If you know or suspect that you have a specific learning difficulty which may impact upon your written and assessed work then you can be [offered support for teaching and assessments](#).

Study skills and IT

You'll need strong study skills to help you learn effectively and efficiently throughout your degree. In our department all students participate in compulsory Philosophy Skills sessions, which are tailor-made to Philosophy, but cover a range of topics including reading and writing skills, note taking, and referencing. Additionally, the University's [Study Skills web pages](#) have a range of different online resources, personalised support and workshops that all students can access. There are numerous [study spaces](#) across campus, and you are welcome to come into the Philosophy Department to use our space too. Your module learning is supported via materials on the VLE and you will find everything you need on here relating to your Philosophy topics, including access to reading resources and assessment tasks. Our [web pages for Current Students](#) provide a wealth of information about your Philosophy degree programme, assessment, policies and sources of support. For quick access to all the IT systems you will use and what they do, then please visit the [Student home](#) webpages.

Beyond your Philosophy course

Make the most of your time at university. You are unlikely ever again to have the same opportunities to develop your skills, try out new activities or build your confidence by taking on new responsibilities. This is all part of learning and developing, and it will count when you finally head out into the world looking for work (sorry to raise the delicate topic of [careers](#), but the time will come!). Be realistic and don't over-commit yourself, but do look for positive and worthwhile ways of using your time outside your course. The University offers *The York Award* to recognize

students' training and achievements in areas beyond their formal study. You can find out more about it on the [York Award](#) pages.

Course requirements

This section of the handbook is about what your course will look like, and the processes as you move through your degree programme. Much of this information is already available online and we'll signpost you to the information you will need.

The 2025/26 academic year structure

Here is a [poster](#) for you to keep, showing how your first year will be structured with semester dates, teaching weeks, and revision / assessment weeks. Information about semester dates is updated annually and published on the university web pages about [Semesters](#).

Your degree programme structure

We've provided an [overview of how your degree will be structured](#) each year in terms of what types of modules (compulsory or optional) you will study, and when you will study them. [Click on the appropriate degree title](#) to see your degree programme structure.

Modules

Which combination of modules you study in your first year depends on which degree course you are taking, and you should follow the programme links below for details of the modules you will be taking in year 1 (and beyond). Each module is worth 20-credits, and you will study 120 credits in each year (i.e. 6 modules). Your module activities (lectures, seminars etc) will also appear on your [online timetable](#) for each semester.

Full first-year module descriptions are provided in the [Module Appendix](#) document in this handbook.

[BA Philosophy](#)

[BA Philosophy with Sociology](#)

[BA Language, Logic and Communication](#)

[BA Philosophy and Linguistics](#)

[BA Philosophy with French / German / Spanish or Italian \(with a Year Abroad\)](#)

[BA English and Philosophy](#)

[BA History and Philosophy](#)

[BSc Maths and Philosophy](#)

[BSc Physics and Philosophy](#)

[MPhys Physics and Philosophy](#)

Electives

On many programmes at York, you have the opportunity to step outside your degree and expand your knowledge by taking a module from a different department or school. We call these 'Electives'. If you are interested in taking any, please visit the [Studying beyond your department](#) pages to find out more. You can also ask your Academic supervisor for advice.

Assessment

Assessment (both informal and formal) is part and parcel of your university journey, and ultimately the results of your formal assessments will determine your degree classification at the end of your final year. Module assessments will test your understanding, argument, organisation and writing on a philosophical topic, and also your independence and originality of thought. Your assessments in Philosophy over the course of your degree will take some different formats (some specific to particular modules which you might or might not take): from essays, coursework and (probably online) exams, to posters, presentations, podcasts and Wikis.

During a module students may have informal ('formative') assessments - this might be practice questions, or an essay plan, for example. Tutors will provide timely feedback on formative assessment so that students can act on this for future assessments and in their work generally.

