

Frequently Asked Questions

PHILOSOPHY

Question: What is Philosophy?

Answer: That is not an easy question to answer! However, a good way of thinking about Philosophy is to think of it as the study and development of arguments (debates) about open-ended, age-old questions. For more on the kind of questions a Philosopher would debate, read the next question below.

Question: What are some of the key topics I would cover?

Answer: The course is broken up into four broad themes, two in the first year and two in the second year. In the first year we study Epistemology: the Philosophy of Knowledge, considering questions such as how do we gain knowledge and ideas? What knowledge can we have? How do we perceive things around us? What is knowledge? We also study Ethics.: How do we decide what is right to do? What makes something right or wrong? In the second year we study Philosophy of Religion: Can we prove God exists, or that he doesn't exist? What separates believers and non-believers? We also study Philosophy Of Mind. What is the relationship between the mental and the physical? Can we ever know someone else's mind?

Question: Are there any subject specific entry requirements?

Answer: Yes, English Language 5 and Mathematics 5.

Question: Why do you have a Mathematics requirement?

Answer: A large part of Philosophy is logical argument, following step by step patterns of reasoning, to reach a deductive conclusion. Experience has shown us that this skill is assessed most closely at GCSE in Mathematics, where students have to use step by step reasoning and 'show their working' to solve problems in algebra, geometry, etc. Most written subjects at GCSE do not require as rigorous reasoning in essays and extended written responses. Please be assured that these entry requirements, like all such requirements at Collyers, are designed to make sure that the students will be broadly suited to the courses in which they enrol, are broadly in line with requirements from many similar institutions, and have been researched carefully.

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Question: Do you have to have done Religious Studies / Philosophy of Religion & Ethics at GCSE, to do Philosophy at A-Level?

Answer: No, and the teaching on the course will not assume any knowledge of Religious Studies, Philosophy of Religion & Ethics.

Question: Is the course at Collyers A-Level Philosophy or A-Level Religious Studies?

Answer: At Collyers, we teach A-Level Philosophy – the AQA Philosophy course, which is the only exam board to offer an A-Level in Philosophy. We do not offer A-Level Religious Studies. Some institutions claim to offer 'A-Level Philosophy', but in reality teach A-Level Religious Studies and within that pick Philosophy options.

Question: What is the difference between A-Level Philosophy and A-Level Religious Studies?

Answer: A-Level Philosophy offers a broader selection of topics in Philosophy than A-Level Religious Studies does (which typically only features Philosophy of Religion & Ethics), in addition A-Level Religious Studies requires more close reference to religious points of view and perspectives.

Question: How many other subjects can I choose alongside this one?

Answer: Almost all students at Collyers study three subjects, so you would study two subjects alongside Philosophy.

Question: What other subjects do students take alongside Philosophy?

Answer: Students take all kinds of subjects alongside Philosophy, from English Literature to History, from Chemistry to Physics, from Art to Theatre Studies. Sometimes students take it to contrast to their other two subjects, or for others it is part of a broad-based general programme.

Question: Do you have a lot of debates and discussion in Philosophy?

Answer: Yes! With very few exceptions, every lesson will have class discussion and debate, and plenty of opportunity to ask questions and make comments. It's one of the best ways to learn about the subject.

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Question: What is the learning style like within this subject?

Answer: Debate and discussion in either small or large groups and as a class will form part of every lesson. Written work also forms an important part of the learning process in the subject, through note taking, responses to short questions and timed essay writing – both in class and through regular homework. We often read short passages together in class and respond to them through worksheets. Students will also work on and deliver short presentations and take part in independent and group research. Use of IT will also feature prominently on the course.

Question: Do I have to learn Philosophers' views?

Answer: Knowledge of the views of certain listed Philosophers is expected and we will cover these on the course, but your opinion and evaluation of their views is valued, including in the exam. You can always disagree with any Philosopher on our syllabus, as long as you can back up your view with careful reasoning (and we'll help you do that, too!).

Question: How will I be assessed?

Answer: The course is 100% exam based, you will sit two exam papers at the end of the second year which will count for 50% of your overall mark each. In the exam, all questions are written answers and range from short one-sentence answers, to answers of paragraph length, to full essays. Throughout the course all students will do regular practice timed questions in class to prepare for the final exams and to get feedback on how they are getting on.

Question: What support can I access if I am struggling?

Answer: You can attend one of the regular subject workshops to get more individual support from the teacher. You will also be able to access general support from the Study Support area within Collyers. You can also ask the teacher for help in class and via email.

Question: What do students who have studied this area normally do after Collyer's?

Answer: Most students taking A-Level Philosophy at Collyers use it to support their application to university, A-Level Philosophy is an academic and well-regarded subject. A small number of students each year apply for Philosophy degrees but aside from this students taking A-Level Philosophy apply for a variety of subjects including those in the Arts, Humanities and Sciences. Increasingly, students are also using their Philosophy A-Level as a part of a strong application for apprenticeships and employment.

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Question: What are results like in A-Level Philosophy at Collyers?

Answer: Over the last three years, Philosophy results have been some of the best in college of any department / subject – and overall of course Collyers is justifiably proud of its excellent results overall. We have had a 100% pass rate in this time and excellent 'value added' – a measure of how much students progress from GCSE to A-Level.

Question: How similar is the course to GCSE Religious Studies / GCSE Philosophy of Religion & Ethics?

Answer: The closest GCSE to our course, in terms of content, is GCSE Philosophy of Religion & Ethics. A student who really enjoyed this GCSE is likely to enjoy A-Level Philosophy. Two of our four main big topics – Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion – are the same, although we also do other, new topics in Philosophy as well (please see above for more explanation on all the topics). Students of Religious Studies GCSE sometimes debate the arguments for the existence of God and Ethics as well – these are topics we study on our course. On the other hand, often at GCSE the Religious perspective has to be mentioned a lot in answers (and teaching) – you don't have to do this in A-Level Philosophy.

Question: What transferrable skills do A-Level Philosophy students develop?

Answer: Communication skills, critical reasoning skills, and general problem-solving skills are all enhanced by work in philosophy. Essay writing and making a case for a reasoned conclusion will be covered on the course. In addition, philosophy helps students develop sound methods of research and analysis.