

How to Write a Paper for this Course

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Phil UA-5 Minds and Machines

1. State a thesis.
 - The thesis should answer a question in italics of one of the paper topics. (Or run your thesis by me.)
2. Defend your thesis.
 - What you are doing in your paper is defending your thesis. That is *why* you are writing the paper.
 - Give the best arguments you can, and include only the descriptive facts about the topic that help you either clarify or defend your thesis.
3. The introduction of the paper should tell me what your thesis is and what your strategy for defending it will be.
 - Don't be full of mystery! Tell me up front what you are going to do and how you are going to do it.
4. Consider some objections to your thesis and your arguments for your thesis.
 - How would a smart person try to argue against you? Think about good responses to some good objections to your claims, and explain them.
5. Cite your sources as you go.
 - When you make a claim about descriptive facts, or about what someone's views are, or basically anything that is not your own opinion or idea, *cite it*.
 - Don't just include your citations at the end. As I read your paper, I should be able to tell what the basis for each claim is, and be able to follow up on your sources myself if I want to.

6. Use quotes sparingly.
 - Use quotes to back up interpretive claims, not to explain what the thinker you're discussing holds.
 - In a slogan: *Don't use quotes to explain. Instead, explain your quotes!*
7. Think independently.
 - You don't have to re-invent the wheel. If someone gives an argument for your thesis that you think is good, that's great. But you should also explain why *you* think it is good, and better than arguments against your thesis.
8. Use simple, clear language.
 - Philosophy prizes clarity above beauty of prose. If a simpler word will do, use a simpler one.
 - Don't use a synonym in other places in the paper merely for a change in vocabulary. If you mean exactly the same thing as you did above, use exactly the same word.
 - Pretend that you are explaining the subject to your smart third-grade brother/sister/ cousin/ etc. That's how simple and clear the writing should be.
9. Your conclusion should *briefly* summarize what you've done in your paper. It might also suggest a further issue or consideration for future work.
10. For more advice, check out Jim Pryor's "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper":
<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>