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Important information

Accreditation period

Units 1–4: 1 January 2025–31 December 2029

Implementation of this study commences in 2025.

Other sources of information

The [*VCAA Bulletin*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/news-and-events/bulletins-and-updates/bulletin/Pages/index.aspx) is the only official source of changes to regulations and accredited studies. The Bulletin also regularly includes advice on VCE studies. It is the responsibility of each VCE teacher to refer to each issue of the Bulletin. The Bulletin is available as an e-newsletter via [free subscription](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Footer/Pages/Subscribe.aspx) on the VCAA website.

To assist teachers in developing courses, the VCAA publishes online [Support materials](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/philosophy/Pages/Index.aspx) (incorporating the content previously supplied in the *Advice for teachers*).

The current [*VCE Administrative Handbook*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/vce-handbook/Pages/index.aspx?Redirect=1) contains essential information on assessment processes and other procedures.

VCE providers

Throughout this study design, the term ‘school’ is intended to include both schools and other VCE providers.

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Introduction

Scope of study

VCE Philosophy contains a broad introduction to Western philosophy and its methods of inquiry. It explores themes and debates within metaphysics, epistemology and value theory, as well as techniques of reasoning and argument drawn from formal and informal logic. It investigates how we should live by examining what a good life is for the individual and the community, and what it means to believe well.

Prescribed texts by significant philosophers are used to develop a critical appreciation of key questions and contemporary debates. Where religious concepts and traditions of thought are discussed, they are considered from a philosophical rather than theological point of view.

Rationale

Philosophy is broadly concerned with questions of ethics, epistemology and metaphysics. Philosophy is the founding discipline of logic, and it continues to develop and refine the tools of critical reasoning, influencing approaches in mathematics, digital coding, science and the humanities. Philosophers grapple with the problems that lie at the foundation of issues of public debate such as the concept of artificial intelligence, justification for a charter of human rights and freedom of speech.

Philosophers are concerned with thinking rigorously and rationally about ideas, and exploring their meaning, context, coherence and implications. The nature of the questions studied, together with the techniques of reasoning and argument used to study them, can in turn help to create new ideas and insights.

VCE Philosophy explores foundational ideas and enduring questions related to diverse fields including the humanities, sciences and the arts. It is a challenging study, which nurtures curiosity, problem-solving skills, open-mindedness and intellectual rigour.

Studying VCE Philosophy involves explicitly developing the habits of clarifying concepts, analysing problems and constructing reasoned and coherent arguments. It encourages students to reflect critically on their own thinking and helps them to develop a sophisticated and coherent worldview.

Exploring big philosophical questions and the ideas of some of history’s greatest thinkers promotes a satisfying intellectual life. The ability to think philosophically is highly regarded in careers that involve conceptual analysis, strategic thinking, insightful questioning and carefully reasoned arguments.

Aims

This study enables students to:

* understand the distinctive nature of philosophical thinking and the techniques used in philosophical inquiry
* identify and formulate philosophical questions
* understand significant philosophical ideas, viewpoints and arguments
* critically reflect and develop perspectives on philosophical ideas, viewpoints and arguments
* explore ideas and respond to philosophical questions, viewpoints and arguments with clarity, precision and logic
* engage with primary philosophy texts and use techniques of philosophical reasoning to identify, discuss and evaluate philosophical viewpoints and arguments expressed within these texts
* identify and discuss relationships between responses to philosophical questions and contemporary debates.

Structure

The study is made up of 4 units:

* Unit 1: Philosophy, existence and knowledge (PL011)
* Unit 2: Questions of value (PL022)
* Unit 3: The good life (PL033)
* Unit 4: On believing (PL034)

Each unit deals with specific content contained in areas of study and is designed to enable students to achieve a set of outcomes for that unit. Each outcome is described in terms of key knowledge and key skills.

Entry

There are no prerequisites for entry to Units 1, 2 and 3. Students must undertake Unit 3 and Unit 4 as a sequence. Units 1 to 4 are designed to the equivalent standard of the final 2 years of secondary education. All VCE studies are benchmarked against comparable national and international curriculum.

Duration

Each unit involves at least 50 hours of scheduled classroom instruction.

Changes to the study design

During its period of accreditation, minor changes to the study will be announced in the [*VCAA Bulletin*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/news-and-events/bulletins-and-updates/bulletin/Pages/index.aspx). The Bulletin is the only source of changes to regulations and accredited studies. It is the responsibility of each VCE teacher to monitor changes or advice about VCE studies published in the Bulletin.

Monitoring for quality

As part of ongoing monitoring and quality assurance, the VCAA will periodically undertake an audit of VCE Philosophy to ensure the study is being taught and assessed as accredited. The details of the audit procedures and requirements are published annually in the [*VCE Administrative Handbook*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/vce-handbook/Pages/index.aspx?Redirect=1). Schools will be notified if they are required to submit material to be audited.

Safety and wellbeing

It is the responsibility of the school to ensure that duty of care is exercised in relation to the health and safety of all students undertaking the study. Sensitivity to religious and cultural beliefs should be exercised when selecting themes for study in Units 1 and 2.

Requirements for delivery

The Principal must make sure that students have access to adequate facilities and resources to complete any VCE study they are offered. There are no requirements for specialist facilities, [teacher qualifications](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/recruitment-schools/policy-and-guidelines/qualifications#teacher-class) and resources specified for this study.

Employability skills

This study offers a number of opportunities for students to develop employability skills. The [Support materials](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/philosophy/Pages/Index.aspx) provide specific examples of how students can develop employability skills during learning activities and assessment tasks.

Legislative compliance

When collecting and using information, the provisions of privacy and copyright legislation, such as the Victorian *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and *Health Records Act 2001*, and the federal *Privacy Act 1988* and *Copyright Act 1968*, must be met.

Child Safe Standards

Schools and education and training providers are required to comply with the Child Safe Standards made under the Victorian *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*. Registered schools are required to comply with *Ministerial Order No. 1359 Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises*. For further information, consult the websites of the [Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority](https://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafe/Pages/Home.aspx), the [Commission for Children and Young People](https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/) and the [Department of Education](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/child-safe-standards/policy).

Assessment and reporting

Satisfactory completion

The award of satisfactory completion for a unit is based on the teacher’s decision that the student has demonstrated achievement of the set of outcomes specified for the unit. Demonstration of achievement of outcomes and satisfactory completion of a unit are determined by evidence gained through the assessment of a range of learning activities and tasks.

Teachers must develop courses that provide appropriate opportunities for students to demonstrate satisfactory achievement of outcomes.

The decision about satisfactory completion of a unit is distinct from the assessment of levels of achievement. Schools will report a student’s result for each unit to the VCAA as S (satisfactory) or N (not satisfactory).

Levels of achievement

Units 1 and 2

Procedures for the assessment of levels of achievement in Units 1 and 2 are a matter for school decision. Assessment of levels of achievement for these units will not be reported to the VCAA. Schools may choose to report levels of achievement using grades, descriptive statements or other indicators.

Units 3 and 4

The VCAA specifies the assessment procedures for students undertaking scored assessment in Units 3 and 4. Designated assessment tasks are provided in the details for each unit in VCE study designs.

The student’s level of achievement in Units 3 and 4 will be determined by School-assessed Coursework (SAC) as specified in the VCE study design, and external assessment.

