# Ethics: Exam 1

Here are the guidelines for Exam 1.

**Due Date: Sunday, July 25 at 11:59 PM.**

1. The questions are listed below. You should only answer **THREE** of them (not all of them!).
2. Each essay should be between **500** and **1000 words.** I won’t penalize you for going over, but please consider whether you *need* more than 1,000 words 😊.
3. Direct quotes from the class readings or handouts can be **cited** simply as (page number or handout name). If you choose to use outside resources, please use a standard citation style (such as APA, MLA, or Chicago), and provide a full citation. In general, **no more than 15%** of your paper should be quotes.
4. Please don’t use the words or ideas of others without proper attribution. Please see the syllabus for details on the policy regarding **plagiarism and academic integrity.** I regularly use [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) to check for plagiarism or related issues.
5. Since the goal of the exam is to demonstrate how well *you* understand the material, you should try to **use your own words/examples**. Essays that simply reproduce the handouts will not receive good grades.
6. Please submit your exam as a SINGLE MS WORD file to the D2L assignment folder. Each essay should start on a new page.

## The Questions

Answer THREE of the following questions. If you’ve already written on these topics (e.g., in your annotations on Perusall), it’s fine to reuse what you wrote. However, I do expect that you will make an effort to revise and improve earlier work.

1. In recent years, there have been a number of prominent political acts aimed at changing laws (see MLK handout for some examples). Do a little research, and choose one particular political movement that interests you. Describe it in 1-2 paragraphs, making sure to say what law/policy was being challenged, and how those seeking to change the law responded. Now, consider how MLK (in “Letter for Birmingham Jail”) and Plato (in “The Crito”) might evaluate it.
2. Carefully describe the Euthyphro dilemma (the dilemma that arises from claiming “Morally good actions are those God loves”) in your own words. Then, explain what you think the *best* response is for theists (e.g., people who believe in God).
3. Argue for a yes/no answer to ONE of the following claims (a) “Morality relative to culture” or (b) Any rational person *ought* to be an egoist. Be sure to incorporate what you’ve learned from class readings, as well as from my lectures/notes. I’d also encourage you to bring in real-life examples of what this might mean.
4. Is lying always immoral? In your answer to this question, please explain and analyze Kant’s claims that lying is wrong because it treats people as mere means and/or lying isn’t “universalizable.” Then, consider how defenders of other ethical theories (such as utilitarianism or virtue ethics) might treat this same issue.
5. In 2 or 3 paragraphs, explain the basic ideas of Aristotelian virtue ethics. Now, apply it to your own life: pick a moral virtue you want to *improve* at, and explain how Aristotle might advise you to approach this. Give detailed examples! (I encourage you to actually try this out for 3 days, and write about how it went).
6. Choose a book, TV show, movie, comic book, etc. that you know well. Now, use the characters and events of this to explore one of the ethical theories we learned in class. You’ll want to (a) accurately explain the theory in your own words, (b) give some examples (from your chosen book/movie/etc.) showing how this theory works in practice, and (c) analyze some strengths and weaknesses of the theory (again, using your book/show to illustrate your points).

## Exam Grading Rubric

Each essay is worth TEN points, and the whole exam is worth 30 points. Your grade will depend on how well you do each of the following:

1. How well are you able to **explain** the relevant course material? (Very important)
2. To what extent can you make an (evidence-based) **argument** for a **thesis?** (Very important)
3. To what extent do your paper’s **structure** (e.g. intro/body paragraphs/conclusion) and **language** (e.g. grammar, style) make it easy for a reader to follow? (Important to the extent that they impact the two criteria above)

The grading criteria are as follows:

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| Grade | Description |
| *0* | No answer submitted, or evidence of plagiarism. |
| *1-4* | Significantly below minimal requirements, in terms of content (e.g., doesn’t address the question at all), or word count. |
| *5-6* | Fails to meet minimal requirements in terms of content (e.g., addresses a related question) or word count. Essays that simply report what you “believe” or “feel,” without providing an *argument* may receive this grade. |
| *7* | Meets minimal requirements in terms of both content (it clearly addresses the assigned question) and word count. However, there may be some significant errors or omissions when it comes to the explanation of relevant class material, or providing a detailed response to the question. |
| *8* | Fully meets both content and word count requirements, and provides satisfactory explanations of relevant arguments and concepts from class. There are no majorerrors in argumentation or explanatory gaps. |
| *9-10* | Goes *significantly* above the minimal requirements. The essay’s treatment of course material shows a full mastery of the relevant content, and provides a creative, well-thought out response to it. |

I will grade essays in the order they are submitted (first-come, first-serve). Grades go up in whole-number increments (there is no .5).

## Tips on Writing Philosophy

Philosophy essays can be a bit different from other sorts of writing. Here are some general tips:

1. You should have an **introduction** that concisely introduces the topic, and a **thesis sentence** that clearly states your position. Philosophy papers often begin with theses of the form “I will argue X because Y.”
2. When discussing tough ethical or philosophical issues, **avoid phrases like “I feel,” “I think,” or “I believe.”** Part of taking these issues seriously involves granting that one’s actions and beliefs have consequences for other people, and that (for this reason) they need to be defended with the sorts of ***arguments*** and ***reasons*** that these other people could actually accept. For this reason, appeals to your *own* emotions, religious beliefs, etc. are generally (though not always) inappropriate.
3. Pretend you are writing to **an intelligent and interested (but relatively ignorant) 12-year-old** who doesn’t know anything about the subject (rather than your philosophy professor). This means you’ll need to write clearly, explain new concepts, and offer interesting, memorable examples. A significant portion of your grade will be based on your ability to explain the arguments/concepts we’ve been studying using your own words and examples.
4. Your essay should have multiple paragraphs, each of which has a clear **topic sentence** that clearly relates back to your thesis. When writing philosophy, it’s easy to get “off topic.” So, always ask yourself: is this paragraph helping me provide evidence for my thesis? If the answer is “no,” it should be cut or revised.
5. You should always consider possible **objections** to your thesis. Ask yourself: “How would a smart, well-educated opponent respond to my argument?” In some cases, this might be a real author who you can cite; in other cases, you’ll have to play your own “devil’s advocate.”
6. The conclusion should help the reader appreciate the way your argument fits into the “big picture.” For example, what exactly do you take yourself to have shown? How does this relate to similar cases? What might be the “next ste” of this argument, if you had more time and space?