



PHILOSOPHY & HUMAN IDENTITY · GENERAL ENGLISH · PROFICIENCY (C2)

lesson overview ★

What this lesson covers and where it is going.

This lesson uses a two-thousand-year-old paradox about a ship as a vehicle for advanced English. It is not a philosophy course, and no prior knowledge of philosophy is assumed or required. The paradox is a tool: it generates the vocabulary, the argumentative structures and the reasoning demands that this lesson exists to develop. What the learner will actually practise is distinguishing concepts that are easy to confuse, holding competing explanations in tension without collapsing them into a preference, and revising a stated position under pressure — applied to identity, change, memory, relationships, institutions and technology.

The central question is this: **if everything about something changes over time, what makes it the same thing?** The route through it is deliberate. The learner meets a modern dilemma before knowing it has a name or a history, and has to take a position on it unaided. The video then reveals the ancient paradox underneath. The reading sets out five competing theories and tests each against a hard case that is not the ship. The listening presents two experts who largely agree, so that the task becomes locating precisely where the agreement ends. Only then does the learner commit to a position of their own — and is required to argue against it.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the learner can:

1. explain the problem of the persistence of identity, and why it resists a simple answer
2. distinguish precisely between numerical and qualitative identity, continuity and persistence, and essential and accidental properties
3. analyse five competing theories of personal identity and identify the difficulty attached to each
4. evaluate competing positions against a single hard case, rather than asserting a preference
5. synthesise evidence from the video, the reading and the listening within a single argument
6. locate exactly where two speakers who largely agree begin to diverge
7. deploy conditionals, modal deduction, hedging and cleft structures as instruments of argument
8. commit to a position, name the principle underneath it, argue against it, and revise it under pressure

Lesson Flow and Timing

SECTION	TIME
Warm-Up: Identity and Change	10–12 min
Video Comprehension	12–15 min
Vocabulary & Lexical Precision Lab	12–15 min
Original C2 Reading: The Problem of Identity	22–25 min
Reading Comprehension & Synthesis	14–16 min
Listening Studio: Two Experts Disagree	15–18 min
Argumentation Language in Context	12–15 min
Advanced Writing: Comparative Evaluation	12–15 min
Critical Thinking Challenge — main focus	25–30 min
Final Reflection	3–5 min
Vocabulary Crossword	review
Mini Project (homework)	20–30 min — outside class time

Timings are pacing guidelines, not limits. These materials are taught across weekly sessions and continued until complete; no section should be compressed or omitted to meet a stated time.



The Ship of Theseus

Identity, change, and what makes something the same thing—from a ship in an Athenian harbor to a city rebuilt from rubble, and to the question of whether you are who you were.

Level: Proficiency (C2 CEFR)

Duration: 120 minutes · 1:1 General English Coaching

Skill Focus: Reading, Listening, Speaking, Vocabulary, Writing

Grammar Focus: Conditionals, modal deduction, hedging & cleft structures

SCAN ME



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1

warm-up: identity and change

Discuss these questions before we begin. (10–12 min)

The case. Fifteen years ago, Marek was a practising lawyer in Gdańsk. He was a committed Catholic, voted conservative, was married, played competitive chess, and was known for being combative in argument. Today he is a carpenter in a village in the mountains. He is an atheist. He is divorced and estranged from his brother. He no longer plays chess and finds the person who did faintly embarrassing. He holds political views he would once have found contemptible, and he says so openly. He remembers his former life accurately, but describes that man in the third person — and says, without any apparent distress, that he does not like him.

Take a position: is this the same person?

- Over fifteen years, almost every cell in Marek's body has been replaced. Does that bear on your answer at all — and if not, why do we so readily accept bodily replacement while hesitating over the rest?
Follow-ups: Would your answer differ for an injury that changed his appearance entirely? · Is there any physical change that would settle it for you?
- He remembers the lawyer's life in detail. Now suppose he did not — suppose those fifteen years were intact but everything before them was gone. Does your answer change? Which direction does it move?
Follow-ups: Is for getting the same as never having been there? · Does it matter whether the memories could be recovered?



1

warm-up (continued)

Each question should make your position harder to hold.

3. Every value he held has been replaced by its opposite, and he actively disowns the person who held them. Is disowning a past self evidence that you are no longer that person, or evidence that you are — since only he can disown it?

Follow-ups: Can you reject something you were never part of? · Would an apology from him for that man's actions make sense?

4. His wife, his brother and his colleagues have all gone. If identity depends partly on being recognised and treated as continuous by others, has something been lost that is not his to lose?

Follow-ups: Who has the authority to say whether he is the same man? · Could everyone around him be wrong?

5. Now the rate. Suppose all of this had happened in a single week rather than across fifteen years — same endpoint, same man. Does the speed of the change alter your verdict? If it does, explain what speed has to do with identity.