The VCAA will report the student’s level of achievement on each assessment component as a grade from A+ to E or UG (ungraded). To receive a study score the student must achieve 2 or more graded assessments in the study and receive an S for both Units 3 and 4. The study score is reported on a scale of 0–50; it is a measure of how well the student performed in relation to all others who completed the study. Teachers should refer to the current [*VCE Administrative Handbook*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/vce-vcal-handbook/Pages/index.aspx) for details on graded assessment and calculation of the study score.

Percentage contributions to the study score in VCE Philosophy are as follows:

* Unit 3 School-assessed Coursework: 25 per cent
* Unit 4 School-assessed Coursework: 25 per cent
* end-of-year examination: 50 per cent.

Details of the assessment program are described in the sections on Units 3 and 4 in this study design.

Authentication

Work related to the outcomes of each unit will be accepted only if the teacher can attest that, to the best of their knowledge, all unacknowledged work is the student’s own. Teachers need to refer to the current [*VCE Administrative Handbook*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/vce-handbook/Pages/index.aspx?Redirect=1) for authentication rules and strategies.

Characteristics of the study

This section contains an overview of the nature of philosophical inquiry and further information on methods underpinning its study. It covers:

* Key concepts
* Key philosophical skills
* Doing philosophy.

Key concepts

Argument

For the purposes of this study, an argument may be understood as a collection of statements, called premises, with the intention to establish how true another statement is, called the conclusion. Premises can be clearly stated or implicit, and they can be supported with evidence or values.

Counterarguments are used to demonstrate the problems of an argument. Counterarguments can be used to question the veracity of premises or show that a conclusion does not follow on from its premises. Counterarguments may also be used to test objections to an initial argument.

Standard form

Standard form is a method for presenting arguments. It involves reducing the argument to its premises and conclusion, rewriting these in succinct, declarative sentences and arranging them sequentially so as to make clear the reasoning that underpins the argument. Standard form is a useful tool for helping students to recognise the structure of an argument, including identifying any premises that might be missing or implicit. It can be a useful first step when evaluating the reasoning of the argument and the strength of the premises.

Viewpoint

For the purposes of this study, a viewpoint may be understood as a stance or claim that may be supported by arguments, or that may be simply asserted.

Perspective

For the purposes of this study, a perspective is a broad standpoint that may be taken on a particular philosophical debate or question, for example one perspective on the philosophy of mind is that the mind is separate to the body. One or more philosophical arguments and viewpoints will be aligned to a particular perspective.

Evaluation

Evaluation is the process used to decide whether or not a particular conclusion should be accepted based on the plausibility of the premises and the validity of the reasoning used. See *Evaluating philosophical viewpoints and arguments* in the *Key philosophical skills* section below.

Examples and counterexamples

Examples are used in philosophy to clarify and explain concepts and arguments, support evaluations and test ideas. Counterexamples are examples used to falsify or challenge particular statements. For example, if a student claimed ‘all cars are red’ another student might point to the fact that their mother owns a blue car.

Contemporary debates and questions of contemporary living

Throughout this study, students are invited to apply their understanding of philosophical arguments and viewpoints to contemporary debates. A contemporary debate may be understood as a contested issue occurring within the public sphere within the past 20 years. In philosophy, the setting out of a contested issue includes identifying relevant philosophical question(s) and/or casting the issue in the form of a philosophical question. Examples of contemporary debates include the ethics of eating meat, the ethics of artificial intelligence, or the metaphysics of cloning. Although such debates may engage with broader philosophical debates – such as what we owe to others, the nature of mind and the nature of identity – they are distinguished by their specificity and practical concerns. Philosophical questions associated with a contemporary debate should reflect this practical character.

Questions of contemporary living deal with broader, enduring questions relating to how we should live our lives that may overlap with, but are not limited to, contemporary debates; for example, what kind of work should we pursue and how much of our time should we devote to leisure? Should we give to charity? How should we govern our personal relationships and our broader relationships with others?

Case studies

In Unit 4 Area of Study 2, students are asked to apply their learning from Area of Study 1 to relevant case studies relating to prescribed contexts. A case study may be understood as a specific example in the public domain that contains epistemological issues that can be mapped to Area of Study 1.

Primary texts

For the purposes of this study, a primary text is defined as a philosophical text offering a positive argument or viewpoint rather than a mere rebuttal. A primary text may be a complete work or an extract from a complete work. Students will be expected to engage with primary philosophy texts throughout this study.

Key philosophical skills

Philosophy is an activity as much as a body of thought. Throughout this study, students utilise a range of skills fundamental to philosophical reasoning and the broader *activity* of philosophy.

Formulating philosophical questions

Philosophical questions share a number of distinct characteristics. They are open-ended, can be answered in a variety of ways and do not yield to simple yes or no responses. While data or research may be helpful for supporting responses to philosophical questions, philosophical questions cannot be solved using data or research because they are not empirical questions. A philosophical question is not, generally speaking, one that appeals to our tastes or preferences (‘Are pugs beautiful?’) but speaks to something larger (‘What is beauty?’). This is because philosophical questions tend to be ‘big’ questions about what is, what should be and how we can know.

Outlining philosophical viewpoints and arguments

Outlining a philosophical viewpoint or argument involves identifying a central claim or conclusion and any reasons supporting it. Unlike an analysis, which requires more depth and detail, an outline is essentially a summary of the viewpoint or argument.

Analysing philosophical viewpoints and arguments

Analysing a philosophical argument involves identifying the conclusion and the explicit and implicit premises (including any assumptions) used to support that conclusion. It also involves identifying any evidence or values, or arguments used to support the premises (sub-arguments). Analysis also involves the identification and discussion of the inferential connections between these things.

Evaluating philosophical viewpoints and arguments

Evaluation involves testing the plausibility of the explicit and implicit premises and the validity of the reasoning that connects the premises to the conclusion. It may also involve discussing the implications that extend from the argument or viewpoint. An evaluation should always be supported by reasons that demonstrate why an argument or viewpoint should be accepted, rejected or questioned. Premises and implications can all be tested by the application of examples, counterexamples and counterarguments. These examples, counterexamples and counterarguments should appeal to the reader or listener’s rational faculty. Putting arguments into standard form can be a helpful first step in the evaluative process.

Comparing and critically comparing philosophical viewpoints and arguments

Comparing philosophical viewpoints and arguments involves explicitly identifying and discussing similarities and differences between viewpoints and arguments. It may also involve discussion of why particular viewpoints and arguments may be similar or different (for example, philosophers may have different views of what the good life is because their viewpoints are premised on different understandings of human nature, or they may share a view about human nature but hold different views on how we should respond to our human nature).

Critical comparison involves identifying similarities and differences between viewpoints and arguments and then going a step further by discussing the relative merits and shortcomings of those viewpoints and arguments. Critical comparison engages the process of evaluation. In discussing the relative merits and shortcomings of a viewpoint or argument, examples, counterexamples and counterarguments are used to demonstrate and weigh up these merits and shortcomings.

Applying philosophical viewpoints and arguments to contemporary debates, questions of contemporary living and case studies

Throughout this study, students are expected to apply their philosophical knowledge and skills to matters of practical concern, including contemporary debates, questions of contemporary living and case studies. Application involves using philosophical viewpoints and arguments to identify, understand and critically reflect on the different positions taken and claims made about a practical matter. It also involves using these positions and claims – as well as associated developments, data and research – to critically reflect on the relevant philosophical viewpoints and arguments. Debates, questions and case studies may be presented to students in the form of curated media – such as articles, podcasts and videos – or as short extracts from applied philosophical and non-philosophical sources. An applied philosophical source is one that engages with philosophical problems associated with practical concerns.