Additionally, at the end of each semester you will be formally assessed (i.e. take 'summative' assessments) on the modules you have studied. These will take place during [dedicated assessment periods](#) each year and you **must** be available at these times for assessment. Summative assessments are submitted and marked anonymously to ensure fairness and consistency for all students. For every summative assessment taken, tutors will again provide written feedback on your work. **We must emphasise to you that submission deadlines and word limits for summative assessments are strict, and penalties will be applied if you submit assessments late.** Please familiarise yourselves with all the rules about summative assessment.

Everything you will need to know about assessments in Philosophy is on our undergraduate [Assessment](#) web pages, including:

- [Assessment dates](#) for all Philosophy modules: these are strict submission dates and times;
- [Philosophy Assessment Guide](#) and [University's assessment policies and procedures](#) (aka The Rules!);
- Our [marking procedures and marking criteria](#);
- [Instructions for electronic submission of assessments](#), and [use of Turnitin](#).
- University information on taking [assessment and examinations](#)

Permission to move to the next year of study

The marks you achieve in every first year module assessment count towards your overall end of year mark, and each module that you pass is worth 20 credits. You have to successfully pass 120 credits (i.e. the equivalent of 6 modules) in each year of study, and so it's important that you pass every module in order to be given the credits, permitting you to continue into the next year of your degree course.

Modules in Philosophy are marked out of 100, and the pass mark for an undergraduate module is 40. Our [marking guide and marking criteria](#) explains how we mark your work. If you don't achieve the pass mark for a module (i.e. fail a module) then you *may* be eligible for a reassessment (although there are rules about how many modules you can be reassessed in, if you fail them). If you have to Resit module assessments due to failure, then you also need to be aware that the maximum mark you can achieve will be 40 (i.e. it is capped), even if you perform considerably better. Reassessment of modules will take place in August each year.

In your first year, the end of year mark *does not count* towards your final degree classification result - you simply have to pass every module (all 120 credits) in order to be allowed to move into the second year of your degree programme. This is called Progression. **However, in your second and subsequent years of study your end of year marks WILL be used to calculate your final degree result.**

The rules about [Progression and Award for undergraduate students](#) are published on the university web pages. This is an important guide for understanding how your degree classification is calculated, and how Reassessment and compensation works.

You will get module results and feedback regularly throughout the year, and will be formally notified by the end of July whether you have completed the first year satisfactorily, or need to be reassessed in any module. If you are at all concerned about your progress, please speak to your [Supervisor](#) as soon as possible - they are there to help.

When academic plans change

Sometimes things don't go to plan with your academic progress - we know that illness or significant life events can have a big impact upon your ability to study effectively. And sometimes your plans change for some reason.

We've provided information about wellbeing support in our [Supporting the Student Experience](#) section; however, when you need practical help and support regarding academic progress issues, please have a look at the following resources:

- Your [Supervisor](#) - the first person you should contact if you've concerns;
- The [Philosophy Student Services team](#) - for any queries or questions;
- [Exceptional Circumstances affecting Assessment](#) - applying for mitigation for summative assessments;

- [Changing your plan](#) (e.g. course transfers, leave of absence, withdrawal);
- [Support to study](#) - how you can access holistic support to help you engage in studies;
- [Self-certification of illness](#) - where you can let us know if you are ill and cannot attend lectures or seminars.
- [eVision student record](#) - where you find details of your assessment results, personal contact details, modules, and supervisor;

Learning outcomes

You can find details of our Programme's Learning Outcomes in the UG Handbook.

Contact Us

Although starting at University can be daunting, we hope that this handbook has reassured you by covering most of the information and signposting you should need during your first year. However, that is not to say we can't help if the information you need is not covered above. The Student Services team or your Supervisor should be your first point of contact. Between them, they can help or signpost you in the right direction:

E-mail: philosophy@york.ac.uk

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Modules appendix

Please ensure that you have read the section Modules [link]. The module titles additionally link to the information in the university's [Module Catalogue](#).