Follow-ups: Where exactly would the boundary fall? · Is gradualness a fact about him, or about our tolerance?

Look back at your answers. **What are you actually relying on to decide?** Name it as precisely as you can.



You are likely to find that you do not yet have the words for whatever you named in the final question above. That is the intended outcome. Section 3 supplies them.



**SCAN
ME****2****video comprehension****Answer the prediction question before watching** . 12–15 minutes.Watch here: youtube.com/watch?v=UHWVypIU3Pg

Before you watch. How do you think a philosopher would answer the dilemma you have just discussed? Write your prediction in one or two sentences. You will return to it at the end of this section.

Part A — True / False with Correction

Mark each statement. Correct every false one. The false statements are close paraphrases, not obvious errors.

#	Statement	T / F
1	The ship was maintained in the harbour for a thousand years, with worn parts replaced by identical pieces of the same material.	
2	On the argument that A equals B, the two ships are qualitatively identical — exactly alike — even though they share no parts.	
3	The counter-argument holds that Theseus's presence on the ship is an essential qualitative property, which Ship B cannot have.	
4	In the twist, the collected original parts are rebuilt into a second ship, and the video concludes that this rebuilt ship is the genuine one.	
5	Plutarch, a Greek historian, used the ship to illustrate a paradox concerning the persistence of identity.	

Part B — Comprehension

1. The video says the difficulty lies partly with “the persistence of identity.” Using the video’s own three questions, explain what makes that concept so hard to pin down.
2. Why did the Athenians maintain the ship for a thousand years, and what did they do annually?
3. Reconstruct the argument that Ship A equals Ship B. What work is the word *gradually* doing in it?
4. Reconstruct the counter-argument. What exactly is claimed to be essential, and why can Ship B not have it?
5. State the twist precisely. Why does the video say only one of the two ships could actually be the real thing?





2

video comprehension (continued)**Go beyond what the video states.****Part C — Inference and Argument Structure**

1. The “gradual change” argument depends on an assumption the video never states. Identify it. (Consider: why should the *rate* of replacement make any difference to whether a thing survives it?)
2. Why does the video treat the rebuilt ship as a genuine problem rather than a trivial one? What would have to be true for it to be dismissed easily — and why can it not be?
3. The video declines to give an answer. Is that evasion, or is it the honest position? Defend your reading with reference to what the video does and does not claim.

Part D — Prediction Review

1. Return to the prediction you wrote before watching. How close was it?
2. What did the video introduce that you had not considered — and does it change the position you took on Marek?

The central question, which every remaining section returns to:*If everything about something changes overtime, what makes it the same thing?*



3

vocabulary & lexical precision lab**Read, repeat, and master these words before reading the article.**

Match each item (1–15) with its definition (A–O). Write the matching letter in the **Answer** column. The definitions on the right are **independently shuffled** – none sits opposite its own item. Several are deliberately close: work by precision, not by gist.

#	ITEM	ANSWER	DEF.	DEFINITION
1	persist through change	☐	A	passive acceptance of something without active agreement or protest
2	continuity	☐	B	a quality a thing cannot lose and still remain itself
3	essential property	☐	C	to continue to exist as the same entity while altering
4	authenticity	☐	D	to take something for granted as a necessary condition of an argument
5	transitive	☐	E	granted by a decision rather than discovered as a fact
6	re-identification	☐	F	to give formal approval to a decision that has already been taken in practice
7	acquiescence	☐	G	badly framed; of a question, constructed so that no clean answer is possible
8	to ratify	☐	H	to work backwards from a desired conclusion to the reasoning that would produce it
9	to presuppose	☐	I	an unbroken process or connection running through time
10	malformed	☐	J	the standard or test by which a judgement is actually made
11	criterion	☐	K	to show that a question was confused rather than answering it
12	to dissolve a problem a	☐	L	the quality of being genuine rather than a copy or imitation
13	severed thread	☐	M	the act of recognising something encountered again as the same thing
14	to reverse-engineer	☐	N	describing a relation that carries along a chain: if A relates to B and B to C, then A relates to C
15	conferred rather than found	☐	O	a connection, especially of memory, that has been cut through





3 vocabulary & lexical precision lab (continued)

Part B—Lexical Precision

For each pair: (a) state the difference in your own words; (b) produce a sentence in which the two are *not* interchangeable; (c) identify which term the video's argument actually requires at the point indicated.

PAIR	WHERE THE VIDEO NEEDS ONE AND NOT THE OTHER
numerical vs qualitative identity	The claim that A and B are "one and the same" despite sharing no parts.
continuity vs persistence	The claim that the ship "never at any point stopped being" the legendary ship.
change vs replacement	What actually happened to the planks, year by year.
essential vs accidental properties	The role of Theseus's presence in the counter-argument.
authenticity vs originality	The status of the ship rebuilt from the discarded parts.