Developing perspectives

Students develop perspectives by engaging with philosophical, applied philosophical and non-philosophical sources, as relevant. They draw on and apply relevant key knowledge and skills to engage with these sources. In particular, they analyse and synthesise philosophical concepts, viewpoints and arguments to arrive at different perspectives. See the entry on perspective in the Key concepts section above.

Using clear and precise language

The use of clear and precise language is central to the study of philosophy. Clear and precise language facilitates clarity in argument exposition and evaluation. Students should be encouraged from the beginning of their study to use language appropriately and to familiarise themselves with any technical or philosophical terms, as the misuse of such terms can compromise the accuracy of their work.

Doing philosophy

Philosophy is the activity of identifying and considering central, contestable ideas and developing good reasons for holding one position rather than another. It involves the rigorous testing of ideas and the formulation and defence of ideas. For the purposes of this study, philosophy should not be understood only as a history of thought but as a live discussion in which students are active participants.

Open-mindedness

Philosophical questions are contestable. For this reason, doing philosophy requires moving beyond personal biases and approaching questions in a spirit of open-mindedness. To be open-minded is to permit the consideration of different ideas and perspectives and to be receptive to the possibility that ideas and perspectives other than our own might also have merit.

Intellectual rigour

Although doing philosophy encourages open-mindedness, it also demands intellectual rigour. For this reason, analysis and evaluation are fundamental philosophical skills.

Collaboration and charity

Central to philosophy is working with the ideas of others, whether in the classroom, within students’ broader communities or within the context of working with philosophical, applied philosophical and non-philosophical sources. Through these interactions, ideas can be tested, clarified, refined and expanded. Such a process demands care for the ideas of others, a commitment to understanding what others are trying to say and a desire to help them to express it as accurately as possible.

Critical reflection

Throughout this study, students critically reflect on the perspectives, viewpoints and arguments they encounter. Critical reflection involves the careful consideration of perspectives, viewpoints and arguments using techniques of philosophical reasoning, in particular, the techniques associated with evaluation and critical comparison.

Formulating and defending philosophical positions

As students engage with philosophical ideas and critically reflect on the various perspectives and associated viewpoints and arguments they encounter, they will formulate their own philosophical positions, that is, their argument or series of arguments in response to a philosophical issue or question. A central part of the activity of philosophy is sharing these philosophical positions and defending them using techniques of philosophical reasoning. Both open-mindedness and intellectual rigour play an important role in the formulation and defence of philosophical positions, providing the context in which these activities take place. An open-minded and intellectually rigorous defence of a philosophical position may lead to the refinement of that position or even reformulation to reach a new position, which is then defended.

Working with primary philosophical texts

Throughout this study, students work with primary philosophy texts. Working with primary philosophy texts allows students to engage with philosophical ideas and develop their understanding of how philosophical viewpoints and arguments are constructed. Students should be encouraged to engage with primary philosophy texts in an active way, critically reflecting on the viewpoints and arguments expressed within the texts, and considering how the viewpoints and arguments respond to philosophical questions and relevant contemporary debates. Techniques of philosophical reasoning play a central role when working with primary philosophy texts and students should be encouraged to use these techniques when studying these texts.

Responding to perspectives, viewpoints and arguments

Throughout the study, students respond to perspectives, viewpoints and arguments. Their responses provide them with opportunities to practise techniques of philosophical reasoning. For this reason, students must be familiar with the attitudes of open-mindedness and intellectual rigour and the conventions of philosophical writing, and they must understand the core role techniques of philosophical reasoning play in both writing and discussion.

Unit 1: Philosophy, existence and knowledge

What is the nature of reality? How can we acquire certain knowledge? These are some of the questions that have challenged humans for millennia and underpin ongoing endeavours in areas as diverse as science, justice and the arts. This unit engages students with fundamental philosophical questions through active, guided investigation and critical discussion of 2 key areas of philosophy: epistemology and metaphysics. The emphasis is on philosophical inquiry – ‘doing philosophy’ – through the formulation and exploration of questions in philosophical exchanges with others. Hence the study and practice of techniques of philosophical reasoning are central to this unit. As students learn to think philosophically, appropriate examples of philosophical viewpoints and arguments, both contemporary and historical, are used to support, stimulate and enhance their thinking about central concepts and problems. At least one of these examples will be from a primary philosophical text using a complete text or an extract. As students investigate central concepts and problems, they will also consider the relationship between philosophical problems and relevant contemporary debates.

Area of Study 1

The nature and methods of philosophy

Philosophy is an activity as much as it is a body of thought. Students benefit from first understanding the distinctive nature of philosophical thinking before embarking on a deeper study of the questions, problems and ideas that have challenged philosophers for millennia.

In this area of study, students are introduced to, and practise, a variety of techniques used by philosophers to construct, analyse and evaluate arguments. Students consider what distinguishes philosophical reasoning from other ways of thinking and through so doing, begin to formulate an understanding of the distinctive nature of philosophy.

Outcome 1

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to analyse the distinctive nature of philosophy and recognise and apply techniques of philosophical reasoning.

To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 1.

Key knowledge

* key terms associated with philosophical reasoning such as argument, premise, assumption, conclusion, proposition, claim, assertion, standard form, deduction, induction, cogency, validity, soundness, contradiction, fallacy, syllogism, analogy, example, counterexample, counterargument, definition, thought experiment
* the distinctive nature of philosophical thinking.

Key skills

* analyse simple arguments to identify the premises and conclusions, and the relationships between the premises and conclusions, including standard form presentation
* identify and describe errors of reasoning
* apply techniques of philosophical reasoning to analyse and evaluate philosophical viewpoints and arguments
* use appropriate terminology when analysing and evaluating viewpoints and arguments.

Area of Study 2

Metaphysics

Metaphysics is the study of the basic structures and categories of what exists, or of reality. It is the attempt to work out a comprehensive account of everything that we know or believe about existence, including all our scientific knowledge.

This area of study introduces students to metaphysical problems through a study of questions associated with selected themes. Students study at least 2 of the 6 themes listed below. A range of questions for study is to be selected from the list under each theme. Appropriate questions outside the list can also be included for study.

For at least one of the themes selected, students must study a minimum of one primary text. Suggested thinkers are recommended at the end of each section, from which an appropriate primary text or texts can be selected, or an appropriate thinker outside this list could be studied.

1. On materialism and idealism

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* Are material/physical objects the only things that exist?
* Does the world consist of ideas?
* To what extent does the mind make its world?
* What are secondary qualities? To what extent do they exist in the world?
* Can idealism account for the apparent objectivity and persistence of physical objects?
* In what ways is the contemporary realism/anti-realism debate distinct from the historical materialism/idealism debate?
* How real is virtual reality?

Suggested thinkers: Plato, John Locke, René Descartes, George Berkeley.

1. On the nature of mind

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* What is the mind? Is the mind part of, or separate from, the body?
* Are mental states reducible to brain states?
* What ontological commitments are made by dualism and materialism?
* What are some of the different philosophical positions associated with dualism and materialism?
* What is consciousness?
* If we knew everything there was to know about the physics and physiology of colour, would we know everything there is to know about colour?
* What kinds of things are propositional attitudes such as beliefs and desires, especially given they cannot be located in any specific part of the brain?
* Are mindless but animate human bodies conceivable? If so, are they therefore metaphysically possible?
* Might computers have minds?

Suggested thinkers: René Descartes, Elisabeth of Bohemia, Gilbert Ryle, JJC Smart, David Armstrong, Thomas Nagel, Patricia Churchland, David Chalmers, Alan Turing.

