

Greek 9902a: Sophocles' *Philoctetes*

Fall 2026: Department of Classical Studies, University of Western Ontario

“In Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, the fate of an entire civilization is suspended in order to allow the ambassadors of that civilization to stop and take account of the nature of the human body, the wound in that body, the pain in that wound.” Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*. Oxford 1985.10.



Terracotta squat lekythos (oil flask) depicting Philoktetes on Lemnos (detail), 420 B.C., Greek, Attic. Terracotta. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. [Creative Commons CCO 1.0](#)

Course Information

Where/When Tuesdays, 2:30-5:30

Instructor Aara Suksi

E-Mail: asuksi@uwo.ca Please use your uwo email in correspondence with me. I will aim to get back to you within 2 business days.

Office Hours: by appointment

Required Text

Seth L. Schein, ed. *Sophocles Philoctetes*. Cambridge University Press 2013. This has been ordered by the university bookstore and is listed online for \$47.95.

Course Description and Objectives

Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is a play that will likely stay with you. It addresses problems that confront us all, including questions of how we respond to another's suffering, how we can make a moral decision in the midst of conflicting claims, and what happens when language fails us? In this course we will perform a close reading of the *Philoctetes* in Greek, considering its original contexts of 409 BCE Athens, and in more recent performance. Together we will discuss a range of scholarly and artistic responses to the play, and you will contribute to your scholarly community by presenting your own work and responding attentively to the work of your colleagues. You will gain a textured appreciation of the *Philoctetes*, you will hone your knowledge of ancient Greek, and you will develop your critical thinking, communication, and professional skills.

Evaluation (See details below)

Class Participation: 20%

Class Presentation: 20%

Paper: 20%

Weekly Translation Quizzes: 15%

Final Exam: 25%

Class Participation 20%

This course will be conducted as an academic community, through considered discussion and mutual learning support. You are expected to attend every class. If, because of circumstances beyond your control, you need to miss a class, please contact me in advance.

You should be prepared to participate at every class meeting. We will discuss critical and theoretical issues arising from both primary and secondary readings. In evaluating your participation, I will consider both the quality and the quantity of your contributions. You should be prepared to make thoughtful comments or raise interesting questions in our discussions, informed by the assigned readings and your own research; at the same time, you should also demonstrate attention, courtesy and respect in response to the contributions of your colleagues.

Each student will be assigned to lead a discussion of a secondary reading. The idea is not to summarize the reading for your colleagues, but to lead the class discussion by providing context and sharing your own questions or observations. We will consider not only the arguments and information presented by each author, but also their choice of rhetorical strategies.

Presentation 20%

Each student will present a conference-style paper on any topic related to this course.

Please speak to me about your topic before you get started, and as early in the term as possible. I will schedule the presentations in consultation with the members of the class.

Each presentation should be a formal scholarly talk of twenty minutes followed by up to ten minutes of class discussion. Formality can include charm, humour, or other elements that will engage your audience! Your presentation will be a preliminary version of your final research paper. It will be graded for presentation style as well as content. Criteria will include the quality of the research and argument, the clarity, timing and organization of the presentation, its integration with a handout and/or slides, including a list of sources cited, and how you handle questions from the room.

Research Paper 20%

Your paper will be a more developed version of your presentation and should be about 3500 words in length. Your research should be properly, fully, consistently and formally documented by means of footnotes and bibliography. If you are citing any Greek (or Latin), you should include your own translations.

Your paper is due by midnight on the last day of term (Dec. 9). You may submit your paper by e-mail as a Word attachment to meet this deadline, but please also submit an identical hard copy by the end of the next business day.

Weekly Translation Quizzes 15%

Starting September 22, each week at the beginning of class we'll take twenty minutes for a quiz, for a total of 11 quizzes. You'll be asked to translate a brief passage from the week's assigned Greek reading (listed on the course schedule). No aids of any kind will be allowed.

Final Exam 25%

The three-hour final exam will consist of passages selected from the text of *Philoctetes*, for translation and commentary, as well as a sight translation passage from a text similar to *Philoctetes*. Some choice of passages will be offered. No aids of any kind will be allowed. I'll provide you with the specific format of the exam ahead of time.