Part C — Collocation and Register

- Complete: an _____ property; _____ identical; continuity of _____; to _____ through change; to lay _____ to a title.
- Which of these belong to academic register only, and which would pass unremarked in careful everyday speech? Sort them.
- To lay claim to* appears in the video. What does it imply that *to claim* alone does not?
- Acquiescence* and *agreement* both describe going along with something. What does choosing *acquiescence* tell the reader about the writer's judgement?

Part D — Productive Use

Answer each in two or three sentences. Imprecise usage will produce a visibly wrong claim — that is the test.

- Name one property of your own profession that is **essential** and one that is **accidental**, and justify the division.
- Describe something you own that has **authenticity** but not **originality**.
- Describe a relationship that has **persisted** without **continuity** — and say whether that is really possible.
- Give an example of a rule in an institution you know that was **conferred rather than found**.
- Describe a question you have heard publicly debated that you consider **malformed**. Say what would have to change for it to admit an answer.





4

original c2 reading: the problem of identity

Read closely. Not every idea is explained on first mention. 22–25 minutes.

The Problem of Identity*An original Fluentora essay on persistence, change, and what survives reconstruction*

More than eighty-five per cent of Warsaw's historic centre was destroyed in 1944, demolished in reprisal after the Uprising rather than lost incidentally to fighting. What was rebuilt over the following decade was assembled from new brick and new mortar, guided by eighteenth-century cityscapes painted by Bernardo Bellotto and treated by the reconstruction office as primary evidence, cross-referenced against photographs and salvaged fabric. UNESCO inscribed the district on the World Heritage List in 1980 — not despite the reconstruction but, in the committee's own framing, as an outstanding example of one.

The decision is worth pausing on, because on the face of it the listing is incoherent. The criteria protect authenticity, and a district rebuilt from new materials, after an interval in which it did not exist, would seem to be the one thing that cannot be authentic. UNESCO's own documentation concedes the strain, noting that authenticity here cannot be applied in its strict sense. And yet almost nobody standing in the Rynek experiences the square as a replica, which suggests either that a great many people are confused, or that authenticity is not quite what they assume it is.

Philosophy has a long-running argument about exactly this, conducted mostly about persons rather than about buildings, and it has not produced a winner. What it has produced is a set of positions, each of which explains something the others cannot, and each of which breaks somewhere.

The most intuitive is **psychological continuity**: what makes someone the same person over time is an unbroken chain of mental life — memory above all, but also intention, character, and the sense of looking out from behind the same eyes. The appeal is obvious. It tracks what people actually care about when they fear dementia or amnesia; the dread is not of bodily discontinuity but of a severed thread. It also explains why we hold adults responsible for what they did at twenty and feel some unease about holding them responsible for what they did at six.

The difficulty is arithmetical. Memory chains are not transitive. A woman of ninety may remember her thirties clearly and recall nothing whatsoever of her childhood; the woman she was at thirty remembered the child perfectly well. If identity travels along the chain, she is identical to her thirty-year-old self, who is identical to the child — and so she must be identical to a child she cannot reach. If identity does not travel along the chain, then identity is not what the chain carries. The theory survives this, but only by being reformulated into something considerably less intuitive than the version that attracted us.

A more radical response accepts the fragmentation and denies that there was ever anything there to fragment. On the **bundle view**, there is no persisting self underneath the succession of states — no thread, only beads. Introspection, the argument runs, never discovers a self; it discovers a perception, a mood, a thought. The self is a grammatical convenience that has been mistaken for a discovery.

continues —



**4 original c2 reading (continued)**

This has the considerable virtue of explaining why the question is so hard: it is hard because it is malformed. But the cost is that almost every practice we have presupposes the thing the view denies. Promising, punishing, grieving, saving for retirement — each assumes a subject who persists to be bound, blamed, missed or rewarded. A theory that leaves our entire moral vocabulary resting on a grammatical error is not thereby refuted, but it has set itself a steep bill.

Against both, **biological continuity** offers simplicity: the thing that persists is the organism. No chain of memory is required, because the question was never about minds. This handles the cases the psychological view strains over — the patient in a persistent vegetative state remains the person their family visits — and it has the merit of not requiring a theory of consciousness in order to settle a question about a body.

What it cannot do is explain the intuition that most forcefully generates the problem. If a procedure transferred every memory, disposition and intention into another organism, the biological view must say that the person remained with the original body, now blank. Few people, invited to undergo the procedure, would feel reassured by this. The theory is coherent; it simply declines to take seriously the thing that made anyone ask.

Essentialism takes the opposite route, distinguishing properties a thing can lose from those it cannot. A ship may lose its paint and remain the ship; lose its purpose, perhaps not. Applied to Warsaw, the question becomes which properties of the Old Town were essential — the original brick, the form, the position on the escarpment, the continuity of use. If the essential properties survived the dynamite, the district did too.

