

Contents:

- I. Paper Topics (page 1)
- II. Writing a Philosophy Paper, “do”s and “don’t”s (pages 1-5)
- III. How You’ll Be Graded (pages 5-8, grade rubric included)

LENGTH AND DUE DATE:

- Length: Appx. 1200 words (appx 4 pages, double spaced)
 - Due Date: **MONDAY DECEMBER 10TH**, by 12:00pm
-
- Upload your paper to Assignments in D2L.
 - **PAPER MUST BE .doc OR .docx FILES!**

I. Paper Topic

Choose any one of the writers we have read on abortion (Warren, Marquis, Thomson) and do two things:

- 1) **Fully explain, in detail, the author’s argument for his or her position.**
- 2) **Refute the author’s argument.**

That is, you have to disagree with the author and make the case that the author’s argument is inadequate. Make sure you are crystal clear about how, exactly, the author’s argument goes wrong.

***NOTE:** This is not a research paper. You need not deal with any readings other than the course readings that are relevant to your topic. The purpose of this paper is for you to show that you understand and can critically engage with ideas, not for you to look up and report on what others have said about the ideas. That said, if you think additional sources will help you make your argument, feel free to use them.

***If you do not want to write about abortion and want to construct your own paper topic, you may, but you must check it with me first – by no later than Monday November 19th.**

II. Writing a Philosophy Paper:

(The following is taken mostly from “Writing A Philosophy Paper” by Peter Horban, here: <http://www.sfu.ca/philosophy/resources/writing.html> I have made some changes here and there.)

Good writing is the product of proper training, much practice, and hard work. The following remarks, though they will not guarantee a top quality paper, should help you determine where best to direct your efforts. I offer first some general comments on philosophical writing, and then some specific "do"s and "don't"s.

One of the first points to be clear about is that a philosophical essay is quite different from an essay in most other subjects. That is because it is neither a research paper nor an exercise in literary self-expression. It is not a report of what various scholars have had to say on a particular topic. It does not present the latest findings of tests or experiments. And it does not present your personal feelings or impressions. **Instead, it is a reasoned defense of a thesis.** What does that mean?

Above all, it means that there must be a specific point that you are trying to establish - something that you are trying to convince the reader to accept - together with grounds or justification for its acceptance.

Before you start to write your paper, you should be able to state exactly what it is that you are trying to show. This is harder than it sounds. It simply will not do to have a rough idea of what you want to establish. A rough idea is usually one that is not well worked out, not clearly expressed, and as a result, not likely to be understood. You should be able to state in a single short sentence precisely what you want to prove. If you cannot formulate your thesis this way, odds are you are not clear enough about it.

The next task is to determine how to go about convincing the reader that your thesis is correct. In two words, your method must be that of rational persuasion. You will present arguments. At this point, students frequently make one or more of several common errors. Sometimes they feel that since it is clear to them that their thesis is true, it does not need much argumentation. It is common to overestimate the strength of your own position. That is because you already accept that point of view. But how will your opponent respond? It is safest to assume that your reader is intelligent and knows a lot about your subject, but disagrees with you.

Another common mistake is to think that your case will be stronger if you mention, even if briefly, virtually every argument that you have come across in support of your position. Sometimes this is called the "fortress approach." In actual fact, it is almost certain that the fortress approach will not result in a very good paper. There are several reasons for this.

First, your reader is likely to find it difficult to keep track of so many different arguments, especially if these arguments approach the topic from different directions.

Second, the ones that will stand out will be the very best ones and the very worst ones. It is important to show some discrimination here. Only the most compelling argument should be developed. Including weaker ones only gives the impression that you are unable to tell the difference between the two.

Third, including many different arguments will result in spreading yourself too thinly. It is far better to cover less ground in greater depth than to range further afield in a superficial manner. It will also help to give your paper focus.

In order to produce a good philosophy paper, it is first necessary to think very carefully and

clearly about your topic. Unfortunately, your reader (likely your marker or instructor) has no access to those thoughts except by way of what actually ends up on the page. He or she cannot tell what you meant to say but did not, and cannot read in what you would quickly point out if you were conversing face to face. For better or for worse, your paper is all that is available. It must stand on its own. The responsibility for ensuring the accurate communication of ideas falls on the writer's shoulders. You must say exactly what you mean and in a way that minimizes the chances of being misunderstood. It is difficult to overemphasize this point.

There is no such thing as a piece of good philosophical writing that is unclear, ungrammatical, or unintelligible. Clarity and precision are essential elements here. A poor writing style militates against both of these.

“DO”S AND “DON’T”S FOR WRITING YOUR PHILOSOPHY PAPER

1. **MAKE THE INTRO SHORT AND STATE YOUR THESIS.** As it says above, a philosophy paper is a **reasoned defense of a thesis**. Your **thesis statement** is a statement of the main claim that your paper will seek to establish. Your opening paragraph should contain your thesis statement, and the rest of the paper should be spent establishing that thesis with whatever argument you intend to offer. Avoid general, historical, or flowery introductions. Don't use phrases like "Since the dawn of history, philosophers have been arguing about..." The first paragraph of your essay should be short and to the point. It should indicate the topic of your paper and clearly state what you are going to show in your paper. For example:

Don Marquis argues that abortion is wrong because it deprives the fetus of a valuable future. I shall argue that Marquis' position is inadequate because it rests on a false theory about what makes killing wrong.