Tentative Course Schedule: Student Presentations will be scheduled after our first meeting

Date	Assigned Lines from <i>Philoctetes</i>	Assigned Reading
Week 1: Sept. 15 Course Introduction; a first look at Sophocles' <i>Philoctetes</i>.		
Week 2: Sept. 22 <i>Philoctetes</i> and Homeric Epic 1: the <i>Iliad</i>	1-134	<i>Iliad</i> Books 1, 9, 10 Schein, Seth. 2006. "The <i>Iliad</i> and the <i>Odyssey</i> in Sophocles' <i>Philoctetes</i> : generic complexity and ethical ambiguity", in J. Davidson, F. Muecke and P. Wilson, eds., <i>Greek Drama III: Essays in honour of Kevin Lee</i> , <i>BICS</i> Supp. 87. London. 129-40.
Week 3: Sept. 29 <i>Philoctetes</i> and Homeric Epic 2: the <i>Telemacheia</i>	135-253	<i>Odyssey</i> Book 1 Whitby, Mary. 1996. Telemachus Transformed? The Origins of Neoptolemus in Sophocles' 'Philoctetes', <i>Greece & Rome</i> , 2nd Ser., Vol. 43, No. 1), 31-42.
Week 4: Oct. 6 <i>Philoctetes</i> and Homeric Epic 3: the <i>Cyclopeia</i>	254-390	<i>Odyssey</i> Book 9 Van Nortwick, T. 2015. Philoctetes: The Creature in the Cave. In <i>Late Sophocles: The Hero's Evolution in Electra, Philoctetes, and Oedipus at Colonus</i> . University of Michigan Press. 43-80
Oct. 13	Reading Week	
Week 5: Oct. 20 Neoptolemus as Athenian ephebe	391-540	Rose, P. W. 2019. "Sophokles' <i>Philoctetes</i> and the Teachings of the Sophists: A Counteroffensive. In <i>Sons of the Gods, Children of Earth</i> (pp. 266–330). Cornell University Press. Blundell, M. W. 1988. The "Phusis" of Neoptolemus in Sophocles' "Philoctetes." <i>Greece & Rome</i> , 35(2), 137–148.

Week 6: Oct. 27 The <i>Phusis</i> of Neoptolemus	541-675	Carlevale, J. 2000. Education, “Phusis,” and Freedom in Sophocles’ “Philoctetes.” <i>Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics</i> , 8(1), 26–60.
Week 7: Nov. 3 The Bow of Heracles	676-826	Sophocles’ <i>Trachiniae</i>
Week 8: Nov. 10 Philoctetes’ disease	827-962	Biggs, P. 1966. “The Disease Theme in Sophocles’ <i>Ajax</i> , <i>Philoctetes</i> and <i>Trachiniae</i> ”, <i>CP</i> 61:223-35
Week 9: Nov. 17 The Body and Language	963-1100	Worman, N. 2000. “Infection in the Sentence: the discourse of disease in Sophocles’ <i>Philoctetes</i> ”, <i>Arethusa</i> 33:1-36.
Week 10: Nov. 24 Tragedy and Philosophy	1101-1217	Hawkins, A. H. (1999). Ethical Tragedy and Sophocles’ “Philoctetes.” <i>The Classical World</i> , 92(4), 337–357. https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.2307/4352287
Week 11: Dec.1 The Final Scene	1218-1347	Mitchell-Boyask, R.N. 2007. “The Athenian Asklepieion and the end of the Philoctetes”, <i>TAPA</i> 137, 85–114.
Week 12: Dec. 8 Review and Class Discussion	1348-1470 Research Paper Due Dec. 9	

Course Enrollment Restrictions

“Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in Classics as well as any student that has obtained special permission to enroll in this course from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student’s home program.” For the policy on undergraduate students taking graduate courses, please see the policy on “Undergraduate Course Credit”.

