

---

# CONTENTS

---

## I PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

- 1 WHY PROJECTS? 5
- 2 TASKS 7
- 3 GRADING 11

## II PROJECT GUIDES

- 4 A BRIEF GUIDE FOR PHILOSOPHICAL WRITING 15
- 5 A BRIEF GUIDE FOR PHILOSOPHICAL PRESENTATION 17

## III PROJECT CONTENTS

- 6 TOPICS AND READINGS 21



## Part I

# PROJECT REQUIREMENTS



---

## WHY PROJECTS?

---

The course project is an opportunity for you to explore an interesting problem of your choice related to epistemology. The purpose of the project is to inform you how to conduct research on an issue you find interesting or important. In this process, you will be able to practice the cognitive skills that are necessary for any kind of research within or outside philosophy. Those skills include:

- Critical thinking
- Structural Reading
- Succinct, clear argumentative writing
- Organized and easy-to-understand presentation

Successful implementation of a research project would make an epistemology course not just about philosophical theories of knowledge, but also about cultivating practical skills to actually gain new knowledge efficiently.



---

## TASKS

---

There are 4 tasks in this project:

**1. Proposal** In this part of the project, you will need to come up with a topic. You can either choose one of the suggested projects in section III of this handbook, or you can pick your own topic. If you would like to choose your own topic, please send me an email and discuss your ideas with me. I will check if the topic is appropriate for the course, and provide help and suggest necessary readings. If you select one of the topics in section III, then no need to send me anything. There is no official due date for this step as long as it would not affect the deadline of next step.

**2. Progress Report** Due April 22. 2-3 pages. Includes:

- A high-quality introduction of the issue and the background,
- a precise summarization of one paper/book chapter in your project readings,
- a very brief description of what you will do next.

**3. Presentation** Prepare for 10 minutes presentation and 5 minutes for comment and response. The in-class presentation sections will be held on June 3 and June 10. I will ran-

domly draw the presentation order at least two weeks before the presentation and make public announcement. You can exchange your order with others before the actual presentation, but please let me know by email if you do so.

#### 4. **Final Paper** 5-6 pages, Due June 17.

Submit a docx or pdf file by email. Send it to 6687@cnu.edu.cn  
The final paper **MUST Be** organized into the following structure:

- Section 1: An Introduction to the philosophical issue and necessary background you are going to talking about in the paper. State your thesis clearly, and describe precisely how you are going to organize your arguments for your thesis.
- Section 2: Describe your favorite answer to the philosophical issue, and provide at least one argument for your answer. The argument must be convincing and clearly written out. You can summarize the arguments given by one of the readings under your topic, but you must write the argument in your own words, expect a few necessary quotations.
- Section 3: Think of at least one objection to the view or the argument you wrote in section 2, and write down the objection clearly. The objection should be as convincing as you can think of. A trivial objection will not do. The objection could be some argument you learned from your readings. Or you can come up with your own idea.
- Section 4: Give a response to the objection you considered in section 3, and argues why the objection does not hold.



- Section 5: Write a conclusion, briefly describe what you have done in the paper and what you can do to improve your arguments and response to the objection.

*A note on the deadline:* Except the presentation, we adopt a soft deadline policy. If you cannot finish the task before the official due date listed above, you can automatically extend the deadline up to 5 days, but **NO MORE**. Otherwise it will affect your grade.



---

## GRADING

---

Presentation/Paper/Participation: 30/60/10

The grading of the presentation will be based on 2 criteria: (1) how clear the explanation is; (2) if the material is well-organized.

The grading of the paper will follow a precise rubric. I will mainly look for 3 factors: (1)How accurate the summarization of the original paper is; (2)how convincing the arguments, objections and responses are; (3)The clearness of the writing. You can download the grading rubric through the following link:

<https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/resources/Teaching/CourseDesign/Assessment-Grading/Rubrics/PhilosophyPaperRubric.doc>



## Part II

# PROJECT GUIDES



---

## A BRIEF GUIDE FOR PHILOSOPHICAL WRITING

---

Things to keep in mind:

- A philosophy paper consists of the reasoned defense of some claim.
- A good philosophy paper is modest and makes a small point; but it makes that point clearly and straightforwardly, and it offers good reasons in support of it.
- The aim of the paper is for you to show that you understand the material and that you're able to think critically about it. To do this, your paper does have to show some independent thinking.
- To write a good philosophy paper, you need to be concise but at the same time explain yourself fully. Try to use examples and definitions when necessary.
- Your paper doesn't always have to provide a definite solution to a problem, or a straight yes or no answer to a question. Many excellent philosophy papers don't offer straight yes or no answers. Sometimes they argue that the question needs to be clarified, or that certain further questions need to be raised. Sometimes they

argue that certain assumptions of the question need to be challenged. Sometimes they argue that certain answers to the question are too easy, that is, they won't work. Hence, if these papers are right, the question will be harder to answer than we might previously have thought. These are all important and philosophically valuable results.

