

First Draft Instructions

The first draft should be at least 1800 words. To give you feedback, I will be looking for your thesis and how your argument supports it, presented with clarity and rigor and written in crisp, readable prose. More specifically, a good philosophy paper is evaluated along the following four dimensions—use them as guides for what to do and not to do when you’re writing.

1. Effectiveness of argumentation

Strong 1.0: Your paper offered sufficient reasons to support and persuasively argued for your thesis. It shows your understanding of the issue. You considered good objections, which substantiates your argument.

1.1 Your paper clearly argued for a view. It would be stronger if you offered better reasons to support your thesis, or considered better objections.

1.2 Your paper advanced a view and offered reasons to agree with it, but I was sometimes confused about the point you were making or didn’t think your conclusions always followed from your claims.

1.3 Your paper made some effort to advance an argument, but it is poorly supported by your reasoning, or it is extremely difficult to pin down what exactly the argument is.

Weak 1.4: Your paper didn’t appear to have an argument of your own at all, or if there was one it was completely disengaged from the content of the text(s).

Writing tips: Ask yourself: Is what I am saying true? Is it plausible? Have I provided evidence or argumentation to support what I am saying here? Do I really need to say this? Would a reasonable but skeptical reader find this persuasive?

2. Clarity of writing

Strong 2.0: Your paper was clear and comprehensible. I could always understand the point you were making and how it fits into the bigger picture.

2.1 Your paper is relatively clear--I could generally follow along. But your writing could have been more clear, as I sometimes found it hard to see your point, or why each sentence is related to one another.

2.2 Your paper was more difficult to understand than it should have been, and/or I could not always tell why various parts of the paper related to one another.

Weak 2.3: Your paper was very difficult to understand, to the extent that I often couldn’t follow your train of thought.

Writing tips: Write clear, direct prose. No need for formal, fussy language. Feel free to use the first-person pronoun and say things like “I will argue...” and “I will consider...”.

3. Logical structure

Strong 3.0: The logical structure of the essay is clear and airtight; I could always see how each point is related to your broader argument.

3.1 It is clear what the overall structure of the paper is. But it is hard to see how each sentence within a paragraph relates to each other, or how each point is related to the broader argument.

3.2 The logical structure of the paper is basically clear. However, there is some gap in your argument.

Weak 3.3: It is unclear what the overall structure of the paper is, or it is hard to see how each paragraph is related to your thesis.

Writing tips: You might find it helpful to structure your essay in the way suggested in the previous handout “Week 4 Outline”. Your argument, and your vision for the paper, might have changed from the Outline you submitted earlier, then keep a new outline in mind when you’re writing to make sure your paper has a clear and obvious structure.

It’s recommended that do not break up your essay into numbered sections (the paper at this stage is too short for that) and do not use bullet points. Rather, use paragraphs to structure your essay, and use connecting phrases to build a coherent flow.

Ask the following questions as you write and re-write your essays: What is this sentence doing here? How is it connected to the sentences that immediately precede and succeed it? What is the point I am trying to convey in this paragraph? How is this paragraph related to its predecessors and successors? How would someone reading this essay for the first time ever feel as they parse these sentences? What might confuse or trip them? How can I avoid any misunderstandings of what I’m trying to say?

4. Engagement with the literature

Strong 4.0: Your paper gives a reasonably clear and correct account of the problems at stake in the literature. It demonstrates your understanding of the issue.

4.1 Your paper gives a reasonably clear and correct account of the problems at stake, but leaves out the most important and obvious discussions in the literature.

Weak 4.2: Your paper gives an account of the problems at stake, but reflects significant misunderstanding of the issue or the literature.

Notes: This class focuses more on 1, 2, and 3, given the wide scope of topics covered. For 4, you are strongly advised to discuss your paper with faculties whose expertise is more in align with your paper topics.

You should also be using this time to continue reading! Never stop reading: read abstracts, take notes, and try to get a sense of what people are talking about