

Mastering the Basics: A Guide to Writing Philosophy Papers (Two Approaches)

This handout equips you with the tools to write clear, well-structured, and engaging philosophy papers, focusing on two key approaches: Assessing Evidence and Running Defense.

1. Assessing Evidence:

This approach dissects an existing philosophical argument by evaluating its premises.

- **Structure:**
 - **Thesis:** Briefly introduce the philosophical view and the argument you'll be assessing in a concise introduction paragraph. Tell the author what stance you will take.
 - **Premise Analysis:** Put the argument into premise-conclusion form and use the remaining paragraphs to assessing each premise:
 - **Explain:** Clearly explain the premise and its role in the argument. Use appropriate quotations and citations.
 - **Critique:** Identify weaknesses in the premise. This could involve:
 - Counter-arguments: Presenting opposing viewpoints that challenge the premise.
 - Logical Fallacies: Highlighting flaws in reasoning within the premise.
 - Ambiguity: Exposing unclear terminology or definitions.
 - The goal here is to show that one or more of the premises is false such that even if the argument is valid, the argument itself is unsound.
 - **Conclusion:** Summarize your analysis.

2. Running Defense:

This approach tackles a specific criticism leveled against a philosophical view you endorse.

- **Structure:**
 - **Thesis:** Introduce the view you'll be defending and the criticism it faces. Tell the author what stance you will take.
 - **Unpack the View:** Explain the core ideas and reasoning behind the view you support. Use appropriate quotations and citations.
 - **Unpack the Criticism:** Clearly present the criticism and why it seems like a serious challenge to the view.
 - **Rebuttal:** Develop a strong counter-argument to the criticism. This might involve:
 - **Distinguishing Concepts:** Clarifying any misunderstandings in the criticism.
 - **Highlighting Weaknesses:** Exposing flaws in the reasoning behind the criticism.
 - **Alternative Explanations:** Offering a different perspective that addresses the criticism.
 - **Conclusion:** Recap your defense and why the view ultimately overcomes the criticism.

General Tips for Both Approaches:

- **Clarity and Concision:** Use clear, concise language and avoid jargon unless absolutely necessary.
- **Evidence and Examples:** Support your claims with relevant philosophical concepts, quotes, and examples.
- **Citations:** Use a consistent citation style (e.g., APA, MLA) and accurately credit your sources.
- **Proofread!** Typos and grammatical errors undermine your credibility. ProTip: Have someone whose intelligence you respect (but who has not taken a class like ours) read through your paper prior to turning it in. If they have any confusions or questions after reading the paper, then it is likely not well written enough. Revise the draft to address those issues.