

Introduction to Online Lectures

(Slide 1) This slideshow includes an audio component. Please make sure your speakers are turned up, and your volume is set high enough to hear the narration.

(Slide 2) These lectures will all begin with a title slide, which will be accompanied by a sentence or two to introduce the topic.

(Slide 3) This presentation plays continuously as a movie, but the software used to produce it makes it easy for you to move around within it to find a particular section or go back and listen to a section that went by too quickly. Here's a quick overview of the controls that are available to you. (Note that the word "slide" will be used interchangeably in these lectures with "section" to refer to what you see on the screen at a given time, and the audio narration that goes along with it.)

Along the right side of the screen you'll see a table of contents, which displays the names of the sections of the movie and the amount of time that each section lasts. Click on the name of a section to go to that section, or look here to see where you are in the presentation.

Along the bottom are a series of controls that allow you to pause the movie or resume play, and to skip ahead to the next section or back to the previous one. The pause feature is useful if you'd like to stop and look at the graphics or read the text before continuing. Also along the bottom is a button that allows you to increase or decrease the volume of the audio, or mute it.

(Slide 4) Navigation of the course should be fairly straightforward. The goal of this lecture is primarily to introduce you to strategies for listening to lectures, in contrast to the lower-level skill, addressed in the previous slide, of simply managing to use the software with which they are recorded. You'll discover shortly that a major part of this course in critical thinking involves learning to *read* critically, that is, to use a text as a tool for your own thought and learning rather than simply as a record of somebody's speech. Thus critical reading depends on your willingness and ability to ask questions of a text, rather than simply being a passive recipient of it, and to move through the text in a non-linear way, going forward or backward as necessary to get answers to your questions. Similarly, these lectures are designed to encourage *critical, or active listening*.

(Slide 5) Consider what happens when you listen to a lecture in person. It's generally possible to interrupt the speaker and ask questions, but there are several factors that make it hard to do this as often as you might like. You might be familiar with the adage "the only bad question is the one you didn't ask." A lot of lecturers believe this is the case, and if you as a listener don't follow what they're saying, they'd like you to interrupt and tell them where you're confused. But it's a natural human reaction to not want to draw attention to oneself when one is uncertain or uncomfortable, particularly so if you're shy by nature. Also, students who ask a lot of questions can get pushback from other students – angry or frustrated glares, comments after class, and so on. Finally, college classes are scheduled to meet for specified times, typically 50 minutes or 90 minutes per session. Most professors who lecture a lot plan on using all the class time, so if you ask a lot of questions you tend to interrupt the pacing of the class, and some professors may resent that.

(Slide 6) This course is different. Lectures have been recorded ahead of time, and you are encouraged to listen as many times as you'd like. But you don't have to sit through an entire 50 minute session if you want to refresh yourself on certain points of a lecture that you've already heard. Different lectures

last for different amounts of time, so there's no filler here. Each lecture is just as long as it needs to be. The different lectures are devoted to a particular subject, and they all have a table of contents, so you can zero in on a particular topic quickly and easily. It's recommended that you listen to each lecture straight through the first time, but if you get bored and want to skip ahead to see where things are going, you're welcome to do so. That said, because there's no filler you probably should listen to the entire lecture eventually, even if it's in pieces. In any case, while lectures vary in length, most are about 10-15 minutes long, because research indicates that most people can't maintain their concentration for much longer than that.

It's advisable that you not run from lecture to lecture to get through with a unit as fast as possible. After you finish a unit, unless you're feeling particularly fresh, stop and walk around the room, or get yourself a glass of your favorite, non-alcoholic beverage, or use the restroom. Use this brief break to think about what you've learned, and decide whether there's anything you missed that you want to go back to before continuing. You'll see how long the lecture is on the link from the course webpage, so when you begin a new unit you may want to skim it first, to see how many lectures there are and how long each one is. Then use your time wisely.

(Slide 7) Now, a few words about the audiovisual components of these lectures. Transcripts of lectures are provided for those of you who find it easier to read than to listen, but most people will find that listening is easier. If your computer screen is large enough, you may choose to have the text next to the AV lecture, but that's not necessary, and for most people probably not advisable. The audiovisual version of each lecture includes both a verbal narration and something displayed on the screen. Sometimes you'll be shown a picture, or chart, or list, which the narration will talk about. Most of the time, however, what you'll see is just an outline of what's being discussed. Think of this as the blackboard in a face-to-face class. Technology doesn't need to be complicated just because it can be, and since it can be hard to catch everything you hear the first time through, sometimes it can help to have a few words that allow you to follow what's being said. A lot of the time, that's all the visual component of these lectures is intended to accomplish. You might find it helpful not even to read the screen when it just presents an outline, at least initially. Listen to the narration, and if you think you're not following everything, go back to the beginning of the section that you're on, pause the narration long enough to read the screen, then start it up again. Most screens will remain for at least thirty seconds, and rarely longer than a minute and a half; that's enough movement that it shouldn't get too boring, but slow enough that screens won't flash by too quickly for you to follow them. Again, however, if a screen goes by too quickly, you can always pause it or rewind and listen to it again.

(Slide 8) Remember: if you go through a lecture or a series of lectures straight through, chances are good you're going too fast. These lectures are short for a reason: they're focused and thus somewhat dense. That's balanced, of course, by the fact that the narration isn't too quick, and generally there are a few seconds of silence at the beginning or end of each slide. There's no advantage in simply running through the lectures; you need to understand what they're saying if you're going to benefit from them at all. In a face-to-face course you might get credit for attendance, for simply occupying a seat and inhaling college air. In this course there's no participation credit. Nobody's monitoring whether you listen to the lectures, or how long you spend listening to them (well, we might do this to assess the course itself, but not to assess you). The learning outcomes (more on those in a later lecture) determine what you need to be able to do to pass the course, and all the bells and whistles (the website, the lectures, the readings, even the assignments) are designed to provide you with the opportunity to learn what you need to learn. Think of the lectures as a tool, as a means to an end rather than as an end in their own right.

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