

Principles of Reasoning

Period 6 (2:05–3:15) on Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday • 2024-2025
Mr. Holzer • tholzer@ahsmail.com

“To every man there comes ... that special moment when he is figuratively tapped on the shoulder and offered a chance to do a special thing unique to him and fitted to his talent. What a tragedy if that moment finds him unprepared or unqualified for the work which would be his finest hour.”

—Winston Churchill

Course Description

Principles of Reasoning, a course for 8th and 9th graders at American Heritage School – Salt Lake City, introduces students to the 4R Method, a powerful method for learning that aims to take learning from the mind into the heart by fostering deep understanding, the internalization of truth, and the development of character. This course is all about learning, doing, and becoming. As a child of the Almighty God living in these latter days, you have a grand future and important responsibilities ahead of you. To make this a reality, you will want to learn all that you can possibly learn, and you will want to adopt guiding principles that will help you to rise up and become all you were sent here to be. This is the purpose of your AHS education, and of this course in particular.

Learning is a key element of our preparation for life — both here on Earth and throughout eternity. For this reason, this course will focus on learning: why we want to learn, what we want to learn, how to pursue that learning in the most practical and effective way, how to collect learning in a way that lasts, how to apply what we learn to ourselves and our society, and how to communicate that learning to others in clear, impactful ways. We will especially focus on how to learn principles: powerful truths that can be used to help make wise, righteous decisions, even when circumstances may be confusing.

In this course, you will learn and practice a simple and powerful method for learning called the 4R Method, which breaks down the learning process into four steps: Research, Reason, Relate, and Record. You will “Research” by engaging with scriptures; scholarly and academic texts; works of great literature, music, and art; living people; and physical artifacts in order to acquire knowledge. You will “Reason” by thinking critically about what you are learning in order to distinguish truth from error and good from bad, all with the goal of distilling true principles from your sources. You will learn and practice essential reasoning skills, such as judging between truth and error, evaluating truth claims, using deductive and inductive reasoning, recognizing logical fallacies, and evaluating various kinds of sources for reliability and applicability. You will “Relate” by drawing connections between what you are learning and other areas, including other subjects you are learning, events in history, and your own life. Finally, you will “Record” what you have learned so it will not be forgotten.

As recording what you learn is so essential to the learning process, this course will help you learn various methods of recording truths you have discovered, with a specific focus on writing. You will learn how to organize your thoughts in written form by first learning to write clear sentences, then well-structured paragraphs, and finally solid five-paragraph essays. The writing skills you develop in this course will serve as a foundation for the academic and personal writing you will perform in high school and beyond.

By learning to reason, to write, and to discover and apply principles, you will have the power to continually improve, spiraling ever upward toward “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). If you follow this path long enough, you will become a powerful instrument in the hands of the Lord, and He will be able to use you in ways that will amaze you. In this way, you will be ready when He “figuratively [taps you] on the shoulder and [offers you] a chance” to do the “special thing” He sent you here to do.

What aspect of this course are you most interested in? (This will help Mr. Holzer understand what you want to get out of this class.)

Does anything in the Course Description worry or concern you? (Again, this will help Mr. Holzer.)

Course Requirements

Assignments

Various assignments will be given in each unit to help you internalize the concepts and practice the skills you will be learning. You will receive a printed copy of all required readings and assignments during class. These materials will also be posted to Gradelink, insofar as that is allowable by copyright law. If you lose or damage the printed copy that is provided to you, you will be responsible to print another copy from Gradelink.

4R Projects

Each unit will culminate in the completion of a larger project in which you will practice some aspect of the 4R Method. Some class time will be given to work on these projects, but you should also plan to spend time outside of class to complete them by the deadline.

Memorization

Each term, a scripture or quote related to our topics of study will be provided for memorization. We will review the quote periodically in class to aid in the memorization process, but it will be your responsibility to memorize the quote, complete the accompanying reflection, and pass it off. You may pass off your memorization during any class work time; I will simply ask you to repeat the quote from memory and turn in your reflection.

Course Notebook

Organizing knowledge is a large component of the fourth R: Research. Throughout the year, you will practice this skill by maintaining a course notebook containing all class readings, assignments, and writing projects. Your best work is expected, including good handwriting and neat organization. Your notebooks will be inspected and graded twice per term.

Grading

Grades will be assigned according to the standard American Heritage breakdown, as follows:

A = 100-93%	A- = 92-90%	B+ = 89-87%
B = 86-84%	B- = 83-80%	C+ = 79-77%
C = 76-74%	C- = 73-70%	D+ = 69-67%
D = 66-64%	D- = 63-60%	
F = 59-0%		
IN = Incomplete		

Course Materials

Most lessons will include a reading of some kind. All readings will be provided to you in class. These materials will also be posted online for both student and parent access; however, due to potential copyright issues with some of the readings, we request that online readings not be printed or distributed in any way.

The Scriptures of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will serve as the primary textbook for this course. Other readings will include talks from Church leaders, historical documents from American and Church history, chapters from various books, and other essays and articles.

