

Course memo Autumn 2026

AK2018 Advanced Course in Research Ethics, 4.5 credits

Headings marked with an asterisk (*) are retrieved from the course syllabus. The remaining sections describe this course offering.

Course offering

Autumn 2026 (start date 26 October 2026, English). The course runs until 11 January 2027 in period 2, at 25 % study pace.

Language of instruction

English. You may write your assignments and essay in English or Swedish.

Offered by

ABE/Philosophy

Content and learning outcomes

Course contents *

This course develops themes that were introduced in AK2017 Introduction to research ethics. The focus is on problems that the students choose for their individual project tasks.

Intended learning outcomes *

After the course the student should be able to describe and discuss research ethical problems in her own subject area independently. The student should also be able to provide a nuanced account of different possible approaches to specific problems, and should be able to analyze and discuss ethical arguments in relation to these different approaches.

Learning activities

This is an independent study course. You write one essay on a research ethical problem in your own field, and you work towards it in three checkpoints. The course has no lectures. It has written feedback from the teacher on the first two checkpoints, a peer review of a fellow student's draft, a handwritten journal in which your own thinking can be followed, and an individual oral examination on your essay in January.

Overview

1. **Checkpoint 1:** an analysis of one research ethics article, and your topic and question.
2. **Checkpoint 2:** three sources on your topic, summarised, and an outline of your argument.
3. **Checkpoint 3:** a complete draft, which one fellow student reviews.
4. **Final essay** of 2,500–3,000 words with a short process note, submitted 4 January.

5. **Oral examination** on your essay, 7 or 8 January.

Pedagogical approach

The essay is written in steps, and each step is an earlier version of the same text. The teacher comments in writing on checkpoints 1 and 2, when it is still easy to change your question and your argument. The draft at checkpoint 3 is read by a fellow student, not by the teacher, so that the teacher's first reading of your essay is the one that is graded. The checkpoints are never assessed for quality; they only need to be complete. Alongside the text you keep a handwritten journal, where your own thinking takes shape and can be followed, whatever tools you use for writing.

Expected workload

The course is 4.5 credits, which corresponds to about 120 hours of work. The figures are planning values.

Part	Hours
Getting started: the writing guide and choosing a topic	9
Checkpoint 1: article analysis	8
Checkpoint 1: topic and question	4
Journal, one spread a week	8
Literature search and reading for the essay	22
Checkpoint 2: three source summaries	8
Checkpoint 2: outline	6
Checkpoint 3: draft	25
Peer review	3
Final revision and process note	21
Preparing for and taking the oral examination	6
Total	120

Detailed plan

All submissions are made in Canvas, as PDF. The course room is AK2018 in Canvas, which you reach through the Personal menu on kth.se.

The essay

The essay deals with a research ethical problem that could arise in your own subject area. It should

- state a clear question about a specific problem or case;
- present at least two different approaches to the problem, fairly and in some detail;
- defend an answer, the essay's main claim, with arguments;
- consider the strongest objection to the claim and reply to it;
- end with a clearly stated conclusion.

Topic. You choose the topic yourself. A list of suggested topics with readings is attached at the end of this memo. You can change topic up to checkpoint 2. After that, check with the teacher first.

Form. 2,500–3,000 words, counting the main text and footnotes but not the title, reference list or process note. References in an established system, for example APA or Harvard. Your name and the

title at the top. Submitted as PDF. Plagiarism is not allowed: when you use someone else's text or ideas, give the source.

Journal

Throughout the course you keep a handwritten journal on paper, in a notebook, with one spread a week from the week of 2 November until the final submission. That makes about nine spreads. Date each spread.

- **Your thinking:** you work out your question, your main claim, the approaches you compare and your reply to the objection in the journal, so that it can be followed there. What you then submit at a checkpoint you transfer to the checkpoint's text.
- **Revision plan:** directly after you have read the teacher's comments on checkpoints 1 and 2, and the peer review of your draft, you write three points: what you will change, what you will not change and why, and your next step.
- **Submission:** at each checkpoint and at the final submission you photograph the spreads written since last time and upload them as a separate PDF in the same Canvas submission, for example with your phone's scanning function.
- **Assessment:** the journal counts as submitted when you upload the spreads written since last time. A missing weekly spread, for example because you have been ill, does not make a checkpoint incomplete. The journal is your own working tool, and the teacher does not read it. Bring it to the oral examination.