First Year Philosophy modules in detail

Semester 1

[Philosophical Analysis](#)

This module has two main aims: it introduces you to various aspects of how arguments work, and their purposes; and it also gives you plenty of practice and support in the close reading of texts, to work out what they are saying (before, of course, trying to decide whether what they are saying is correct - partly by analysing the arguments they are presenting). Lectures will provide background context for the texts you are reading closely in seminars, and explain various aspects of informal argumentation theory. In the seminars, you will be using what has been explained in the lectures to help you interpret and understand the set texts. You will then be expected to critically evaluate the arguments and ideas you find in them.

[Knowledge & Perception](#)

This module introduces some fundamental issues in epistemology (the theory of knowledge). In the first part of the module we will consider what knowledge is. In the second part, we will explore some philosophical puzzles and problems about ways of acquiring knowledge, including perception.

[Power & Consent](#)

Who has power over you, and have you consented to that? A state has great power over its citizens. It can enforce its laws and punish those who disobey. Some political philosophers have thought that people's consent is required to make this political power legitimate. But can consent make power legitimate, and if so, what kind of consent can do that? Beyond the state's power, what are the limits to what we can consent to between individuals? And how do existing power relations between people complicate the validity of consent in various contexts? We will investigate these questions over the course of the module, in order to shed light on the complicated relationship between power and consent.

Semester 2

[Reason & Argument](#)

As a philosopher, you'll need to be able to tell good arguments from bad. In this module, you will study one of the most important ways for an argument to be good: an argument is valid if, but only if, it is impossible for its premises to be true and its

conclusion to be false. You will learn how to take arguments written in ordinary English, and symbolise them in formal languages that better reveal their logical forms. Then you will learn how to test these formal arguments for validity. Along the way, you'll be introduced to a host of key logical concepts that are used in all branches of philosophy.

Ethics

This module involves considering some of the following questions: Is morality subjective or objective? (Hard question? Some forms of subjectivism, the view that morality has to do with how we feel about things, are, it turns out, quite objective.) Should you help more people rather than fewer? (Many think that's an easy question to answer. It is not.) What on earth is axiology? Why might lotteries be a splendid idea for distributing resources? (Aristotle knew, and evolutionary psychology shows, how important fairness is.) Is every moral theory a form of consequentialism? (Answer: No, but it takes work to figure out why not.) Why should one fly less and buy less even if one's contribution makes no difference whatsoever? (After all, you must fly an awful lot (on your private jet plane) to actually make a difference to global warming.) What does philosophy have to say about climate change? (If we can't solve the so-called Non-Identity Problem, there won't be much wrong with leaving a depleted and overheating planet to the next generations; however, we know it is wrong, very wrong, so we had better tackle this problem!) Is it okay to kill animals in their millions or billions? (After all, as Cora Diamond says, we are at the table and they are on the table.) It's not the aim of this module to change the world; we need to understand it. No (or at most little) repeat of A-level material. Independent thinking required. A genuine interest in understanding ethical issues is a plus.

Free Will

Free will is the idea that we have a certain kind of control over our actions, that when we do something, we could have done otherwise. This idea seems practically very important, but theoretically fragile. If we are not free, our lives make no sense. But there seems to be good reason to think we are not free. In this module, we investigate the problem of free will, and we use it as a jumping off point for some of the most fundamental questions in philosophy, including questions in metaphysics, ethics and about the nature of philosophy.

Beginning Philosophical Research

This module involves more independent study. In one part of it, you will conduct your own research into the ideas of a particular philosopher of your choice (from an approved list), supported by a member of academic staff who will be assigned to meet with you to discuss your progress and direct you. The culmination of this research will be a poster presentation.

Reading suggestions appendix

Part of what makes studying philosophy exciting is that there are no 'starter problems' like there are in maths, for example: in philosophy, the things you start by thinking about are the difficult, interesting questions which are also still at the cutting edge of the subject! So, whilst you can increasingly find text-book style introductions to philosophy, one of the best ways to get into the subject is still to read some texts by philosophers who are wrestling with various puzzles.

There are links to online versions of some of the suggestions below; but where there is no link, various editions of the works listed can be bought quite cheaply online. (Note that you will not have to buy any of the texts you need for your course yourself: these will all be available through the University Library, usually online.)