Class Policies

Respect for People — The highest standard of respect for others is expected in our class: for your classmates, for all faculty and staff, and for any volunteers who may assist us in any way. I promise to treat you with the same level of respect, for I view the opportunity to interact with you in class as a profound privilege.

Assignment Submission and Due Dates — All assignments must be turned in on paper in class; electronic submissions will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances. All work is due on the set due date. You will generally have at least a week to work on normal assignments and two weeks to work on larger writing assignments. If the due date has past, you are still encouraged to turn in your work, but it will incur a 20% late penalty.

Technology Use

- Computers — All writing in this course will be done by hand; neither personal nor school computers will be used in class. For all writing assignments, first drafts must be written by hand and turned in. Subsequent drafts may be typed and formatted using a computer, if you wish, but this will be done exclusively outside of class using your own personal or family computer.
- Phones — In accordance with the policies of American Heritage, phone use in class is not permitted.

Cleanliness — We all need to work together to keep our classroom clean. It is expected that everyone will help to clean up at the end of each class. Once you have finished cleaning up your own work area, please look for opportunities to help others clean up as well.

Artificial Intelligence Use — Artificial intelligence is a powerful tool and has many legitimate and powerful uses. However, because this course is focused on developing your own personal skills of reading, reasoning, and writing, you will not be allowed to use generative AI tools of any kind for any of the work done in this course. American Heritage aims to offer a unique style of education in which both the heart and mind are educated, and we believe that developing the time-honored skills of reading, reasoning, and writing are some of the best methods of achieving this kind of transformative learning. Education about how to use ChatGPT and other AI tools can be obtained in other classes (such as American Heritage’s Computer Science Principles class for 9th graders), at other schools, or in other places. We ask for your trust as we insist that this policy be kept by all students in this course.

If you have concerns about this policy, please talk with me; I will be happy to discuss this with anyone. If it is suspected that you have used an AI tool to do any of your thinking or your writing, we will have frank conversations that will likely result in you needing to redo your work. Repeated violations of this policy will be escalated to school administration.

Do you anticipate having any problems keeping these policies? Do you have any special circumstances or needs Mr. Holzer should be aware of?

I agree to abide by these policies. (Sign your name to signify your agreement.)

Course Outline

Unit 1: Finding and Gathering Principles

Discussion Topics

- Finding the “Moral” or “Lesson” in a Text
- Principles
- Finding Principles in the Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision
- Finding Principles in Our Own Life Experiences
- Gathering Principles

Writing Skills

- Strong, Single-Sentence Statements of Principle
- Effective Notetaking: Gathering Learning into a Central Location

Unit 2: The Pattern for Learning: Research, Reason, Relate, Record

Discussion Topics

- Research
 - What Does it Mean to Research?
 - Starting Your Search in Divinely Appointed Sources
 - Reaching Out to Additional Sources
 - Diligent Research
- Reason
 - What Does it Mean to Reason?
 - Judging Truth from Error and Good from Evil
 - Evaluating Truth Claims
 - Arguments
 - Deductive, Inductive, and Abductive Reasoning
 - Logical Fallacies
 - Lenses for Doctrinal Confidence
 - Keys for Evaluating Sources
 - Keys for Evaluating Historical Sources
- Relate
 - What Does it Mean to Relate?
 - Be Doers of the Word, Not Hearers Only
 - Circles of Stewardship and Influence
- Record
 - What Does it Mean to Record?
 - Purpose and Importance of Record-Keeping
 - Various Means of Recording
- Synergistic Skills
 - Looking for Patterns
 - Asking Insightful Questions

Writing Skills

- Writing Principles in the Most Applicable, Useful Way
- Clear, Well-Structured Paragraphs

Unit 3: Principles for Living the Joyful, Abundant Life

Discussion Topics

- The Joyful, “Abundant” Life
- Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs
- The Two Great Commandments
- The First Principles and Ordinances of the Gospel
- The Covenant Path
- Losing Our Lives to Find Them: The Great Secret of Joy

Writing Skills

- Constellations of Explanatory Paragraphs
- The First Five-Paragraph Essay

Unit 4: Principles of Liberty

Discussion Topics

- Divine Identity and Purpose
- Liberty through Christian Self-Government
- Christlike Character
- Conscience, the Most Sacred of All Property
- The Family, Religion, and Civil Government
- Cultivate Self-Government in Others
- Fullness of Liberty through Unity with God and Man

Writing Skills

- Five-Paragraph Essays
- Revising

Unit 5: Principles to Change the World

Discussion Topics

- Discussion topics in this unit will largely be proposed by students and approved by the teacher. This will give students the chance to practice selecting their own sources for research and guiding their own path for learning — a truly essential skill for lifelong learning.

Writing Skills

- Five-Paragraph Essays
- Revising

Unit 6: Our American Heritage

Discussion Topics

- What is “Heritage”?
- What is Our “American Heritage”?

Writing Skills

- Five-Paragraph Essays
- Compile a Writing Portfolio