Checkpoint 1: article and question

Submit by **Thursday 12 November, 23.59:**

1. **Article analysis, 1–2 pages.** Read Rothman (1991), *The ethics of research sponsorship*, and answer:
 - What is Rothman's main claim?
 - Give a detailed account of one of the arguments he offers for it, including any implicit premises needed to make the argument valid.
 - Do you find the argument convincing? Why or why not?
2. **Topic and question, at most one page:** your topic and why it is a research ethical problem in your field (3–4 sentences), your question, and your preliminary answer to it.

Before you write, read Rippon (2008), *A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper*, listed under *Literature*.

The teacher gives at most three written comments in Canvas by **Friday 20 November**.

Checkpoint 2: sources and outline

Submit by **Thursday 26 November, 23.59:**

1. **Three sources** on your topic: scholarly articles, book chapters or, for a recent case, serious news articles. Summarise each in about 300 words: the author's main claims, the arguments for them, and whether you find the arguments convincing. The readings in the topic list count. Useful places to search are PhilPapers, the journal *Science and Engineering Ethics* and Google Scholar.

2. **An outline** of the essay: the aim, the main claim, the approaches you will compare, the arguments that support your claim, the strongest objection and your reply. One line per section on what the section does for the argument.

The teacher gives at most three written comments in Canvas, mainly on the outline, by **Wednesday 2 December**.

Checkpoint 3: draft and peer review

Submit by **Thursday 10 December, 23.59** a complete but rough draft: all sections and the whole argument, at least 1,800 words, with the uncertain parts marked. Add 2–3 questions you want your reader to answer.

After the deadline, Canvas assigns you one fellow student's draft; you find it under *Peer Reviews* in the assignment. **By Tuesday 15 December, 23.59**, add your peer review there as a comment with an attached file of about one page. It answers:

1. What is the main claim, in one sentence? If you cannot find it, say so.
2. Which argument is the weakest, and why?
3. Is the strongest objection taken seriously, and does the reply hold?
4. Your answers to the writer's own questions.

The teacher does not read or comment on the drafts. If no draft has been assigned to you by Friday 11 December, because too few drafts came in on time, the teacher assigns one when it arrives. If none arrives by 15 December, the peer review requirement lapses for you.

Final essay

Submit by **Monday 4 January 2027, 23.59**:

- the final essay as PDF, with the process note last in the same file;
- the last journal spreads as a separate PDF.

You may submit earlier. The process note is at most one page and answers three questions:

1. How did your question and your main claim change during the work?
2. Which comments did you follow, and which did you not? Why?
3. How have you used AI, and where in the journal did your question and main claim take shape?
See Help and AI.

Oral examination

The oral examination is individual, takes 30 minutes and is held in person in the teacher's office, Teknikringen 76, on **Thursday 7 or Friday 8 January**. In December the teacher posts available times in Canvas, and you book one by email. You present your essay in about five minutes, and then we discuss it: your question and main claim, the approaches you compare, the objection and your reply, and how you reached your position.

Submissions and deadlines

When	What
Thursday 12 November, 23.59	Checkpoint 1: article analysis, topic and question, and journal
Thursday 26 November, 23.59	Checkpoint 2: three source summaries and outline,

	and journal
Thursday 10 December, 23.59	Checkpoint 3: draft and journal
Tuesday 15 December, 23.59	Peer review
Monday 4 January, 23.59	Final essay with process note, and journal
Thursday 7 – Friday 8 January	Oral examination

There are no other scheduled sessions. Between 21 December and 3 January, do not expect answers to email.

Preparations before course start

Specific prerequisites *

Higher education studies comprising 120 ECTS in the areas of natural sciences/technological sciences or equivalent. English proficiency equivalent to Swedish gymnasium English B.

Recommended prerequisites

AK2017 Introduction to research ethics, or an equivalent course.

Registration

Register for the course according to [KTH's instructions on course registration](#); you get access to the Canvas room when you are registered. You need a notebook for the journal.