Please check out the following link for a guide in philosophical writings:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Some additional resources:

[https://philosophy.fas.harvard.edu/files/phildept/files/brief\\_guide\\_to\\_writing\\_philosophy\\_paper.pdf](https://philosophy.fas.harvard.edu/files/phildept/files/brief_guide_to_writing_philosophy_paper.pdf)

<http://www.sfu.ca/philosophy/resources/writing.html>



---

## A BRIEF GUIDE FOR PHILOSOPHICAL PRESENTATION

---

Things to keep in mind:

- Do not read your talk out from a manuscript.
- Start with a simple overview. Always make sure the organization of your talk is clear.
- An extremely common mistake is to try to present too much, and too complicated, material. Do not attempt to cover too much.
- Be abundantly clear about key points.
- As any other communication formats, good presentations require practice. Practising will help you avoid pretty much all the pitfalls of a bad presentation. Practising allows you to find good ways of saying things in a way that is natural to you. It allows you to catch a bad example or an unhelpful aside before a full audience has to listen to it. Do practice giving your presentation.

Please consult the following guide for presentation:

<http://www.koksvik.net/talk.php>



## Part III

# PROJECT CONTENTS



# 6

---

## TOPICS AND READINGS

---

This section provides a list of 19 recommended project topics. These topics are designed to have a format of a yes/no question. Epistemologist and other philosophers have debated these questions at length. Their arguments for both sides of the answer and their objections against each other are presented in the corresponding readings.

For each of the topic, there are two sets of readings: basic readings and additional readings. The basic readings include two papers, one of them defends a “yes” answer to the topic question while the other one defends a “no” answer. These two papers provide a clear description of the philosophical issue under the topic. The additional readings are extensions or elaborations of the basic readings. They also include arguments for both sides of the answer. You can start by reading the basic papers and then look for useful information in the set of additional papers for your project. You are also encouraged to search for other papers not on the reading list and take them as your additional papers. Note that you are only required to choose one paper. So you don’t have to read all the four or five papers under your topic.

**Topic 1** Is Knowledge Closed Under Known Entailment?

## Basic Readings:

- Dretske, Is Knowledge Closed under Known Entailment?
- Hawthorne, The Case for Closure

## Additional Readings:

- Vogel, Are There Counterexamples to the Closure Principle?
- Feldman, In Defence of Closure
- Audi, Deductive Closure, Defeasibility and Scepticism: A Reply to Feldman

**Topic 2** Is Knowledge Contextual?

## Basic Readings:

- Earl Conee, Contextualism Contested
- Stewart Cohen, Contextualism Defended

## Additional Readings:

- DeRose, Contextualism: An Explanation and Defense
- MacFarlane, The Assessment Sensitivity of Knowledge Attributions

**Topic 3** Can Skepticism be Refuted?

## Basic Readings:

- Jonathan Vogel, The Refutation of Skepticism
- Richard Fumerton, The Challenge of Refuting Skepticism

## Additional Readings:

- Fumerton, Skepticism and Reasoning to the Best Explanation
- Leite, An Empirical Response to External World Skepticism

- Foley, Three Attempts to Refute Skepticism and Why They Fail

#### **Topic 4** Is there *a priori* Knowledge?

##### Basic Readings:

- Laurence Bonjour, In Defense of the *a Priori*
- Michael Devitt, There Is No *a Priori*

##### Additional Readings:

- Hawthorne, *A Priority* and Externalism
- Kitcher, *A Priori Knowledge Revisited*
- Penelope Maddy, Naturalism and the *A Priori*

#### **Topic 5** Is Infinitism the Solution to the Regress Problem?

##### Basic Readings:

- Peter Klein, Infinitism Is the Solution to the Regress Problem
- Carl Ginet, Infinitism Is Not the Solution to the Regress Problem Carl

##### Additional Readings:

- Fantl, Modest Infinitism
- Turri, On the Regress Argument for Infinitism

#### **Topic 6** Can Beliefs Be Justified through Coherence Alone?

##### Basic Readings:

- Catherine Z. Elgin, Non-foundationalist Epistemology: Holism, Coherence, and Tenability
- James Van Cleve, Why Coherence Is Not Enough: A Defense of Moderate Foundationalism

##### Additional Readings:

- Firth, Coherence, Certainty, and Epistemic Priority

- Shogenji, Justification by Coherence from Scratch

### **Topic 7** Is There Immediate Justification?

#### Basic Readings:

- James Pryor, There Is Immediate Justification
- Juan Comesaña, There Is No Immediate Justification

#### Additional Readings:

- Goldman, Immediate Justification and Process Reliabilism
- James van Cleve, Foundationalism, Epistemic Principles, and the Cartesian Circle

