

## The Levels System

PHI 203: Introduction to Metaphysics and Epistemology  
Spring 2014

*This is a duplicate of Dustin Locke's Level System, modified slightly for my purposes (see Dustin's webpage at [www.cmc.edu/pages/faculty/dlocke](http://www.cmc.edu/pages/faculty/dlocke)). Many thanks to Dustin for his help in constructing this part of the course.*

### 1/ What is the levels system?

The "levels system" consists of three levels. You start at Level 1. Once you complete one level, you progress to the next.

Each time you attempt a level, you will receive one of four evaluations:

- not much progress
- good effort
- almost
- complete

You can progress to the next level only when you receive a "complete". If you receive one of the other evaluations, you can try again. In total, you have a maximum of *five attempts* at the levels system in total through the semester (see schedule below). Of those five attempts, only *two* of them can be attempts at Level 3.

Your grade for the levels system is determined by how far you progress through the levels, and your evaluation on the last level you attempt, as follows:

*Level 3.* Complete = A, Almost = A-, Good effort = B+, Not much progress = B

*Level 2.* Complete = B-, Almost = C+, Good effort = C, Not much progress = C-

*Level 1.* Complete = D, Almost = D-, Good effort = F, Not much progress = F

So, if you completed levels 1 and 2, and got an "almost" for your last attempt at level 3, your levels grade would be an A-.

Here are the three levels:

**Level 1:** Expository paper (150 – 300 words). Choose an argument from the readings and explain it. State explicitly what the conclusion is and what premises are used to support that conclusion.

**Level 2:** Expository paper (300 – 500 words). Just like Level 1, except that you must also explain how the argument fits into the broader issues that we are discussing. For example, if the argument purports to be an objection to Prof Jones' thesis, explain what Jones' thesis is and why the argument, if successful, is an objection to it. Or if the argument purports to solve a philosophical problem, state what the problem is and why the argument, if successful, solves it.

**Level 3:** Expository and critical paper (500 – 700 words). Just like Level 2, except that you must also criticize the argument. This might involve arguing that one of the premises is false. Or it might involve arguing that the premises do not support the conclusion.

Each attempt at the levels system must be based on a *different* argument. So, if you attempt a level and do not complete it, your next attempt at that level cannot be a re-write of the previous attempt. It must be a new paper.

## 2/ Why use the levels system?

There are three main advantages of the levels system.

First, it means that you can work through this part of the course at your own pace. The system ensures that you're always working on something challenging enough to be interesting, but not so challenging as to be frustrating or daunting.

Second, the levels system prepares you to write a philosophy paper. Without the levels system, when students are asked to write their first philosophy paper they often feel lost and unsure of what's expected of them. The levels system is designed to remedy that, building up your philosophical and writing skills in a step-by-step fashion. By the time you're doing Level 3, you're writing a basic philosophy paper.

Third, the levels system is a much fairer method of evaluation than more typical systems that involve a mid-term paper. Suppose student A has no experience writing philosophy papers, but student B does. Then A is likely to do worse on a mid-term paper than B. So even if A and B end up performing similarly by the end of the semester, A will get a worse overall grade than B. That doesn't strike me as a fair method of evaluation, since it's partly evaluating how prepared you were before the course started! In contrast, the levels system measures how well you are performing by the end of the course. Sure, B might breeze through the levels quicker than A. But I am confident that, with work, students with no experience in philosophy can progress successfully through the levels and finish the course with an "A grade" for that component.

## 3/ Schedule

As I said, you have a maximum of *five* attempts at the levels system. The deadlines for those five attempts are as follows:

Attempt 1: Feb 17<sup>th</sup>

Attempt 2: March 3<sup>rd</sup>

Attempt 3: March 24<sup>th</sup>

Attempt 4: April 11<sup>th</sup>

Attempt 5: May 2<sup>nd</sup>

You are not required to hand in work at each deadline. For example, if you complete all three levels in the first three attempts, you are done. Conversely, a student could in principle chance her luck and ignore the first two deadlines and bank on completing the three levels in the final three deadlines, though I wouldn't advise trying that!

*Late work:* If you want to hand in work at a particular deadline but miss it, you can either (i) submit the work late and take a penalty of 1/3 of a grade per day off your final levels grade, or (ii) just forfeit that deadline and use the next one, meaning that you have one less attempt at the levels system.

Given the flexibility of the system, there are no extensions except for in exceptional circumstances to be discussed in consultation with your Director of Studies.