Literature

- Rippon, S. (2008). *A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper*. Harvard College Writing Center. <https://writingprogram.fas.harvard.edu/sites/g/files/omnuum4511/files/2025-11/BG%20Writing%20Philosophy.pdf>
- Rothman, K. J. (1991). The ethics of research sponsorship. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology* 44(Suppl. 1), 25S–28S. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0895-4356\(91\)90171-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0895-4356(91)90171-5)
- Swedish Research Council (2024). [Good Research Practice](#). Free PDF; use it as a reference for the rules and principles that apply to research in Sweden.
- The readings for your topic: from the topic list, or the sources you find for checkpoint 2.

All three texts are also available in the Canvas room.

Support for students with disabilities

If you have a documented, permanent disability, you can apply for support through [Funka](#). Contact the course coordinator in good time if approved support needs to be taken into account in the course. A student entitled to support may, for example, keep the journal digitally or as voice notes.

Examination and completion

Grading scale *

A, B, C, D, E, FX, F

Examination *

- INL1 - Assignment, 3.0 credits, grading scale: A, B, C, D, E, FX, F
- TEN1 - Examination, 1.5 credits, grading scale: P, F

Based on recommendation from KTH's coordinator for disabilities, the examiner will decide how to adapt an examination for students with documented disability.

The examiner may apply another examination format when re-examining individual students.

If the course is discontinued, students may request to be examined during the following two academic years.

Other requirements for final grade *

Exam (TEN1, 1.5 credits), Pass/Fail. Written assignment (INL1, 3 credits), A-F.

Requirements for this course offering

INL1 – Assignment, 3.0 credits

INL1 is the final essay. It is graded A–F according to the grading criteria below. The form requirements are checked first. If the essay does not meet them, you are told by Wednesday 6 January and can complete it within one week.

TEN1 – Examination, 1.5 credits

For a pass (P) you need to have

- submitted checkpoints 1, 2 and 3 in full, each with the journal spreads written since the previous submission,
- submitted the journal spreads with the final essay,
- submitted a peer review, and
- passed the oral examination.

The checkpoints, the journal and the peer review are assessed only for completeness. The oral examination is passed when you can present the essay, explain and defend its main claim and arguments, account for the approaches you compare, and answer questions about how you reached your position.

Grading criteria for the essay

The requirements under *The essay* apply to all grades. The criteria are cumulative: each grade also requires what is required for the grades below it.

- **E:** Correct language. Clear references and quotations, and a correct reference list. A clear question and a clearly stated conclusion. An adequate account of at least two approaches to the problem.
- **D:** An adequate and independent (1) account of the arguments and positions in the literature used. A well-functioning structure.
- **C:** Considered and consistent terminology. A nuanced account of the approaches, including where they differ and why.
- **B:** Independence in claims, arguments, interpretation and assessment of the soundness and validity of your own and others' arguments.
- **A:** Excellent on all criteria.

(1) An *independent* account means that you analyse and apply arguments from the literature to your own question, argue with your own examples, let your own voice be clear, and propose how the problem could be analysed or solved.

An essay that lacks a clear question, a main claim, a considered objection or a conclusion does not reach E.

Final grade

When INL1 is graded and TEN1 is passed, you receive a final grade for the course. The final grade is the grade on INL1. Grades are reported in Ladok by Friday 29 January 2027.

Completion and re-examination

- **FX:** an essay that is close to E but falls short on one criterion receives FX. You may complete it within two weeks of the decision; an approved completion gives E.
- **Late or missing checkpoints:** submit as soon as you can. Feedback on a late checkpoint may come later or not at all. Everything must be submitted by Monday 1 February 2027.
- **Oral examination:** if you are ill on 7–8 January, we book a new time, at the latest 1 February. If you do not pass, you get one new attempt, at the latest 1 February.
- **After 1 February:** what is missing is examined at the next course offering.

Help and AI

You may use AI tools when you work on the essay, including to formulate and translate text. The thinking must be your own: the question, the main claim, the choice of approaches and the reply to the objection are worked out in your journal, and it should be possible to follow them there. In the process note you account for how you used AI and where in the journal your question and main claim took shape. You are responsible for all content, including references, which must be checked against the actual sources. End each submission with a line on the help you received from people or AI tools and how you used it. "I have not used AI or other help" is a complete answer when it is true. In the oral examination you must be able to explain and defend everything in the essay.

The course allows AI because the essay is meant to show your reasoning, not your prose, and the oral examination tests that reasoning directly. **Not permitted:** submitting arguments you cannot explain, presenting AI-generated text or ideas as your own without disclosing it, and citing references you have not checked. This may be treated as cheating and reported to KTH's disciplinary board.