This is how introductory paragraphs should look. They should be short and sweet, and they should indicate what you are going to do in your paper. It's fine to use the first person. This is a paper in which **you** will be giving reasons in defense of **your** position.

2. **AVOID LENGTHY QUOTATIONS.** Inexperienced writers rely too heavily on quotations and paraphrases. Direct quotation is best restricted to those cases where it is essential to establish another writer's exact selection of words. Even paraphrasing should be kept to a minimum. After all, it is your paper. It is your thoughts that your instructor is concerned with. Keep that in mind, especially when your essay topic requires you to critically assess someone else's views.
3. **NO FENCE SITTING.** Do not present a number of positions in your paper and then end by saying that you are not qualified to settle the matter. In particular, do not close by saying that philosophers have been divided over this issue for as long as

humans have been keeping record and you cannot be expected to resolve the dispute in a few short pages. Your instructor knows that. But you can be expected to take a clear stand based on an evaluation of the argument(s) presented. Go out on a limb. If you have argued well, it will support you.

4. **AVOID CUTENESS.** Good philosophical writing usually has an air of simple dignity about it. Your topic is no joke. No writers whose views you have been asked to read are idiots. (If you think they are, then you have not understood them.) Name calling is inappropriate and could never substitute for careful argumentation anyway.
5. **DEFEND YOUR VIEW.** When arguing against other positions, it is important to realize that you cannot show that your opponents are mistaken just by claiming that their overall conclusions are false. Nor will it do simply to claim that at least one of their premises is false. You must demonstrate these sorts of things, and in a fashion that does not presuppose that your position is correct. Assume that your reader is constantly asking such questions as "Why should I accept that?" If you presuppose that he or she is at least mildly skeptical of most of your claims, you are more likely to succeed in writing a paper that argues for a position. Most first attempts at writing philosophy essays fall down on this point. Substantiate your claims whenever there is reason to think that your critics would not grant them.
6. **ORGANIZE CAREFULLY.** Before you start to write, make an outline of how you want to argue. There should be a logical progression of ideas - one that will be easy for the reader to follow. If your paper is well organized, the reader will be led along in what seems a natural way. If you jump about in your essay, the reader will balk. It will take a real effort to follow you, and he or she may feel it not worthwhile. It is a good idea to let your outline simmer for a few days before you write your first draft. Does it still seem to flow smoothly when you come back to it? If not, the best prose in the world will not be enough to make it work.
7. **USE THE RIGHT WORDS.** Once you have determined your outline, you must select the exact words that will convey your meaning to the reader. A dictionary is almost essential here. Do not settle for a word that (you think) comes close to capturing the sense you have in mind. Notice that "infer" does not mean "imply"; "disinterested" does not mean "uninterested"; and "reference" does not mean either "illusion" or "allusion." Make certain that you can use "its" and "it's" correctly. Notice that certain words such as "therefore," "hence," "since," and "follows from" are strong logical connectives. When you use such expressions you are asserting that certain tight logical relations hold between the claims in question. You had better be right. Finally, check the spelling of any word you are not sure of. There is no excuse for "existance" appearing in any philosophy essay.
8. **GIVE CREDIT – DON'T PLAGIARIZE.** When quoting or paraphrasing, always give some citation. Indicate your indebtedness, whether it is for specific words, general ideas, or a particular line of argument. To use another writer's words, ideas, or arguments as if they were your own is to plagiarize. Plagiarism is against the rules of academic institutions and is dishonest.

NOTE: IF YOU ARE CAUGHT WITH ANY PLAGIARISM PAPER, YOU WILL AUTOMATICALLY GET A ZERO ON THE PAPER ASSIGNMENT, WHICH WILL NEARLY ENSURE THAT YOU FAIL THE COURSE. DO NOT TAKE THIS RISK.

9. ANTICIPATE OBJECTIONS. If your position is worth arguing for, there are going to be reasons which have led some people to reject it. Such reasons will amount to criticisms of your stand. A good way to demonstrate the strength of your position is to consider one or two of the best of these objections and show how they can be overcome. This amounts to rejecting the grounds for rejecting your case, and is analogous to stealing your enemies' ammunition before they have a chance to fire it at you. The trick here is to anticipate the kinds of objections that your critics would actually raise against you if you did not disarm them first. The other challenge is to come to grips with the criticisms you have cited. You must argue that these criticisms miss the mark as far as your case is concerned, or that they are in some sense ill-conceived despite their plausibility. It takes considerable practice and exposure to philosophical writing to develop this engaging style of argumentation, but it is worth it.

10. EDIT BOLDLY. I have never met a person whose first draft of a paper could not be improved significantly by rewriting. The secret to good writing is rewriting - often. Of course it will not do just to reproduce the same thing again. Better drafts are almost always shorter drafts - not because ideas have been left out, but because words have been cut out as ideas have been clarified. Every word that is not needed only clutters. Clear sentences do not just happen. They are the result of tough-minded editing.