1. On personal identity

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* What makes a person the same person at different points in time?
* To what extent can a person change and still remain the same person?
* What is the role of the body in personal identity?
* What is the role of memory in personal identity?
* What role do our relationships with others play in personal identity?
* Which has greater authority in questions of personal identity – the first person or a third person account?
* What is the relationship between personal identity and moral responsibility?

Suggested thinkers: John Locke, David Hume, Meredith Michaels, Derek Parfit.

1. On the existence and nature of God

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* What are the arguments for the existence of God?
* To what extent have developments in science and philosophy undermined or reinforced traditional arguments for the existence of God?
* Is religious faith different from other kinds of faith?
* What can philosophy say about the attributes of God?
* Is the concept of God consistent with traditional theistic beliefs (for example, divine compassion, divine intervention in human life)?
* Does the existence of suffering constitute a refutation of the existence of God?

Suggested thinkers: Saint Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Blaise Pascal, William Paley, David Hume, Damaris Masham.

1. On free will and determinism

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* Can we be free if there are causes for all our actions?
* Do forces beyond our control determine everything we do?
* What is indeterminism in nature? Does it help us to understand free will?
* Do theories of compatibilism or soft determinism successfully reconcile freedom and determinism?
* How is determinism linked to materialism and freedom to dualism?
* How is freedom linked to notions of agency, responsibility, reward and punishment?

Suggested thinkers: Daniel Dennett, David Hume, Thomas Reid, Baron D’Holbach, Arthur Schopenhauer, William James, Peter van Inwagen, Peter Strawson, Helen Steward, Elizabeth Anscombe.

6. On time and space

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* What is time?
* What is space?
* Does it make sense to speak of time and space having a beginning or an end?
* In what ways are time and space similar and different?
* What paradoxes arise when considering motion through space and the possibility of time travel?

Suggested thinkers: Zeno of Elea, Aristotle, Saint Augustine, Immanuel Kant, John MacTaggart, Robin Le Poidevin, Richard Taylor.

Outcome 2

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to analyse metaphysical problems and evaluate viewpoints and arguments arising from these and analyse metaphysical problems in relevant contemporary debates.

To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 2.

Key knowledge

* debates and philosophical questions that arise from exploration of at least 2 metaphysical themes listed above
* the meaning of key terms and concepts associated with the chosen themes
* viewpoints and arguments central to the chosen themes in general
* central viewpoints and arguments associated with the chosen themes as represented in at least one primary text
* criticisms that can be raised in response to the viewpoints and arguments central to the chosen themes
* the interrelationships between metaphysical problems and relevant contemporary debates, such as punishment, issues of life and death and artificial intelligence.

Key skills

* formulate philosophical questions associated with problems central to the chosen themes
* use examples to support philosophical discussions
* identify and describe key philosophical concepts associated with the chosen themes
* evaluate philosophical viewpoints and arguments associated with the chosen themes and as presented in at least one primary philosophical text
* evaluate viewpoints and arguments associated with the chosen themes
* develop perspectives on philosophical questions associated with the chosen themes
* reflect critically on perspectives
* explain the interplay between relevant contemporary debates and viewpoints and arguments relating to metaphysical problems
* formulate and defend philosophical positions on metaphysical questions using precise language.

Area of Study 3

Epistemology

The word epistemology derives from 2 Ancient Greek words: episteme meaning ‘knowledge’ and logos meaning ‘what is said about something’. In the ancient world, episteme was contrasted with doxa meaning ‘belief’, or something falling short of genuine knowledge. This ancient contrast points to one of the basic problems in epistemology: the difference between belief and the certainty associated with knowledge.

This area of study introduces students to basic epistemological problems through a study of questions associated with selected themes. Students also consider philosophical problems in contemporary debates, including the implications of accepting particular views about knowledge; for example, what are the implications for the authority of science from a position that knowledge, belief and truth are relative to different cultures? Does considering this implication lead to a revision of the initial position?

Students study at least 2 of the themes listed below, including the first theme ‘On knowledge’ and at least one other theme. A range of questions for study is to be selected from the list under each theme. Appropriate questions outside the list can also be included for study.

For at least oneof the themes selected, students must study a minimum of one primary text. Suggested thinkers are recommended at the end of each section, from which an appropriate primary text or texts can be selected, or an appropriate thinker outside this list could be studied.

1. On knowledge

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* Is justified true belief the same as knowledge?
* Is certainty necessary for knowledge?
* What is the difference between knowledge and belief?
* How might our beliefs be justified?
* What is truth?
* What are the sources of our knowledge in areas such as history, the law, forensics, evolutionary biology and the media? How reliable are they?

Suggested thinkers: Plato, René Descartes, Edmund L Gettier, Simon Blackburn.

1. On the possibility of a priori knowledge

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* What are the bases of our knowledge (for example, do they include deductive argument, induction, scientific method, testimony or intuition)?
* How reliable are bases of knowledge?
* Should we trust our senses?
* Is it possible to attain knowledge purely through the senses?
* Is it possible to attain knowledge through the use of reason alone?
* Is there any knowledge with which we are born?
* Is reason superior to experience in giving us knowledge of the world?
* What are the differences between rationalism and empiricism, a priori and a posteriori knowledge, and necessary and contingent truths?

Suggested thinkers: René Descartes, John Locke, David Hume, AJ Ayer, Genevieve Lloyd.

1. On science

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* What is the scientific method?
* Should the methods of observation, experiment and measurement be trusted?
* What is the problem of induction? Can induction be justified?
* What is the reductionist view of scientific knowledge?
* What is falsificationism?
* Does science provide an objective account of the world?
* How does science make progress?

Suggested thinkers: Francis Bacon, David Hume, Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn, Charles Sanders Peirce.

1. On objectivity

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* Are knowledge, belief and truth relative to different individuals or cultures?
* Is truth subjective?
* Is objective truth possible or attainable by humans?
* Does mathematics offer a way to obtain truth?
* Does science offer objective truths?
* What is the role of emotion in knowledge?
* What is the role of language in knowledge?
* What is the status of knowledge from different sources such as mythology, religion, the arts, sciences or mathematics? How should we compare such knowledge?

Suggested thinkers: William James, Richard Rorty, Martha Nussbaum, Genevieve Lloyd, Michel Foucault, Miranda Fricker.

Outcome 3

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to analyse epistemological problems and evaluate viewpoints and arguments arising from these, and analyse epistemological problems in relevant contemporary debates.

To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 3.

Key knowledge

* debates and philosophical questions that arise from exploration of the theme ‘On knowledge’ and at least one other epistemological theme listed above
* the meaning of key terms and concepts associated with the chosen themes
* viewpoints and arguments central to the chosen themes in general
* central viewpoints and arguments associated with the chosen themes as represented in at least one primary text
* criticisms that can be raised in response to the viewpoints and arguments central to the chosen themes
* the interrelationships between epistemological problems and relevant contemporary debates such as the authority of science, the weight of legal evidence or truth in the media.

Key skills

* formulate philosophical questions associated with the problems central to the chosen themes
* use examples to support philosophical discussions
* identify and describe key philosophical concepts associated with the chosen themes
* evaluate philosophical viewpoints and arguments associated with the chosen themes and as presented in at least one primary philosophical text
* evaluate viewpoints and arguments associated with the chosen themes
* develop perspectives on philosophical questions associated with the chosen themes
* reflect critically on perspectives
* explain the interplay between relevant contemporary debates and viewpoints and arguments relating to epistemological problems
* formulate and defend philosophical positions on epistemological questions using precise language.