Mental Health

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <https://www.uwo.ca/health/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Accommodation Policy

Staying healthy – physically and mentally – is an essential part of achieving your academic goals. There are many resources on campus available to help you maintain your health and wellness <https://www.uwo.ca/health/>. Please contact the Graduate Chair if you have any concerns about health or wellness interfering with your studies.

If academic consideration should become necessary at any point, students should contact their course instructor(s) and/or supervisor, as appropriate. Students should also contact the Graduate Chair in most cases, and especially if accommodation is needed for:

- more than one course
- more than one week
- any tests, exams, and/or assignments worth 10% or more of a final grade
- any program milestone (comprehensive exams, thesis, etc.)

In these cases, the Graduate Chair may request that a student work with Student Accessibility Services (<http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/>) to arrange a plan for accommodation (see SGPS Regulation 14: http://www.grad.uwo.ca/current_students/regulations/14.html).

Accessible Education

Accessible Education plays a central role in Western's efforts to ensure that its academic programs are accessible for all students at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Accessible Education arranges academic accommodation for classes, exams, internships and other course or program activities. Accessible Education also provides digital and Braille textbooks, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction for students with learning disabilities, access to computer labs that are equipped with assistive technology, referrals for assessments and other services, and bursaries for students who meet OSAP's eligibility criteria. You may wish to contact Accessible Education at 519 661-2111 x 82147 or visit their website:

http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html for any specific question regarding an accommodation.

Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website:

www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated_exams.html

Western's Statement on Gender-based and Sexual Violence

“Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency

contacts at the following website: Western Survivor Support Services. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.”

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the [Scholastic Offences policy](#), specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence. All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between Western University and Turnitin.com.

Policy on Use of AI for this course

Generative AI tools (e.g., Copilot, ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.) are now being used widely in many professional and academic settings. In this course, a goal is that you develop your skills in critical thinking and in professional academic research and communication. You will not develop those skills if you let Generative AI do that work for you.

This policy statement clarifies how AI may and may not be used by students in this course. Every course you take may have a different policy, so take care to inform yourself about specific expectations for each course.

Basic Guidelines

1. You are expected to **first** do your own thinking, research, note-taking, and writing. Only after that should you make use of any AI tools to clarify, challenge, or refine thoughts you already have. Do not use AI to produce your assignment from the beginning.
2. AI can assist you (like a calculator or grammar checker), but **under no circumstances** should AI tools be the primary creator of your submissions.
3. No fake data or sources will be tolerated. You may not use AI to invent references and present them as real. As good as some AI tools are, they are still subject to major errors.
4. Transparency is **mandatory**. For every submitted assignment, students must include a short “AI Use Statement” describing whether and how you used AI. Concealing substantial AI assistance will be considered an academic integrity violation.
5. You are responsible for the accuracy, originality, and argumentation of all submitted work, regardless of whether AI tools were used.

Acceptable uses (with full disclosure)

Examples of generally acceptable uses **after you have done your own work**:

- Clarifying concepts: “Here is my definition of intertextuality. Can you put it into clearer language?”

- Checking understanding of an article you have read: “I think the main arguments are X and Y. What am I missing?”
- Brainstorming counterarguments on points you have already written.
- Getting suggestions for improving clarity, structure, or grammar in a draft you wrote on your own.

You must still **read critically** and decide what to accept and what to reject.

Unacceptable uses that are not permitted:

- Asking AI to “write my article critique or presentation or research paper” and/or submitting such text (even with light editing).
- Using AI summaries of articles instead of reading the article yourself.
- Having AI invent references that you have not read and verified.
- Using AI during quizzes or the final exam.
- These potential uses fall under academic misconduct because they misrepresent someone else’s (or something else’s) work as your own.

Student AI Use Statements

For each major assignment in this course (presentation, research paper, article presentation), you must include a short, carefully labelled “**AI Use Statement**” at the end. For example: “I used Copilot after drafting my outline to help identify possible counterarguments to my main points, and I used Grammarly to check grammar. I did not use AI to generate any full paragraphs or summaries. I accepted one suggestion (to consider X as an alternative explanation) and rejected others that misinterpreted the article. These are **all** the prompts I entered when using the AI tool”