The objection is that nothing in the theory tells us which properties are essential. The distinction is real but the criterion is missing, and in practice the essential properties are identified by first deciding whether the thing survived and then reverse-engineering a list that produces the desired verdict. The theory therefore functions less as a test than as a record of a judgement already made on other grounds.

continues →**4 original c2 reading (continued)**

The **temporal parts** view attempts to dissolve the problem rather than solve it. Objects, on this account, are extended through time as well as space, in the way that a road is extended through a country. The Old Town of 1939 and the Old Town of 1965 are not two candidates competing for a single title; they are two stages of one four-dimensional object, as the eastern and western ends of a road are two parts of one road. Asked which is the real one, the view replies that the question is as confused as asking which end of the road is really the road.

Elegant, and genuinely clarifying about the ship. But it relocates the difficulty rather than removing it. The question of which temporal stages compose a single object is precisely the question we started with, now asked in a new vocabulary. And the Warsaw case introduces a complication the ship never did: a gap. The ship was continuously present throughout its gradual replacement; the Old Town, for a period, was not there at all. A road with a mile missing from its middle is a hard case for roads, too.

That gap is the point at which every one of these positions is most exposed, and it is worth being precise about why. Gradual replacement, as in the ship, at least offers a continuous path along which identity might be thought to travel. Destruction and reconstruction offer no path. If the district that stands today is the same district, it is the same across an interval in which nothing physical connected the two. Whatever is doing the work there is not continuity of matter, and it is not an unbroken process. It is something closer to intention — the rebuilding was undertaken precisely in order that it should be the same place — combined with the acquiescence of everyone who agreed to treat it as such.

Which raises a possibility more unsettling than any of the five positions. It may be that re-identification is not a matter of tracking a fact about the object at all. The committee that inscribed Warsaw was not discovering that the district had survived; it was ratifying a decision already taken by the people who rebuilt it and the people who live in it. If that is right, then every theory above is attempting to systematise something that was never a discovery, and the disagreement between them is not a disagreement about the world.

The difficulty is that this cannot be quite right either. The claim that identity is conferred rather than found would make it impossible to be mistaken about it, and we plainly think we can be — a forgery is not the painting, however convinced its owner. Something must constrain the decision, even if nothing determines it. What that something is, none of these positions has yet said.



5

reading comprehension & synthesis**Part D is mandatory and requires both the article and the video.** 14–16 minutes**Part A — Comprehension**

1. What does the article identify as the difficulty facing psychological continuity, and why does it call that difficulty “arithmetical”?
2. The bundle view is said to have “set itself a steep bill.” What is the bill?
3. According to the article, what does biological continuity handle well, and what does it decline to take seriously?
4. Why does the article say essentialism functions “less as a test than as a record of a judgement already made”?

Part B — Inference and Assumption

1. The temporal parts view is described as relocating the difficulty rather than removing it. What unstated assumption does that criticism depend on?
2. The article says the Warsaw case introduces “a complication the ship never did.” State the complication, and explain why it is harder than gradual replacement.
3. The closing paragraph rejects the view that identity is simply conferred. The argument turns on forgery. Reconstruct it: what does the forgery example prove, and what does it not prove?

Part C — Author Stance

1. Where does the article’s own sympathy lie? Point to specific linguistic evidence — hedging, the order in which positions appear, how much space each receives, and where the objection to each is placed.
2. The article never answers the question it raises. Is this the same move the video makes, or a different one? Justify the distinction.

Part D — Cross-Source Synthesis (mandatory)

1. Which of the article’s five positions does the video’s “gradual change” argument actually rely on? It is not stated in either source — you must work it out.
2. The article’s hard case (Warsaw) and the video’s rebuilt ship test different things. What does each expose that the other cannot?





6 listening studio: two experts disagree

These two speakers agree about a great deal. Your task is to find exactly where they stop agreeing . 15–18minutes

Before you listen. This is not a debate. Both speakers accept the same starting premise and then diverge on what follows from it. Listen for the moment one of them *narrows* their own claim rather than defending it.

Dr. Imogen Reyes

Philosopher of mind

Personal identity, psychological continuity, the role of social practice

Dr. Tobias Lindgren

Conservation theorist

Historic fabric, restoration ethics, the evidential value of original material

Part A — Locating the Disagreement

For each statement, mark whether Reyes would accept it, Lindgren would accept it, or **both** would. At least one is accepted by both.