Some classics which are often recommended to those starting out in philosophy (but which continue to be interesting whatever stage you are at!) include:

[Plato](#) (c. 429-347 BCE)

Try one or more of the short dialogues — e.g. the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Meno* and *Phaedo* are all available in various editions individually, or collected together in *Five Dialogues* (published by Hackett) — or *The Republic* (which is much longer). Plato writes 'dialogues' which are like scripts for a play, and he sometimes presents his own arguments through the words of Socrates who talks to various people about all sorts of things, trying to understand those things better. So, for example, the *Meno* deals with how we can ever learn anything, the *Phaedo* is about the soul, the *Crito* is about obligations to obey those in political power and the *Republic* ranges over epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, political philosophy and philosophy of art. The *Apology* is supposed to be a record of Socrates's defence at his trial, where he was sentenced to death for 'corrupting the youth of the city' with his questioning of received wisdom, and for 'denying the city's Gods'.

[Rene Descartes](#), *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641)

This is a classic text of 'early modern' (i.e. C17th & C18th) philosophy, and it deals with knowledge and metaphysics as well as some arguments for the existence of God.

[David Hume](#), *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) and/or *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751)

These works by Hume are slightly more accessible, but still very good, presentations of the ideas in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, and both the *Treatise* and these *Enquiries* are classics of 'early modern' (i.e. C17th & C18th) philosophy. The *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* deals with knowledge (including discussions of 'inductive' or probabilistic reasoning, and an interesting discussion of the evidence for miracles), whilst the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* deals with ethics.

[Mary Wollstonecraft](#), *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

This is a classic of feminist philosophy (though its arguments are not uncontroversial by any means amongst feminist theorists), and it makes many astute observations about the plight in society of both women and men of different social classes.

[John Stuart Mill](#), *On Liberty* (1859)

On Liberty is short and has been very influential not just in philosophy but also in politics, law and society more widely. Mill defends a liberal political philosophy and discusses the proper limits of freedom.

[Bertrand Russell](#), *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912)

Part introduction, part original philosophy, this is perhaps the most accessible of the works by a key figure in early twentieth-century philosophy. It is mainly about epistemology, metaphysics and philosophy of mind/perception.

Some twentieth century and more recent things which you might find interesting include:

[Thomas Nagel](#), *Mortal Questions* (1979)

This is a collection of essays by a leading C20th philosopher, and it includes discussions of various issues in philosophy including consciousness, equality and the meaning of life. It includes his classic essay 'What is it like to be a bat?', which isn't just about being a bat!

[Peter Singer](#), *Practical Ethics* (1st ed. 1979)

This is a nice introduction to some key debates in moral philosophy, with some really interesting ideas. Singer is a well-known and sometimes controversial contemporary moral philosopher.

[Matthew Ratcliffe](#), 'The Feeling of Being', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 8-10 (2005)

[You can access this here](#). This is an example (by one of our York professors!) of 'phenomenology', which is all about paying close attention to describing the nature of our experience. The terms 'intentional' and 'intentionality' are used here in their common philosophical sense, to mean roughly the idea of being *about* something, or directed at something: so, thoughts are *intentional* when or because they are about something (such as a particular person).

[Eleanor Stump](#), *Wandering in Darkness*, Chapter 5: 'The Nature of Love' (2010).

[You can access this here](#). The book is about the problem of evil in philosophy of religion, but this chapter is an interesting discussion of love. It starts with a brief survey of some recent ideas about the nature of love, then presents Aquinas's ideas about love. So, it is an example of philosophical psychology, philosophy of religion, and medieval philosophy scholarship – from a leading contemporary philosopher of religion and Aquinas expert.

[L. A. Paul](#), 'What You Can't Expect When You're Expecting', *Res Philosophica*, Volume 92, Issue 2 (2015)

[You can access this here](#). It is a really interesting recent paper on rational decision making about things which change your life so much that you cannot predict what things will be like afterwards (such as having children).

[Amia Srinivasan](#), 'The Aptness of Anger', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2018)

[You can access this here](#). It is a discussion of the ways in which getting angry about injustice can be a good thing regardless of whether getting angry helps to change things.