

## How to Write a Philosophy Paper

**Definition:** “A philosophy paper is a defence of a *thesis*, in which the thesis is *explained* and *analysed*, *arguments* are given in support of the thesis, possible *objections* to the thesis are stated and examined, and *responses* are given to the objections” (Wolff)

**1. The statement of the thesis:** “A *thesis* is a statement that makes some clear, definite assertion about the subject under discussion.” (Wolff)

- *topics* are subjects about which theses may be proposed; they are not theses themselves; so don't merely state the topic of your paper; open your paper by saying what your thesis on that topic will be.
- e.g. a topic: DuPont's response to the information that the CFC's it produced were likely destroying the ozone layer

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**Definition:** A *philosophy* paper is an *argument* for a *thesis* on a philosophical *topic*

*A possible thesis:* (I shall argue that) DuPont acted immorally because it did not seek to minimize the harms associated with CFCs. (or, because DuPont did not respect the rights of future generations to a safe environment ...)

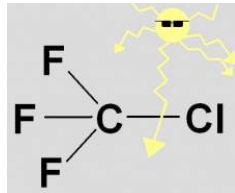
### 2. The analysis and explanation of the thesis.

Here, you briefly explain how you are going to use key terms in your thesis. We often need to do this because people may use different definitions of such terms.

The principle of utility states that ... (Here associated with the estimated dangers of various courses of action)

CFCs are ...

DuPont is ...



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**3. The arguments in support of the thesis:** “If I didn't already believe my thesis, would this reason convince me that the thesis is true? Would it at least make me more inclined to believe that it is true? Would it tend to convince a reasonable reader who is open-minded enough so that he or she is willing to listen to reasons?” (Wolff)

Since your paper is defending a value claim, your argument **should** include an account of *all the empirical facts* relevant to the case. It **should** also try to make clear how moral principles apply to the facts to generate your conclusion.

More specifically, your paper should give a fully detailed explanation of the moral principle underlying your argument. You should explain e.g. how the principle of utility is used with probabilistic reasoning about potential outcomes.

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#### 4. The examination of objections to the thesis.

An objection says the thesis is false, implausible or unproved, for certain reasons.

Generally speaking, these objections should attack premises of your original argument, or it should seek to show that your conclusion doesn't follow from your premises.

In your paper, you are to assume that the facts are as presented in the case study.

The most reasonable objection will probably concern whether the principle of utility, together with probability estimates, truly condemns DuPont's actions?

Is DuPont itself truly responsible or are there mitigating factors that lessen or remove its responsibility?

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You should **clearly and fully** explain your opponent's position, whatever view you take. That respects your opponent and also allows you to show in your "response" that it doesn't really defeat your view.

(Where students often fall down in their papers is to give overly brief, cryptic accounts of the relevant moral principles. At least some significant discussion of the moral principles is required for a "B"-level mark)

**5. The response to these objections.** You need to be able to show that the objections themselves are false, implausible or irrelevant.

This last step is the real measure for a very strong paper. If you can do a fair job of presenting the other side, and then of showing that, even so, it does not undermine your position, you have made a very strong case for your view.

Of course, the "other" side will try to respond, but that's their paper!

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#### Criteria for paper:

(emailed to Turnitin by last day of class; emailed one week before, if you want it returned, with comments)

1. About 2000-2500 words (8–10 pages), 12 pt. font, double-spaced.
2. Proper citation: Whichever method of acknowledging sources that you use, you **MUST**:
  - (i) enclose within quotes **and** provide page references to any material that you take word-for-word from any source you use;
  - (ii) provide page references for any paraphrase you make of some source material (a paraphrase is a **complete** rewriting of the original, and not simply replacing a few words. Merely replacing a few words is really a quote, and has to be treated as such.

Failure to meet these criteria adequately (as checked by Turnitin.com) will result in a failed paper, and possibly a letter on your file.

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**Required references:** (if you use others, please add them)

1. André, Claire & Velasquez, Manuel. "Ozone Debate: Environmentalists and Business Collide—Again," <http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/iie/v3n1/ozone.html>  
Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University
2. Kosub, Tim. LIBS 7002 Class Notes. 2010
3. Velasquez, Manuel. Business Ethics: Concepts and Cases, 6th ed. Prentice-Hall, 2005
4. Velasquez, Manuel. "Moral Responsibility and Blame," pp 41-48 of Manuel Velasquez, Business Ethics: Concepts and Cases, 5th ed. Prentice-Hall, 2001
5. Velasquez, Manuel. "The Ozone Threat: Managing with Uncertainty," "The Ozone Threat: Managing with Uncertainty, Prentice-Hall, 2001