STATEMENT	REYES	LINDGREN
<i>A thing can survive the gradual replacement of all its material parts.</i>		
<i>Reassembling the original discarded parts produces a reconstruction, not the original thing.</i>		
<i>Original material carries evidence that a repaired object has permanently lost.</i>		
<i>Where material continuity is destroyed completely, practice and intention can carry identity instead.</i>		
<i>If a community treats a thing as continuous, that settles the matter.</i>		

Part B — Argument Mapping

ELEMENT	YOUR ANSWER
The shared premise What both accept before diverging	
The point of divergence The exact claim they stop agreeing on	
The reason for it What each thinks carries identity through change	
The narrowing Which speaker revises a claim, and into what	



**6 listening studio (continued)****Part C—Implied Meaning**

1. Reyes says “I wasn’t going to say so quite that directly,” and Lindgren replies “You were going to let me get there.” What has just happened in the argument, and what does the exchange tell you about how Reyes has been conducting it?
2. Lindgren says Reyes’s position “sounds very close to admitting you need something like a record after all.” He does not say she is wrong. What is he actually suggesting, and why does he leave it unstated?

Part D — Evaluation

1. Lindgren concedes that narrowing his claim “costs me the rebuilt ship.” Explain why it does — what exactly has he given up by admitting the Warsaw exception?
2. Whose position survives the rebuilt-ship twist better, once both have been revised? Note that this is not the same as asking whose position you prefer.

Part E — Synthesis

1. Reyes’s “unbroken practice” account and the article’s closing suggestion that identity may be “conferred rather than found” are not the same claim. Where do they come apart?





7

argumentation language in context

These are not grammar exercises. They are the instruments this lesson's reasoning requires. 12–15 minutes..

STRUCTURE	THE JOB IT DOES HERE
Third conditional	Testing what would have been true under different circumstances Linking a
Mixed conditional	past change to a present identity claim
Modal deduction must be, cannot be, might well be	Expressing degrees of certainty about a claim that cannot be verified
Hedging it would seem, arguably, to the extent that	Making a claim you can actually defend
Cleft sentences What matters is..., It is precisely the gradualness that...	Placing emphasis on the contested element
Discourse markers granted, that said, insofar as, on that reading	Signalling concession, restriction and interpretation

Part A — Recognition in Context

Find one example of each structure in the article or the listening script. For each, state **what argumentative work it is doing** — naming the form is not an answer.

Part B — Precision Task

Each pair differs only in structure. State precisely how the claim changes.

1. "If the parts *had been* replaced all at once, it would not have been the same ship." / "If the parts *were* replaced all at once, it would not be the same ship."
2. "It *cannot be* the same district." / "It *might well not be* the same district."
3. "Practice carries identity." / "*What* carries identity is practice."
4. "He is a different person." / "*Insofar as* his values define him, he is a different person."

Part C — Reformulation

Each claim below is indefensible as stated. Rewrite each so that it becomes defensible, using hedging, modal deduction or restriction.

1. "You are not the same person you were ten years ago."
2. "A rebuilt building is obviously a fake."
3. "Memory is what makes you who you are."
4. "If every part is replaced, it is a different object. That is simply a fact."
5. "Identity is just whatever society decides it is."

Part D — Productive Use

Return to Marek. State your position now, using at least **four** of the six structures accurately and without strain.



8

advanced writing: comparative evaluation

12–15 minutes.

Part A — The Move

Comparative evaluation is not opinion-plus-reasons. Opinion-plus-reasons selects a position and recruits support for it. Comparative evaluation sets out two positions, establishes what each genuinely explains, establishes what each cannot, and identifies the remainder that neither accounts for. Declining to crown a winner is not evasion: where two theories each explain part of a case and neither explains all of it, announcing a winner misdescribes the evidence. The discipline is in naming the remainder precisely, rather than suppressing it to reach a tidier conclusion.

Part B — Model Analysis

“Consider a string quartet that, over forty years, has replaced all four players, changed its repertoire entirely, and now performs on modern instruments its founders refused to use. Psychological continuity has no purchase here — there is no mind to be continuous — but its institutional analogue does: an unbroken chain of rehearsal, transmitted interpretive habit, each player taught by the one they replaced. That explains why audiences experience the ensemble as the same quartet, and it explains it better than any account resting on material constitution, since no material whatever has survived. What it cannot explain is the discomfort that persists anyway. Had the four replacements happened simultaneously rather than across decades, few would call it the same quartet, yet the chain of transmission would be equally unbroken at every link. It is precisely the gradualness, not the transmission, that seems to be doing the work — and gradualness is a fact about our tolerance, not about the ensemble. Neither account, then, reaches the thing that actually moves our judgement here; and to the extent that this is right, the question of what the quartet is may be less settled than the confidence of audiences suggests.”

1. Identify the five structural moves: the case, Theory A’s strength, Theory B’s strength, the remainder, the qualified conclusion.
2. Locate the cleft sentence and the third conditional. What is each doing?
3. The paragraph never names a winner. Explain why that is a position rather than an evasion here.