Assessment

The award of satisfactory completion for a unit is based on whether the student has demonstrated the set of outcomes specified for the unit. Teachers should use a variety of learning activities and assessment tasks that provide a range of opportunities for students to demonstrate the key knowledge and key skills in the outcomes.

The areas of study, including the key knowledge and key skills listed for the outcomes, should be used for course design and the development of learning activities and assessment tasks. Assessment must be a part of the regular teaching and learning program and should be completed mainly in class and within a limited timeframe.

All assessments at Units 1 and 2 are school-based. Procedures for assessment of levels of achievement in Units 1 and 2 are a matter for school decision.

For this unit, students are required to demonstrate 3 outcomes. As a set, these outcomes encompass the areas of study in the unit.

Suitable tasks for assessment in this unit may be selected from the following:

* an essay
* a written analysis
* short-answer responses
* a written reflection
* a narrative response and statement of intention
* presentations (oral, multimedia)
* a dialogue (oral, written)
* a research task.

Where teachers allow students to choose between tasks, they must ensure that the tasks they set are of comparable scope and demand.

Unit 2: Questions of value

What are the foundations of our judgments about value? What is the relationship between different types of value? How, if at all, can particular value judgments be defended or criticised?

This unit enables students to explore these questions in relation to different categories of value judgment within the realms of morality, political and social philosophy and aesthetics. Students also explore ways in which viewpoints and arguments in value theory can inform and be informed by contemporary debates. They study at least one primary philosophical text, using the complete text or an extract, and develop a range of skills including formulating philosophical questions and developing philosophical perspectives.

Area of Study 1

Ethics and moral philosophy

What should I do? What is right? On what basis can we choose between different courses of action? These are ongoing fundamental questions. In this area of study, students are introduced to key debates in moral philosophy that stretch back thousands of years. The laws of our society reflect a position that murder and theft are wrong, but a philosopher is interested in the justifications for these convictions. Is morality a personal matter or can we give good reasons for holding particular moral beliefs? Are there fundamental moral beliefs that should be universally binding, or are they preferences that develop in response to particular cultural contexts?

In this area of study, students are concerned with discovering if there are basic principles and underlying ideas of morality and assessing ethical viewpoints and arguments using philosophical reasoning. Philosophical methods may be used to address everyday dilemmas, as well as issues debated in the media and important moral challenges of our times.

Students explore at least 2 of the themes listed below.

For at least oneof the themes selected, students must study a minimum of one primary text. Suggested thinkers are recommended at the end of each section, from which an appropriate primary text or texts can be selected, or an appropriate thinker outside this list could be studied.

1. On the foundations of morality

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* Where does morality come from?
* Is morality subjective or objective?
* What is the ‘is-ought gap’ and can it be bridged?
* What is the relationship between religious belief and morality?
* What is the relationship between nature and morality?
* Is it possible to speak of moral progress?
* What is nihilism?
* Do moral principles exist? Are they universal or relative to particular situations?

Suggested thinkers: Friedrich Nietzsche, JL Mackie, Bernard Williams, Simon Blackburn, Iris Murdoch, Annette Baier, Susan Neiman.

1. On moral psychology

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* What is the relationship between reason and action?
* What is ‘weakness of will’ and what are its causes and moral implications?
* Is it possible to act without a reason? Is it possible to act against your own interests?
* Is pure altruism possible or are all acts essentially based on self-interest?
* What role does and should reason, intuition, emotion, duty and self-interest have in ethical decision-making?
* Is moral behaviour found only in human beings?
* Should our own pleasure seeking be our primary motivation when making ethical decisions?
* Does it make sense to speak of acting well out of habit?
* Should we focus on cultivating our own character and virtues to ensure sound ethical decision-making?

Suggested thinkers: Plato, Bernard Williams, Alasdair MacIntyre, Aristotle, AJ Ayer, Hannah Arendt, Martha Nussbaum.

1. On right and wrong

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* What are the major theories philosophers have offered about what makes an action morally right?
* Does the motive or character of the person performing an action matter to the morality of that action?
* Are acts right or wrong to the extent that they maximise pleasures or minimise suffering? What are the relative merits of various versions of utilitarianism, such as positive, negative, preference, act, rule, ideal or hedonistic?
* Are there certain acts that should be considered right or wrong in themselves independently of their consequences? Why and to what extent?
* Is religious authority a legitimate source of moral principles (for example, principles derived from the Ten Commandments, the Eightfold Path, the Golden Mean, the Five Pillars of Islam)?

Suggested thinkers: Henry Sidgwick, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, Aristotle, Philippa Foot.

Outcome 1

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to analyse problems in ethics and moral philosophy and related contemporary debates, evaluate viewpoints and arguments in response to these problems, and explain the interplay between ethical and moral problems and contemporary ethical and moral debates.

To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 1.

Key knowledge

* debates and questions that arise from exploration of at least 2 of the ethical and moral themes listed above
* the meaning of key terms and concepts associated with the chosen themes
* concepts, viewpoints and arguments central to the chosen themes in general
* central viewpoints and arguments associated with the chosen themes as represented in at least one primary text
* criticisms that can be raised in response to the viewpoints and arguments central to the chosen themes
* the interrelationships between ethical and moral problems associated with the chosen themes and relevant contemporary debates

Key skills

* formulate philosophical questions associated with the problems central to the chosen themes
* use examples to support philosophical discussions
* identify and describe key philosophical concepts associated with the chosen themes
* evaluate philosophical viewpoints and arguments associated with the chosen themes and as presented in at least one primary philosophy text
* evaluate viewpoints and arguments associated with the chosen themes
* develop perspectives on philosophical questions associated with the chosen themes
* reflect critically on perspectives
* explain the interplay between relevant contemporary debates and viewpoints and arguments relating to the chosen themes
* formulate and defend philosophical positions on ethical and moral problems using precise language.

Area of Study 2

Further problems in value theory

In addition to discussing ethical and moral value, philosophers consider a range of other types of values, including social, political and aesthetic value.

Often philosophers concern themselves with questions regarding the foundations of particular forms of value. They consider whether these various forms of value are grounded in the nature of things or whether they are human creations. If they are human creations, students consider whether these forms of value might yet appeal to commonly held or universal standards. How these questions are approached may depend upon the type of value considered.

At other times, philosophers set aside these foundational questions and consider particular questions relating to social, political or aesthetic value. Is democracy the only justifiable form of government? What are the obstacles to freedom? How are conflicts between rights to be resolved? What is the point of art?

This area of study provides students with an introduction to some of these questions and the ways in which philosophers have addressed them. Students explore how philosophical methods can be brought to bear on a range of questions regarding value.

Students study at least 2 of the 4 value theory themes below. A range of questions for study is to be selected from the list under each theme. Appropriate questions outside the list can also be included for study.

For at least oneof the themes selected, students must study at least one primary text. Suggested thinkers are recommended at the end of each section, from which an appropriate primary text or texts can be selected, or an appropriate thinker outside this list could be studied.

1. On rights and justice

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* What is a right?
* What is the basis of and justification for rights?
* What are human rights? What determines the content and extent of human rights?
* To what extent are there and should there be constraints on our rights?
* How are conflicts between rights to be resolved?
* How are rights related to responsibilities?
* Do only human beings have rights? Do animals have rights? Do communities, cultures or environments have rights?
* What is justice?
* What is the relationship between law and justice?
* Is the state justified in punishing criminals?

Suggested thinkers: Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, Simone Weil, John Rawls, Peter Singer, Robert Nozick, Richard Sylvan (Routley), Mary Midgley, Michael Walzer, Danielle Allen, Deborah Bird Rose.

