

Philosophy Paper Rubric

I will evaluate your final papers along the eight categories on the Dos and Dents of Writing Philosophy:

- Narrow Scope
- Audience
- Introduction
- Clarity and Carefulness of Writing
- Organization and Structure
- Thoroughness
- Quality and Accuracy of the Presentation of Author's View/Point/Argument
- Quality and Originality of Philosophical Evaluation

For each category, I will give you one of the following evaluations:

Excellent – your paper goes above and beyond in the relevant category – it has everything I'm looking for *and more*, and avoids mistakes

Good – your paper has everything I'm looking for when it comes to the relevant category, and has almost no non-negligible mistakes

Fair – your paper has most of the things that I'm looking for when it comes to the relevant category, but also makes a few mistakes

Substandard – your paper has several major problems when it comes to the relevant category; it may have had some of the things I'm looking for when it comes to the relevant category, but these things are overall outweighed by the mistakes

Poor – your paper fails to meet most or all of the minimum expectations when it comes to the relevant category

For each category, the things that I'm looking for are captured by the items on the relevant Do List, and mistakes/problems are captured by the items on the relevant Don't List.

The number grade out of 100 that your final paper receives will be based on the evaluation it earns in each of the eight categories. A-range papers will have received mostly "excellent" evaluations in each category. B-range papers will have received mostly "good" evaluations in each category. C-range papers will have received mostly "fair" evaluations in each category. D-range papers will receive mostly "substandard" evaluations. And F-range papers will have received most "poor" evaluations.

Importantly, these evaluations do not capture all the things that went into the grade, and not all the categories are weighted the same. For example, clarity and carefulness of writing is more important than the introduction).

Narrow Scope

DO

- Focus on only one argument/point/view from an assigned reading
- As you philosophical evaluate that argument, make only one or two arguments/points and develop them thoroughly
- Discuss only the parts of the assigned reading that are directly relevant to, or needed to understand, the argument you're discussing

DO NOT

- Include any material irrelevant to philosophy (e.g., biographical info about the author)
- Discuss more than one assigned reading
- Focus on multiple arguments/points/views from an assigned reading
- Write a paper that reads like a book report of the assigned reading
- Make too many points in your philosophical evaluation
- Discuss parts of the assigned reading that are not directly relevant to, or needed to understand the argument/point/view you are focusing on

Audience

DO

- Write your paper so that someone at a college level who hasn't taken the course or done the readings (e.g., your roommate) could totally understand your paper

DO NOT

- Write your paper so that your reader would have to already be familiar with the views and ideas you're discussing in order to understand it

Introduction

DO

- Get straight to the point
- Make clear what you're going to be arguing for in the rest of the paper (your thesis)
- Give a brief preview of what happens in the rest of the paper

DO NOT

- Start off with a fluffy lead-in (e.g., "Since the dawn of time...")
- Leave it unclear what you're going to be arguing for
- Do any substantial philosophical work

Clarity and Carefulness of Writing

DO

- Ensure your writing is straightforward and easy to understand
- Keep word choice simple – write in a way a 3rd grader would understand

- Keep sentence structure simple – avoid sentences with lots of clauses/parts
- Word your points carefully and precisely
- Ensure your lines of thought are easy to follow
- Make your writing polished and grammatically correct
- Fix typos

DO NOT

- Write in a convoluted, imprecise, uncaredful, or otherwise hard to understand way
- Use complicated words and/or sentence structure
- Use 10 words to make a point when 5 words will do
- Have lines of thought that are difficult to follow
- Leave lots of typos or grammatical errors
- Present your points as rhetorical questions

Organization and Structure

DO

- Develop a coherent line of argument from beginning to end
- Make it is clear how each paragraph/discussion fits into the paper as a whole
- Use section headings and/or signposts when appropriate
- Always make it clear whether you're explaining the author's view or presenting your own
- Keep paragraphs short

DO NOT

- Write a paper that comes across like a stream of conscious
- Jumble your thoughts together
- Have a paper that's disjointed, unwieldy, or otherwise does not form a cohesive whole

Thoroughness

DO

- Fully defend your main points
- Define key and technical terms
- Bring in examples to illustrate and clarify your points
- Explicitly connect the dots between the points you make in your philosophical evaluation and the argument/point/view you are evaluating

DO NOT

- Leave some of your main points in need of farther explanation or clarification
- Leave some of your main points in need of (farther) defense
- Fail to define a key or technical term
- Fail to provide examples when appropriate
- Leave it unclear how the points you make in your philosophical evaluation connect back to the argument/point/view you're evaluating

Quality and Accuracy Presentation of the Author's Argument/Point/View

DO

- Explain the author's argument/point/view *in your own words*
- Ensure the claims you attribute to the author are claims the author makes
- Clear up potential confusions about the author's argument/point/view
- Demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the nuances and subtleties of the author's argument/point/view
- Write in a way that makes it clear that you have a firm overall grasp on the relevant material

DO NOT

- Rely on quotes to present the author's argument/point/view
- Make inaccurate claims about the author's argument/point/view
- Present the author's argument/point/view in a way that involves a misunderstanding about the relevant material
- Fail to clear up potential confusions when appropriate

Quality and Originality Philosophical Evaluation

DO

- Critically engage with the author's argument/point/view – for example, by objecting to it or defending it from a potential objection
- Ensure your main points are *original* and *plausible*
- Develop a strong line of reasoning
- If you're adding to or bolstering the author's view – make it clear how the points in your philosophical evaluation are substantially different from the author's points
- Anticipate and address potential objections to your view (optional but encouraged)

DO NOT

- Leave obvious gaps in your reasoning
- Fail to address an obvious objection to your view
- Just claim to agree/disagree with the author's argument without explaining why
- Re-present the author's argument and cast it as your own
- Make main points that are unoriginal
- Leave it unclear how your main points differ from the author's points
- Leave it unclear what part of the author's argument/view your points are responding to