

### Essay grading rubric 730:105:02, Fall 2013

Essays should be around 2000 words. This is roughly a 5-7 page paper, double spaced with 11-12 point font. Don't make the mistake of adding fluff just to get to the page limit. If you find yourself repeating points over and over, step back and try to consider the argument from a different perspective and then develop that new idea.

#### Philosophical paper forms:

Philosophical papers can take many different forms. Here are some examples:

- Present and defend a positive stance on a particular topic discussed in class.
- Present and attack a positive stance on a particular topic discussed in class.
- Compare two opposing stances, pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of both.
- Analyze a position in depth by distinguishing it from nearby positions and clarify what you think may be common misconceptions about the position.
- Provide a view of the conceptual landscape surrounding a topic discussed in class. What are the possible stances that a person might take on the issue? What are some interesting yet unobvious consequences of holding a particular stance on the issue?

#### Key criteria for a philosophical paper:

Whatever form your paper takes, you should write it with an eye toward the following general principles.

- **Clarity of structure:** Philosophical papers are not mystery novels or or fables where the moral must be dug out by the reader. The paper should be explicit in each of its points, and each paragraph should contribute to the overall argument in the paper. Introduce the topic thesis early on, develop the argument throughout, and briefly recap the argument in a conclusion.
- **Focus:** Your philosophical papers are not dissertations. It is easy to get overly ambitious in one's topic, to where it is impossible to adequately address each facet of the issue in 5-7 pages. Focus on what seems like a small aspect of the issue you are interested in; as you develop it, you will uncover more issues to address.
- **Originality:** Philosophical papers aren't book reports. While it is important to consider arguments that others have presented on the issue, I want to see that you have invested your own mental energy into considering the topic. You aren't expected to come up with wholly novel arguments, but show that you have thought seriously about the issue.
- **Development of positive argument:** Philosophical papers aren't personal response essays. Your personal opinions are a good starting point, but your objective is to provide others with reasons for coming to share your opinions. Thus, you must develop the steps of your reasoning, such that if someone honestly followed your paper, they would be inclined to agree with your thesis statement.
- **Consideration of opposing arguments:** Philosophical essays aren't TV news programs where you can choose the issues to present and ignore opposing opinion. If your argument is strong, then it should hold up against criticism. Intellectual responsibility requires you to honestly consider opposing viewpoints and show where they go wrong.

#### General guidelines for paper grades

**An A level paper** is clearly written, readable, and lacks confusing grammatical constructions. It presents a narrowly focused thesis topic, and develops multiple aspects of the thesis at some length. Argument structure is clearly presented, and each step in the reasoning of the argument is clearly spelled out. There is a conscious effort to consider and address potential opposing arguments or viewpoints. The paper goes beyond the ideas presented in the course readings and discussions; it shows a level of original thinking on the topic issue.

**A B level paper** addresses each of the key criteria of a philosophical paper, and has no major oversights or errors. There are only minor failings in the paper. Perhaps it lacks clarity in places, the thesis topic is too ambitious or ambiguous, or the argument presented fails to adequately support the thesis. It may show a tendency toward regurgitating ideas presented in the readings rather than an original perspective on the issue. An otherwise adequate paper that fails to consider and address potential opposing arguments to the thesis statement will receive a B grade.

**A C level paper** has more major failings than a B paper, or combines a number of minor failings. Perhaps the structure or reasoning is difficult to follow, the thesis is off topic or poorly elaborated, or the argument either fails to address the thesis topic or leaves multiple steps in the reasoning undeveloped. It may show a strong reliance on the source material, or lack original insight from the author. A paper that repeats the thesis statement over and over without developing any details of the reasoning in its favor will receive a C grade.

**A D level paper** is poorly structured or unclear. The thesis topic may be difficult to ascertain, or the positive argument may be severely underdeveloped or non-existent. The paper may lack focus or order in the prose. There is little or no originality in the ideas presented.

### Some common philosophical techniques to consider

- Present an example case and generalize from it to your main point. The example may be an actually occurring event, or it may be purely hypothetical.
- Consider an extreme case for a general principle. Many theses hold up well for a small class of cases, but falter on more extreme but relevant cases.
- If you are defending a position, present your argument in explicit premise/conclusion form. Then spend a paragraph or two explaining each premise in the argument, and how it supports the conclusion.
- If you are attacking a position, spell out your understanding of the argument for that position, and explain which premise(s) you think fails.
- Don't waste space on an elaborate introduction. Get right to the point and jump into developing your argument.