1. On liberty and anarchy

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* Is freedom a fundamental human right?
* To what degree is the state justified in limiting individual freedom?
* What is the distinction between positive and negative liberty?
* What is the social contract?
* Is democracy the only justifiable form of polity?
* What is the relationship between free markets and free societies?

Suggested thinkers: Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, Robert Nozick, Adam Smith, Isaiah Berlin, Axel Honneth, Richard Rorty.

1. On aesthetic value

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* What is art?
* What is beauty? Is beauty necessary or even desirable in art?
* What defines the aesthetic? (For example, exploration of such concepts as taste, aesthetic properties, aesthetic experience, aesthetic appreciation and the relationship between these).
* To what extent does art transcend everyday moral categories?
* What is the purpose and value of art?
* Is there a legitimate distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ art?
* Is there a distinction to be made between art and craft?
* Can an aesthetic judgment be wrong? Are some aesthetic judgments better or worse than others?

Suggested thinkers: Plato, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, RG Collingwood, Arthur Danto, Elaine Scarry.

1. On the interpretation of artworks

Questions that may be explored in this theme include:

* What is the relationship between art and philosophy?
* What is the relationship between the meaning of a work and the intentions of its artist?
* What is the relationship between the meaning of an artwork and its context?
* What is the Intentional Fallacy? To what extent is it a fallacy?
* To what extent is a society justified in censoring art?
* How important is originality in the arts? Should we condemn forgeries or even honest copies?
* In what sense can we speak of meaning in non-representational art (for example, music)?
* What is a metaphor? Can we say that a metaphor is ‘true’?
* What is the relationship between a work of art and what it represents?

Suggested thinkers: WK Wimsatt and MC. Beardsley, Arthur Danto, Susanne Langer, Susan Sontag, Nelson Goodman, Alva Noë.

Outcome 2

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to analyse selected problems in value theory and evaluate viewpoints and arguments in response to these problems, and discuss philosophical issues in the context of relevant contemporary debates.

To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 2.

Key knowledge

* debates and questions that arise from exploration of at least 2 of the further problems in value theory themes listed above
* the meaning of key terms and concepts associated with the chosen themes
* concepts, viewpoints and arguments central to the chosen themes in general
* central viewpoints and arguments associated with the chosen themes as represented in at least one primary text
* criticisms that can be raised in response to the viewpoints and arguments central to the chosen themes
* the interrelationships between the viewpoints and arguments associated with the chosen themes and relevant contemporary debates.

Key skills

* formulate philosophical questions associated with the problems central to the chosen themes
* use examples to support philosophical discussions
* identify and describe key philosophical concepts associated with the chosen themes
* evaluate philosophical viewpoints and arguments associated with chosen themes and as presented in at least one primary philosophy text
* evaluate viewpoints and arguments associated with the chosen themes
* develop perspectives on philosophical questions associated with the chosen themes
* reflect critically on perspectives
* explain the interplay between relevant contemporary debates and viewpoints and arguments relating to the chosen themes
* formulate and defend philosophical positions on ethical and moral problems using precise language.

Area of Study 3

Philosophy: its nature, purpose and value

In this area of study, students critically reflect on their experience of doing philosophy and develop perspectives on the nature, purpose and value of philosophy. Students consider the distinctive nature of philosophical reasoning, how it privileges certain ways of thinking over others and the merits and shortcomings of this. Students also consider what perspectives and voices have traditionally been elevated or excluded in philosophical discourse, such as the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and the implications this has for our understanding of the nature and purpose of philosophy. Students reflect on the value of philosophy for navigating questions of contemporary living.

Outcome 3

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to explain and evaluate the nature, purpose and value of philosophy.

To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 3.

Key knowledge

* the nature, purpose and value of philosophy
* key terms associated with philosophical inquiry
* the roles of reasoning and argument, intuition, imagination, emotion and experience in philosophical thinking
* similarities and differences between philosophical thinking and other forms of thinking
* perspectives and voices that have been elevated or excluded in philosophical discourse
* the usefulness of philosophy for contemporary living.

Key skills

* identify similarities and differences between philosophical thinking and other forms of thinking
* analyse and evaluate the roles of reasoning and argument, metaphor, intuition, imagination, emotion and experience in philosophical thinking
* analyse and evaluate one’s own experience of studying philosophy
* identify perspectives and voices that have been elevated or excluded in philosophical discourse
* evaluate the implications of elevating or excluding perspectives and voices in philosophical discourse
* develop perspectives on the nature, purpose and value of philosophy
* formulate and defend philosophical positions using precise language.

Assessment

The award of satisfactory completion for a unit is based on whether the student has demonstrated the set of outcomes specified for the unit. Teachers should use a variety of learning activities and assessment tasks that provide a range of opportunities for students to demonstrate the key knowledge and key skills in the outcomes.

The areas of study, including the key knowledge and key skills listed for the outcomes, should be used for course design and the development of learning activities and assessment tasks. Assessment must be a part of the regular teaching and learning program and should be completed mainly in class and within a limited timeframe.

All assessments at Units 1 and 2 are school-based. Procedures for assessment of levels of achievement in Units 1 and 2 are a matter for school decision.

For this unit, students are required to demonstrate 3 outcomes. As a set, these outcomes encompass the areas of study in the unit.

Suitable tasks for assessment in this unit may be selected from the following:

* an essay
* an extended written response
* short-answer responses
* a written reflection
* a narrative response and statement of intention
* presentations (oral, multimedia)
* a dialogue (oral, written)
* a research task.

Where teachers allow students to choose between tasks, they must ensure that the tasks they set are of comparable scope and demand.

Unit 3: The good life

This unit considers the crucial question of what it is for a human to live well. It explores questions of relevance to our own good lives – what is happiness? What role should pleasure and self-discipline, friendship and love play in the good life? – as well questions regarding the good life as it may be understood within the context of our relationships with others beyond our immediate communities. Students consider the implications of adopting particular perspectives, viewpoints and arguments for questions of relevance to contemporary living, such as our relationship with those beyond our immediate communities, non-human animals and the broader natural world.

Students engage with the set texts to develop perspectives on questions relating to the good life, including questions of relevance to contemporary living. Through critical reflection on ideas, perspectives, viewpoints and arguments, students develop and defend their own philosophical positions.

Texts for Units 3 and 4

In this study, the term ‘text’ refers to a complete text or extract(s) from a philosophical work.

Texts for Units 3 and 4 are prescribed annually by the VCAA and referred to in Units 3 and 4 as ‘set texts’. The prescribed texts for each unit will be published annually in the [*VCAA Bulletin*](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/correspondence/index.aspx%23bulletin).

Area of Study 1

The good life and the individual

In this area of study, students consider what a good life is by exploring their own and others’ responses to 4 general questions. Students use the concepts, arguments and viewpoints in the set texts as well as their own and others’ examples, to develop perspectives on these 4 questions and questions of relevance to contemporary living. Through critical reflection on these perspectives and their underpinning concepts, viewpoints and arguments, students develop and defend their own philosophical positions.

Outcome 1

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to discuss philosophical questions related to the good life and the individual.

To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 1.