**8 advanced writing (continued)****Part C—Guided Editing**

This paragraph asserts rather than evaluates. Diagnose at least four distinct failures, then rewrite it to the standard of Part B.

"I think the football club is definitely still the same club. Obviously the fans still support it and that is the most important thing about a club. Some people say the name and stadium matter but they are wrong. A club is really about its supporters, so as long as they are there nothing else matters at all. This proves that identity is about community and the other theory is clearly false."

Part D — Independent Writing

Choose **one** hard case. Evaluate **two** competing theories of identity against it.

- A.** A football club that has changed its stadium, owners, players, manager, colours and name — and whose supporters are largely the descendants of the original ones.
- B.** A language whose vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation have all shifted so far that its modern speakers cannot understand its earlier form at all.
- C.** A person whose memories of their first thirty years have been entirely erased, but whose body, temperament and relationships continue unchanged.

Required structure: (1) state the case and why it is genuinely hard; (2) Theory A — what it explains well here; (3) Theory B — what it explains well here; (4) what **neither** accounts for; (5) a qualified conclusion stating the conditions under which it would change.

Non-negotiable: draw on at least two lesson sources (article, video, listening); use at minimum hedging, one conditional structure and one cleft from Section 7; do **not** declare a clean winner. A conclusion that resolves the case without remainder has misunderstood the task.





9

critical thinking challenge**the main focus of this lesson. You will commit to a position, then be required to argue against it. 25–30 minutes**

The scenario. The ship Theseus sailed home has stood in the harbour for a thousand years. Each worn plank, oar and spar was replaced as it failed, with an identical piece of the same material, until no original timber remained. The ship has been sailed every year of that millennium.

Unknown to the city, a shipwright collected every discarded plank as it was removed. He has now reassembled them — all original material, in its original configuration. Two ships exist. Both are seaworthy. Both are called the Ship of Theseus.

Which ship, if either, is the Ship of Theseus?

ROUND 1 — COMMIT AND NAME THE PRINCIPLE

State your position **and name the principle it rests on** — continuity of form, continuity of matter, the role of intention, unbroken function, or something else you specify. This is not optional: a position without a stated principle cannot be tested, and testing it is the point of the next three rounds.

Defend the position for approximately two minutes under follow-up questioning.

ROUND 2 — ARGUE THE OPPOSITE

Now argue **against your own position**, advocating the alternative. You may not simply invert your Round 1 points. Construct genuinely new reasoning — which requires understanding the opposing case from the inside rather than caricaturing it.

ROUND 3 — THE PRINCIPLE UNDER PRESSURE

Your teacher will now test the principle you named in Round 1 against a case it does not comfortably handle. The counter example is drawn from this lesson's own material and is not a trick.

Does the principle survive, does it need narrowing, or does it fail? You must either revise it or explain precisely why the counter example does not apply. **Restating your original position is not an acceptable response.**

ROUND 4 — RECONCILE AND QUALIFY

Reconcile the strongest arguments from both sides. State a final **qualified** position. Specify the conditions under which it would change. Acknowledge what remains unresolved.

A final position that merely restates your Round 1 commitment does not meet the standard.

LANGUAGE DEMANDS

Sustained use of concession, restriction, probability, qualification, evidence and reformulation — the structures from Section 7, used under pressure rather than practised.



10

final reflection**No correct answer, and no assessment.** 3–5 minutes

Think of something in your own life that has changed so much it might no longer be the same thing — a relationship, a city, a belief, or yourself. What, if anything, has held it together?

“Everything about a thing can change, and still we insist on calling it the same. The question is what we are pointing at when we do.”

**mini project: homework**

Task. Prepare a 3-minute spoken argument on this claim:

“A person who shares none of their former beliefs, memories, or relationships is, for all meaningful purposes, a different person.”

Your argument must:

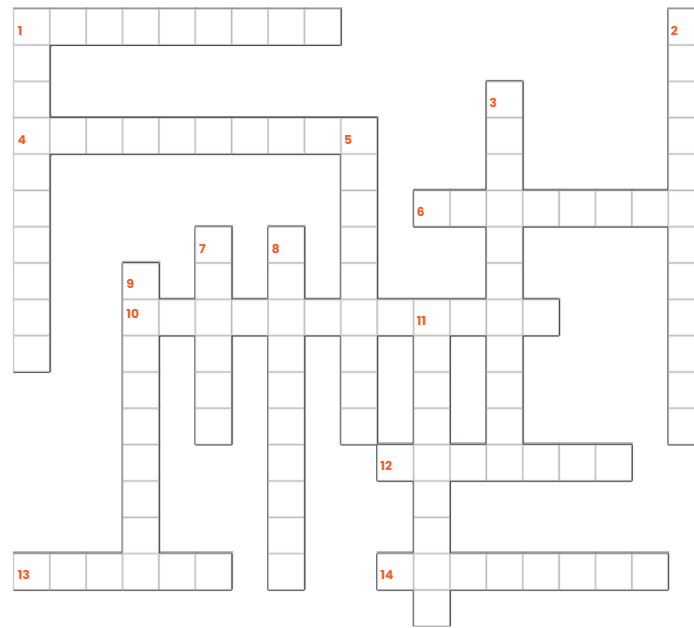
- take a clear position and **name the principle it rests on**
- draw on at least **two** lesson sources
- use a minimum of **six** lesson vocabulary items accurately
- include one counterexample to your own position, and respond to it
- end with a qualified conclusion, not a decisive one

20–30 minutes. No answer key.