There is much more that could be said about clear writing. (I have not stopped to talk about grammatical and stylistic points, for instance.) Some final words should be added about proofreading. Do it. Again. After that, have someone else read your paper. Is this person able to understand you completely? Can he or she read your entire paper through without getting stuck on a single sentence? If not, go back and smooth it out. In general terms, do not be content simply to get your paper out of your hands. Take pride in it. Clear writing reflects clear thinking; and that, after all, is what you are really trying to show.

III. How you'll be graded:

You'll be graded on three basic criteria:

1. How well do you understand the issues you're writing about?
2. How good are the arguments you offer?
3. Is your writing clear and well-organized?

NOTE: THIS IS NOT A PAPER IN WHICH YOU MERELY OFFER YOUR OPINION. You will of course tell me what you think about some philosophical issue in

this paper. But it is not what you think that matters. Rather, what matters is ***why you think what you think***. Another way of stating this: it is not your opinion that matters. Rather, what matters are **the reasons you give in support** of your opinion. **I do not judge your paper by whether I agree with its conclusion.** Rather, I judge your paper by whether you do a good job arguing for your conclusion. More specifically, I'll be asking myself questions like these:

- Do you clearly state what you're trying to accomplish in your paper? Is it obvious to the reader what your main thesis is?
- Do you offer supporting arguments for the claims you make? Is it obvious to the reader what these arguments are?
- Is the structure of your paper clear? For instance, is it clear what parts of your paper are expository, and what parts are your own positive contribution?
- Is your prose simple, easy to read, and easy to understand?
- Do you illustrate your claims with good examples? Do you explain your central notions? Do you say exactly what you mean?
- Do you present other philosophers' views accurately and charitably?

Here is a rubric that explains how I will weight the above questions and calculate your grade:

Evaluation	Excellent/Good		Average (C)	Weak	
	High (A)	Low (B)		High (D)	Low (F)
Thesis Is the thesis stated clearly in the paper? Does the thesis organize the structure of the paper?	5 A: Thesis is stated clearly and placed in the right place; paper is well-organized, utilizing the thesis to do so. B: Thesis is stated but could be clearer, perhaps not placed in the right place; paper is organized but could use slight improvement.	4	3 Thesis is stated, but is not very clear and is not placed properly; paper could be organized better.	2	1 Thesis is either missing or extremely unclear; paper is disorganized.
Presentation Presentation of the thought of a philosopher: Is it accurate? Complete? Clear, well-organized, and easy to understand? Is all the information included relevant?	25 A: The thought of the philosopher is presented accurately, clearly, and is easy to understand. All relevant information is included. B: The thought of the philosopher is presented accurately, but is somewhat unclear and not entirely easy to understand. Some relevant information may be missing.	20	18 The thought of the philosopher is presented, but there may be minor inaccuracies and issues with clarity. Some important information is missing.	16	14 The thought of the philosopher is either missing or presented in an inaccurate, incomplete, unclear, or incomprehensible manner.
Analysis The student's analysis: Are responses relevant to the topic? Do you offer an argument for the main claim you make? Is it obvious to the reader what that argument is? Do you illustrate your claims with good examples? Do you explain your central notions? Do you say exactly what you mean? Do you consider at least one objection to your own view?	50 A: The student's response is relevant, the paper contains a good argument and it is obvious to the reader what that argument is. The paper uses good examples to illustrate its claims when needed, central notions are explained very clearly, and the paper considers and provides good responses to objections. B: The student's response is relevant to the topic. The paper contains an argument, but the argument may be lacking in strength. The examples used to illustrate claims could be stronger, and some central notions could be explained with greater clarity. Objections are either not considered or not properly answered.	40	35 The student's response is relevant, but there are issues with clarity and support that are more than minor. The student may merely assert his position without defending it with reason and argument.	30	25 The student's response is either not included, or it demonstrates significant problems with clarity, support, organization, or relevancy.
Writing Is this a perfected piece of formal writing? Is the paper clear and easy to understand? Is the paper well-organized, flowing clearly and logically?	20 A: The paper is clear, concise, well-organized, easy to understand, correctly uses and cites sources when appropriate, and is free of grammatical and spelling errors. B: The paper is clear and easy to understand, but may contain some grammatical errors that detract from the quality of the writing.	16	14 The paper is clear and organized for the most part, but contains far too many grammatical errors.	12	10 The paper may be unclear, illogical, disorganized, difficult to understand, and contains far too many grammatical errors.
TOTAL SCORE:	_____ (OUT OF 100)				

Grade Scale:

94 – 100	A
90 – 93	A-
87 – 89	B+
84 – 86	B
80 – 83	B-
77 – 79	C+
74 – 76	C
70 – 73	C-
67 – 69	D+
64 – 66	D
60 – 63	D-
59	F

*NOTE: This assignment is supposed to be *difficult*. If you find yourself struggling, chances are you are doing it the right way.