Ethical approach *

- All members of a group are responsible for the group's work.
- In any assessment, every student shall honestly disclose any help received and sources used.
- In an oral assessment, every student shall be able to present and answer questions about the entire assignment and solution.

Contacts

Communication during the course

Email questions about the course to Per Wikman Svahn, per.wikman@abe.kth.se, with AK2018 in the subject line. Expect an answer within two working days, except over Christmas and New Year.

Administrative questions about admission, registration and results go to kursexp@abe.kth.se.

Course coordinator and teacher

Per Wikman Svahn

Examiner

John Cantwell

Appendix: suggested essay topics

You may also choose a topic of your own. The readings are starting points; you will need to find newer literature as well.

1. **The ethics of clinical research in low- and middle-income countries.** Angell, M. (1997). The ethics of clinical research in the third world. *New England Journal of Medicine* 337(12), 847–849. Lurie, P. & Wolfe, S. M. (1997). Unethical trials of interventions to reduce perinatal transmission of the human immunodeficiency virus in developing countries. *New England Journal of Medicine* 337(12), 853–855. Varmus, H. & Satcher, D. (1997). Ethical complexities of conducting research in developing countries. *New England Journal of Medicine* 337(14), 1003–1005.
2. **Addressing conflicts of interest in research: what are the alternatives?** Bird, S. J. (1996). Assessing conflict of interest: sources of bias. *Science and Engineering Ethics* 2, 386–388. Steiner, D. (1996). Competing interests: the need to control conflict of interest in biomedical research. *Science and Engineering Ethics* 2, 457–468. Friedman, P. J. (2002). The impact of conflict of interest on trust in science. *Science and Engineering Ethics* 8, 413–420.
3. **Textual re-use: unethical self-plagiarism or appropriate recycling?** Bretag, T. & Mahmud, S. (2009). Self-plagiarism or appropriate textual re-use? *Journal of Academic Ethics* 7, 193–205. Collberg, C. & Kobourov, S. (2005). Self-plagiarism in computer science. *Communications of the ACM* 48(4), 88–94.
4. **Dual-use dilemmas and the limits of social responsibility.** Badash, L. (2004). Science and social responsibility. *Minerva* 42, 285–298. Miller, S. & Selgelid, M. J. (2007). Ethical and philosophical consideration of the dual-use dilemma in the biological sciences. *Science and Engineering Ethics* 13, 523–580.
5. **Informed consent for patients lacking decision-making capacity.** Beauchamp, T. L. & Childress, J. F. (2013). *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (7th ed.). Oxford University Press. Buchanan, A. E. & Brock, D. W. (1989). *Deciding for Others: The Ethics of Surrogate Decision Making*. Cambridge University Press. Jaworska, A. (2009). Advance directives and substitute decision-making. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
6. **Should we pay people to participate in research?** Wilkinson, M. & Moore, A. (1997). Inducement in research. *Bioethics* 11(5), 373–389. McNeill, P. (1997). Paying people to

participate in research: why not? *Bioethics* 11(5), 390–396. Wilkinson, M. & Moore, A. (1999). Inducements revisited. *Bioethics* 13(2), 114–130.

7. **Sharing research data: moral obligations and limitations.** Langat, P. et al. (2011). Is there a duty to share? Ethics of sharing research data in the context of public health emergencies. *Public Health Ethics* 4(1), 4–11. Piwowar, H. A. et al. (2008). Towards a data sharing culture. *PLoS Medicine* 5(9), 1315–1319.
8. **Misconduct by senior colleagues: when should a junior researcher blow the whistle?** Couzin, J. (2006). Truth and consequences. *Science* 313, 1222–1226. Malek, J. (2010). To tell or not to tell? The ethical dilemma of the would-be whistleblower. *Accountability in Research* 17(3), 115–129. Gunsalus, C. K. (1998). How to blow the whistle and still have a career afterwards. *Science and Engineering Ethics* 4, 51–64.
9. **The ethics of geoengineering research.** Morrow, D. R., Kopp, R. E. & Oppenheimer, M. (2009). Toward ethical norms and institutions for climate engineering research. *Environmental Research Letters* 4(4), 045106.