**vocabulary crossword**

Review. Every answer is a term from this lesson.

**ACROSS**

1. A standard by which a judgement is made (9)
4. Describes a relation that carries along a chain (10)
6. To make a problem disappear rather than solve it (8)
10. Being genuine rather than merely a copy (12)
12. Cut through; used of a broken thread of memory (7)
13. ___ view: there is no persisting self, only connected states (6)
14. ___ parts: a thing extended through time as well as space (8)

DOWN

1. Anunbroken process or connection over time (10)
2. Quiet acceptance without active objection (12)
3. The fact of continuing to exist as the same entity (11)
5. Describes a property a thing cannot lose and remain itself (9)
7. To formally approve a decision already taken (6)
8. To assume something in advance as a condition (10)
9. Badly constructed; of a question, incapable of a clean answer (9)
11. Granted or bestowed rather than discovered (9)



 **Video Transcript**

Throughout the history of mankind, three little words have sent poets to the blank page, philosophers to the Agora, and seekers to the oracles: “Who am I?” From the ancient Greek aphorism inscribed on the Temple of Apollo, “Know thyself,” to The Who’s rock anthem, “Who Are You?” philosophers, psychologists, academics, scientists, artists, theologians and politicians have all tackled the subject of identity. Their hypotheses are widely varied and lack significant consensus. These are smart, creative people, so what’s so hard about coming up with the right answer?

One challenge certainly lies with the complex concept of the persistence of identity. Which you is who? The person you are today? Five years ago? Who you’ll be in 50 years? And when is “am”? This week? Today? This hour? This second? And which aspect of you is “I”? Are you your physical body? Your thoughts and feelings? Your actions? These murky waters of abstract logic are tricky to navigate, and so it’s probably fitting that to demonstrate the complexity, the Greek historian Plutarch used the story of a ship.

As the tale goes, Theseus, the mythical founder King of Athens, single-handedly slayed the evil Minotaur at Crete, then returned home on a ship. To honor this heroic feat, for 1000 years Athenians painstakingly maintained his ship in the harbor, and annually reenacted his voyage. Whenever a part of the ship was worn or damaged, it was replaced with an identical piece of the same material until, at some point, no original parts remained. Plutarch noted the Ship of Theseus was an example of the philosophical paradox revolving around the persistence of identity. How can every single part of something be replaced, yet it still remains the same thing?

Let’s imagine there are two ships: the ship that Theseus docked in Athens, Ship A, and the ship sailed by the Athenians 1000 years later, Ship B. Very simply, our question is this: does A equal B? Some would say that for 1000 years there has been only one Ship of Theseus, and because the changes made to it happened gradually, it never at any point in time stopped being the legendary ship. Though they have absolutely no parts in common, the two ships are numerically identical, meaning one and the same, so A equals B. However, others could argue that Theseus never set foot on Ship B, and his presence on the ship is an essential qualitative property of the Ship of Theseus. It cannot survive without him. So, though the two ships are numerically identical, they are not qualitatively identical. Thus, A does not equal B.

But what happens when we consider this twist? What if, as each piece of the original ship was cast off, somebody collected them all, and rebuilt the entire original ship? When it was finished, undeniably two physical ships would exist: the one that’s docked in Athens, and the one in some guy’s backyard. Each could lay claim to the title, “The Ship of Theseus,” but only one could actually be the real thing. So which one is it, and more importantly, what does this have to do with you?

Like the Ship of Theseus, you are a collection of constantly changing parts: your physical body, mind, emotions, circumstances, and even your quirks, always changing, but still in an amazing and sometimes illogical way, you stay the same, too. This is one of the reasons that the question, “Who am I?” is so complex. And in order to answer it, like so many great minds before you, you must be willing to dive into the bottomless ocean of philosophical paradox. Or maybe you could just answer, “I am a legendary hero sailing a powerful ship on an epic journey.” That could work, too.



 **Listening Studio Transcript**

Imogen: Can I start by conceding something, because I think it clears the ground. The crude materialist answer — that the ship is its planks, and once the planks go the ship goes — I don't hold that, and I don't think you do either.