Key knowledge

* concepts used in discussion of the good life as relevant to the set texts, such as altruism, authenticity blame, creativity, duty, egoism, freedom, happiness, hedonism, human nature, meaningfulness, morality, pain, pleasure, praise, self-restraint, teleology, values, virtue and wisdom
* viewpoints and arguments proposed in the set texts as relevant to these general questions:
* What role do pleasure and self-discipline play in a good life?
* What is the nature of happiness and what is its role in the good life?
* What role do love and friendship play in the good life?
* To what extent is the good life dependent on freedom and authenticity?
* objections and criticisms that can be raised in response to the viewpoints and arguments in the set texts, in relation to these general questions
* connections, similarities and differences between the viewpoints and arguments in the set texts, in relation to these general questions
* objections and criticisms that can be raised when critically comparing the viewpoints and arguments in the set texts, in relation to these general questions
* perspectives on these general questions
* examples from applied philosophical and non-philosophical sources related to each of the general questions
* implications of adopting particular viewpoints, arguments and perspectives on these general questions for questions of relevance to contemporary living.

Key skills

* explain, analyse and apply philosophical concepts
* recognise arguments, identifying the premises, the support given for the premises, conclusions and any assumptions made
* outline and analyse viewpoints and arguments using appropriate terminology
* use examples from applied philosophical and non-philosophical sources to support philosophical discussion
* offer relevant criticisms of arguments by assessing the plausibility of premises and any assumptions made and showing whether the conclusions follow from the premises
* critically compare viewpoints and arguments by comparing the plausibility of the premises or viewpoints, any assumptions made and the quality of the reasoning used
* develop perspectives on philosophical questions
* develop perspectives on questions of relevance to contemporary living
* reflect critically on perspectives
* formulate and defend philosophical positions using precise language.

Area of Study 2

The good life and others

In this area of study, students broaden the scope of their examination of the good life from the individual to the individual’s relationship with others, including the wider community. Students use concepts, arguments and viewpoints in the set texts to develop perspectives on general questions relating to the nature of the good life as it is expressed through our relationships with others, and they re-examine their positions on the good life for the individual in light of this. Students develop perspectives on the implications of particular viewpoints, arguments and perspectives for questions of relevance to contemporary living with others. These questions might consider how we should organise our communities, our relationships with others beyond our immediate communities (including non-human animals and the natural world) and whether we have an obligation to help those beyond our immediate communities. Students develop and defend their own philosophical positions as they reflect on the merits and shortcomings of these perspectives and their underpinning concepts, viewpoints and arguments.

Outcome 2

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to discuss philosophical questions relating to the good life and others.

To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 2.

Key knowledge

* concepts used in discussion of the good life as relevant to the set texts, such as altruism, care, the common good, dependence, duty, ethics, equality, fairness, freedom, human nature, injustice, justice, morality, obligation, reciprocity, rights, society and values
* viewpoints and arguments proposed in the set texts as relevant to these general questions:
* What obligations, if any, do we have to others?
* What is the role of rights and justice in the good life?
* What does a good life have to do with being morally good?
* What is the relationship between the good for the individual and the good for others?
* objections and criticisms that can be raised in response to the viewpoints and arguments in the set texts, in relation to these general questions
* connections, similarities and differences between the viewpoints and arguments in the set texts, in relation to these general questions
* objections and criticisms that can be raised when critically comparing the viewpoints and arguments in the set texts, in relation to these general questions
* perspectives on these general questions
* examples from applied philosophical and non-philosophical sources related to each of the general questions
* implications of adopting particular viewpoints, arguments and perspectives on these general questions for questions of relevance to contemporary living.

Key skills

* explain, analyse and apply philosophical concepts
* recognise arguments, identifying the premises, the support given for the premises, conclusions and any assumptions made
* outline and analyse viewpoints and arguments using appropriate terminology
* use examples from applied philosophical and non-philosophical sources to support philosophical discussion
* offer relevant criticisms of arguments by assessing the plausibility of premises, and any assumptions made, and showing whether the conclusions follow from the premises
* critically compare viewpoints and arguments by comparing the plausibility of the premises or viewpoints, any assumptions made and the quality of the reasoning used
* develop perspectives on philosophical questions
* develop perspectives on questions of relevance to contemporary living
* reflect critically on perspectives
* formulate and defend philosophical positions using precise language.

School-based assessment

Satisfactory completion

The award of satisfactory completion for a unit is based on whether the student has demonstrated the set of outcomes specified for the unit. Teachers should use a variety of learning activities and assessment tasks to provide a range of opportunities for students to demonstrate the key knowledge and key skills in the outcomes.

The areas of study and key knowledge and key skills listed for the outcomes should be used for course design and the development of learning activities and assessment tasks.

Assessment of levels of achievement

School-assessment Coursework

The student’s level of achievement in Unit 3 will be determined by School-assessed Coursework. School-assessed Coursework tasks must be a part of the regular teaching and learning program and must not unduly add to the workload associated with that program. They must be completed mainly in class and within a limited timeframe.

Where teachers provide a range of options for the same School-assessed Coursework task, they should ensure that the options are of comparable scope and demand.

The types and range of forms of School-assessed Coursework for the outcomes are prescribed within the study design. The VCAA publishes [Support materials](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/philosophy/Pages/Index.aspx) for this study, which include advice on the design of assessment tasks and the assessment of student work for a level of achievement.

Teachers will provide to the VCAA a numerical score representing an assessment of the student’s level of achievement. The score must be based on the teacher’s assessment of the performance of each student on the tasks set out in the following table.

Contribution to final assessment

School-assessed Coursework for Unit 3 will contribute 25 per cent to the study score.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Outcomes** | **Marks allocated** | **Assessment tasks** |
| **Outcome 1**Discuss philosophical questions related to the good life and the individual. | **50** | The student’s performance on each outcome is assessed by at least 2 different tasks selected from the following:* an essay
* a written analysis
* an extended written response to a stimulus
* short-answer responses
* a written reflection
* presentations (oral, multimedia)
* a dialogue (oral, written).

One essay task is required for Unit 3. |
| **Outcome 2**Discuss philosophical questions relating to the good life and others. | **50** |
| **Total marks** | **100** |  |

External assessment

The level of achievement for Units 3 and 4 is also assessed by an end-of-year examination (see page [40](#Examination)), which will contribute 50 per cent to the study score.

Unit 4: On believing

In recent decades, developments in information and communication technologies have changed the way we share beliefs and acquire and justify knowledge. More than ever, we rely on the testimony of others, in particular, those we judge to be experts. But what is an expert? What qualities must testimony have to be trusted? And, in a world filled with multiple and often contradictory sources, how do we separate good beliefs from poor beliefs?

This unit focuses on interpersonal aspects of belief and belief formation, considering what it means to believe well by examining the nature of belief and the grounds for accepting or rejecting beliefs. Across 2 areas of study, students explore what our obligations are in relation to belief; when we should adjust or change our beliefs; and to what extent we should take responsibility for fostering the good beliefs of others and the conditions that make them possible. Through so doing, students are invited to consider the interrelationship between believing well and living well.

In Area of Study 1, students use concepts, arguments and viewpoints from the set texts to develop perspectives and justified philosophical positions on belief formation and justification in relation to a range of general questions. Students apply their learning from Area of Study 1 to identify and engage with epistemological issues that arise from case studies suggested by selected contexts.

Texts for Units 3 and 4

In this study, the term ‘text’ refers to a complete text or extract(s) from a philosophical work.

Texts for Units 3 and 4 are prescribed annually by the VCAA and referred to in Units 3 and 4 as ‘set texts’. The prescribed texts for each unit will be published annually in the *VCAA Bulletin.*

Area of Study 1

Foundations of belief

In this area of study, students explore philosophical questions relating to the interpersonal aspects of belief formation and the interrelationship between believing well and living well. Students use the concepts, arguments and viewpoints from the set texts to develop perspectives on these questions. As they reflect on the merits and shortcomings of these perspectives and the underpinning concepts, viewpoints and arguments, they formulate and defend their own philosophical positions.