### **Topic 8** Does Perceptual Experience Have Conceptual Content?

#### Basic Readings:

- Bill Brewer, Perceptual Experience Has Conceptual Content
- Alex Byrne, Perception and Conceptual Content

#### Additional Readings:

- Peacocke, Does Perception have a Nonconceptual Content?
- Hopp, Conceptualism and the Myth of the Given

### **Topic 9** Is Justification Internal?

#### Basic Readings:

- John Greco, Justification Is Not Internal
- Richard Feldman, Justification Is Internal

#### Additional Readings:

- Conee and Feldman, Internalism Defended
- Goldman, Internalism Exposed



- Comesaña, We Are (Almost) All Externalists Now

### **Topic 10** Is Truth the Primary Epistemic Goal?

#### Basic Readings:

- Jonathan L. Kvanvig, Truth Is Not the Primary Epistemic Goal
- Marian David, Truth as the Primary Epistemic Goal: A Working Hypothesis

#### Additional Readings:

- Zagzebski, Epistemic Value Monism
- Sosa, The Place of Truth in Epistemology
- Wedgewood, The Aim of Belief

### **Topic 11** Is Justified Belief Responsible Belief?

#### Basic Readings:

- Richard Foley, Justified Belief as Responsible Belief
- Nicholas Wolterstorff, Obligation, Entitlement, and Rationality

#### Additional Readings:

- Greco, Internalism and Epistemically Responsible Belief
- Korblieth, Justified Belief and Epistemically Responsible Action

### **Topic 12** Does Evidence = Knowledge?

#### Basic Readings:

- Williamson, Evidence
- Comesaña and Kantin, Is Evidence Knowledge?

#### Additional Readings:

- Schiffer, Evidence = Knowledge: Williamson's Solution to Skepticism
- Joyce, Williamson on Evidence and Knowledge
- Williamson, Knowledge as Evidence

**Topic 13** Is (All) Evidence Propositional?

Basic Readings:

- Neta, What Evidence Do You Have?
- Feldman, Having Evidence

Additional Readings:

- Williamson, Evidence
- Williamson, Knowledge as Evidence
- Titelbaum, Not Enough There There

**Topic 14** Is Logic Normative for Thought?

Basic Readings:

- Harman, Chapters 1 and 2 of Change in View
- Field, What is the Normative Role of Logic?

Additional Readings:

- Field, Pluralism in Logic
- MacFarlane, In What Sense (if any) is Logic Normative for Thought?
- Titelbaum, Not Enough There There

**Topic 15** Is Language Innate or Learned?

Basic Readings:

- Barbara C. Scholz and Geoffrey K Pullum, Irrational Nativist Exuberance
- Robert J. Matthews, The Case for Linguistic Nativism
- James McGilvray, On the Innateness of Language

Additional Readings:

- Steven Pinker, Chapter 10 of *The Language Instinct*

**Topic 16** Are There Laws in Social Sciences?

Basic Readings:

- John T. Roberts, *There are no Laws of the Social Sciences*
- Harold Kincaid, *There are Laws in the Social Sciences*

Additional Readings:

- Donald Davidson, *Psychology as Philosophy*
- Harold Kincaid: *Defending laws in the social sciences*
- McIntyre Lee: *Complexity and social scientific laws*

**Topic 17** Does Probability Capture the Logic of Scientific Confirmation or Justification?

Basic Readings:

- Patrick Maher, *Probability Captures the Logic of Scientific Confirmation*
- Kevin T. Kelly and Clark Glymour, *Why Probability does not Capture the Logic of Scientific Justification*

Additional Readings:

- Clark Glymour: *Why I am not a Bayesianism*
- Clark Glymour: *Relevant Evidence*
- Howson and Urbach: Chapter 4 of *Scientific reasoning: the Bayesian approach*

**Topic 18** Can A Theory's Predictive Success Warrant Belief in the Unobserved Entities It Postulates?

Basic Readings:

- Jarrett Leplin, A Theory's Predictive Success can Warrant Belief in the Unobservable Entities it Postulates
- André Kukla and Joel Walmsley, A Theory's Predictive Success does not Warrant Belief in the Unobservable

Additional Readings:

- Peter Lipton, Truth, Existence, and the Best Explanation
- Timothy D. Lyons, Explaining the Success of a Scientific Theory

**Topic 19** Is It Possible to Reduce Biological Explanations to Explanations in Chemistry and/or Physics?

Basic Readings:

- Evelyn Fox Keller, It Is Possible to Reduce Biological Explanations to Explanations in Chemistry and/or Physics
- John Dupré, It Is Not Possible to Reduce Biological Explanations to Explanations in Chemistry and/or Physics

Additional Readings:

- Elliott Sober, The Multiple Realizability Argument against Reductionism
- C. Kenneth Waters, Why the Anti-Reductionist Consensus Won't Survive: The Case of Classical Mendelian Genetics