Tobias: No, I don't. Nobody working in conservation could. Every historic building on the register has been repaired. If replacing fabric destroyed identity, we'd have almost nothing left to protect.

Imogen: Right. So we agree the thing persists through change. Gradual replacement, continuity of use, continuity of form — the ship that sails out after a thousand years of repairs is the ship.

Tobias: Agreed, with one qualification I'll come back to.

Imogen: Noted. But that's the shared starting point, and I want to be clear about it, because people assume this is a debate between materialists and non-materialists and it really isn't.

Tobias: No. The interesting disagreement starts later.

Imogen: It starts at the rebuilt ship. If someone collects the discarded planks and reassembles them, I'd say the thing in the backyard is a reconstruction. A very interesting one. Not the ship.

Tobias: And that's where I'd part company with you, though not as sharply as you might expect.

Imogen: Go on.

Tobias: My reason isn't that the original matter has some mystical claim. It's that the original matter carries information that nothing else carries. Tool marks. Wear patterns. Evidence of how it was actually made and used. When you reassemble those planks, you recover something the continuously-repaired ship has entirely lost.

Imogen: That's a real point, and I'd accept it as far as it goes. But recovering evidence isn't the same as being the thing. A museum that holds every surviving fragment of a lost altarpiece possesses the evidence. It doesn't possess the altarpiece.

Tobias: It would seem that way, yes. Although — and this is the qualification I flagged — I'd want to distinguish between fragments that have simply been preserved and fragments that have been reassembled into working order. The altarpiece in pieces is evidence. The altarpiece reassembled is arguably something more.

Imogen: Arguably. I'd push back on "working order" doing that much work. If I reassemble it and it functions, have I restored the thing, or have I built a new thing out of old parts?

Tobias: That's precisely the question, and I'm not certain I can answer it cleanly.

Imogen: Nor can I, to be fair. But let me say where I think my view has the advantage. On my account, what makes the repaired ship the ship isn't the planks at any given moment. It's an unbroken practice — people maintaining it, sailing it, treating it as continuous. That's not nothing. It's a real historical process you could document year by year.

Tobias: And on mine, it's the material record. So the divergence is quite precise, isn't it. We agree the thing survives change. We disagree about what is actually carrying the identity through the change.

Imogen: That's exactly it. Practice versus fabric.

Tobias: And it generalises uncomfortably well. Apply it to persons and your account says what makes someone the same person is an unbroken practice of being treated as continuous — by themselves, by everyone around them.

 **Listening Studio Transcript (continued)**

Imogen: It does say roughly that, yes, and I'm less troubled by it than you'd expect. The alternative is to locate personal identity in the matter, and the matter turns over completely every few years. Nobody seriously thinks a severed thread of memory is repaired by the atoms staying put.

Tobias: No. Though I'd note you've just made my Warsaw problem your problem. If the thread is severed — genuinely severed, not merely thinned — your practice carries on regardless. The family keeps treating them as the same person.

Imogen: They do. And I think that is the same person, for reasons I'd struggle to make precise.

Tobias: Which is testable, in a way. Take a case where the two come apart badly. Warsaw's Old Town. No material continuity at all — new brick, and an interval where the district simply wasn't there. By your account it survives, because the practice resumed and the intention was explicitly to continue it.

Imogen: Yes, and I'd defend that.

Tobias: And on mine it's harder. I'd have to say something uncomfortable — either that it's a very fine reconstruction and not the original district, which almost nobody who lives there would accept, or that I narrow my claim.

Imogen: Will you narrow it?

Tobias: I think I have to. Let me restate it: material continuity carries identity where it is available. Where it has been destroyed entirely, practice and intention can carry it instead, but they're doing a weaker job and we should say so rather than pretending the loss didn't happen.

Imogen: That's a more defensible position than the one you started with.

Tobias: It is. It also costs me the rebuilt ship, doesn't it. If practice can carry identity when matter is gone, then practice is doing real work, and the continuously-repaired ship has a thousand years of it.

Imogen: I wasn't going to say so quite that directly.

Tobias: You were going to let me get there.

Imogen: I was hoping.

Tobias: Granted. Though I'd note that your account has its own difficulty, which you've been quiet about. Practice can be faked. A community can decide to treat something as continuous when it plainly isn't — a theme-park reproduction, a brand revived forty years after the company folded. If practice is sufficient, you have no way to call that a mistake. **Imogen:**

That's the strongest objection to my view and I don't have a clean answer. The best I can say is that practice has to be answerable to something — there has to be a real historical connection it's tracking, even if the connection isn't material.

Tobias: Which sounds very close to admitting you need something like a record after all.

Imogen: It sounds close. Whether it collapses into your position is, I think, genuinely unsettled.

Tobias: Then we've located it, at least. Not whether things survive change — they do. What carries them through, and whether anything constrains the answer.



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