Outcome 1

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to discuss philosophical questions relating to belief, belief formation and justification, and discuss the interrelationship between believing well and living well.

To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 1.

Key knowledge

* concepts used in discussion of belief, belief formation and justification as relevant to the set texts, such as knowledge, belief, perspective, experience, testimony, expertise, truth, trust, consensus, authority, fact, reason, intuition, perception, influence, falsity, peer disagreement, epistemic justice, epistemic injustice, epistemic community
* connections, similarities and differences between these concepts
* viewpoints and arguments proposed in the set texts as relevant to these general questions:
* What role should experience, testimony and expertise play in the formation of and justification for belief?
* What responsibilities, if any, do we have to ourselves and others regarding belief, belief formation and justification?
* In what circumstances should we trust assertions made by others?
* What should we do in light of others holding beliefs that disagree with our beliefs?
* the interrelationship between believing well and living well
* connections, similarities and differences between the arguments and viewpoints in the set texts, in relation to the general questions
* perspectives on these general questions
* objections and criticisms that can be raised in response to the viewpoints and arguments in the set texts, in relation to the general questions
* objections and criticisms that can be raised when critically comparing the viewpoints and arguments in the set texts in relation to the general questions
* examples from applied philosophical and non-philosophical sources related to each of the general questions.

Key skills

* explain, analyse and apply philosophical concepts
* recognise arguments, identifying the premises, the support given for the premises, conclusions and any assumptions made
* outline and analyse philosophical viewpoints and arguments using appropriate terminology
* use examples from applied philosophical and non-philosophical sources to support philosophical discussion
* offer relevant criticisms of arguments by assessing the plausibility of premises and any assumptions made, showing whether the conclusions follow from the premises, and analysing the potential consequences for belief, belief formation and justification
* critically compare viewpoints and arguments offered in the set texts by comparing the plausibility of the premises or viewpoints, the strength of the assumptions made and the quality of the reasoning used
* develop perspectives on philosophical questions
* reflect critically on perspectives and the relationship between believing well and living well
* formulate and defend philosophical positions using precise language.

Area of Study 2

Contemporary applications

An important aspect of the study of philosophical viewpoints and arguments is developing the capacity to identify and respond to relevant matters of practical concern.

In this area of study, students examine 2 case studies drawn from 2 contexts. They examine the case studies in light of the general questions and associated concepts, arguments and viewpoints found in relevant set texts in Area of Study 1. The contexts are used to help identify a case study that involves epistemological issues. For example, students could explore how social media has been used in election campaigns, which is a case study suggested by one of the following contexts: misinformation, disinformation and echo chambers. Students use the concepts, general questions, arguments and viewpoints from Area of Study 1 to illuminate and explore the epistemological issues relating to the case study.

Two contexts with one case study for each must be selected. The contexts for study are:

* silencing, exclusion and cancelling
* misinformation, disinformation and echo chambers
* truth, trust, credibility and expertise.

Outcome 2

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to discuss case studies in light of epistemological issues associated with belief, belief formation and justification.

To achieve this outcome, the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 2.

Key knowledge

* assumptions, arguments and viewpoints relating to belief, belief formation and justification found within the selected case studies
* epistemological issues related to belief, belief formation and justification arising from the selected case studies
* the relationship between the general questions explored in Area of Study 1 and the identified epistemological issues
* perspectives on epistemological issues arising from the selected case studies
* the interplay between philosophical concepts, arguments and viewpoints found in relevant set texts for Area of Study 1 and the selected case studies
* objections and criticisms arising from the interplay between concepts, arguments and viewpoints explored in relevant set texts for Area of Study 1 and the selected case studies.

Key skills

* identify and analyse assumptions, arguments and viewpoints relating to belief, belief formation and justification found within selected case studies
* identify epistemological issues arising from the selected case studies
* analyse the relationship between the general questions explored in Area of Study 1 and the epistemological issues arising from the selected case studies
* use philosophical concepts, arguments and viewpoints found in relevant set texts for Area of Study 1 to analyse epistemological issues arising from selected case studies
* use philosophical concepts, arguments and viewpoints found in relevant set texts for Area of Study 1 to evaluate arguments and viewpoints relating to belief, belief formation and justification found within selected case studies, in the context of identified epistemological issues
* develop perspectives on epistemological issues
* reflect critically on perspectives
* use philosophical and non-philosophical sources to support philosophical discussion
* formulate and defend philosophical positions on epistemological issues using precise language.

School-based assessment

Satisfactory completion

The award of satisfactory completion for a unit is based on whether the student has demonstrated the set of outcomes specified for the unit. Teachers should use a variety of learning activities and assessment tasks to provide a range of opportunities for students to demonstrate the key knowledge and key skills in the outcomes.

The areas of study and key knowledge and key skills listed for the outcomes should be used for course design and the development of learning activities and assessment tasks.

Assessment of levels of achievement

School-assessed Coursework

The student’s level of achievement in Unit 4 will be determined by School-assessed Coursework. School-assessed Coursework tasks must be a part of the regular teaching and learning program and must not unduly add to the workload associated with that program. They must be completed mainly in class and within a limited timeframe.

Where teachers provide a range of options for the same School-assessed Coursework task, they should ensure that the options are of comparable scope and demand.

The types and range of forms of School-assessed Coursework for the outcomes are prescribed within the study design. The VCAA publishes [Support materials](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/philosophy/Pages/Index.aspx) for this study, which include advice on the design of assessment tasks and the assessment of student work for a level of achievement.

Teachers will provide to the VCAA a numerical score representing an assessment of the student’s level of achievement. The score must be based on the teacher’s assessment of the performance of each student on the tasks set out in the following table.

Contribution to final assessment

School-assessed Coursework for Unit 4 will contribute 25 per cent to the study score.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Outcomes** | **Marks allocated** | **Assessment tasks** |
| **Outcome 1**Discuss philosophical questions relating to belief, belief formation and justification, and discuss the interrelationship between believing well and living well. | **60** | The student’s performance on each outcome is assessed by at least 2 different tasks, selected from the following:* an essay
* a written analysis
* an extended written response to stimulus
* short-answer responses
* a written reflection
* presentations (oral, multimedia)
* a dialogue (oral, written).

One essay task is required for Unit 4. |
| **Outcome 2**Discuss case studies in light of epistemological issues associated with belief, belief formation and justification. | **40** |
| **Total marks** | **100** |  |

External assessment

The level of achievement for Units 3 and 4 is also assessed by an end-of-year examination.

End-of-year examination

Contribution to final assessment

The examination will contribute 50 per cent to the study score.

Description

The examination will be set by a panel appointed by the VCAA. All the key knowledge and key skills that underpin the outcomes in Units 3 and 4 are examinable.

Conditions

The examination will be completed under the following conditions:

* Duration: 2 hours.
* Date: at the end of the year, on a date to be published annually by the VCAA.
* VCAA examination rules will apply. Details of these rules are published annually in the [*VCE Administrative Handbook*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/vce-handbook/Pages/index.aspx?Redirect=1).
* The examination will be marked by assessors appointed by the VCAA.

Further advice

The VCAA publishes specifications for all VCE examinations on the VCAA website. Examination specifications include details about the sections of the examination, their weighting, the question format(s) and any other essential information. The specifications are published in the first year of implementation of the revised Unit 3 and 4 sequence together with any sample material.