

## Guidelines for Writing the Papers

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### INTRODUCTION

- **Thesis Statement:** DO give a thesis statement. You should be able to sum up the main idea or argument of your paper in one or two sentences. For example, “I will argue that Rousseau’s most important criticism of Locke is \_\_\_\_\_. However, I will also explain how Locke could satisfactorily answer Rousseau on this point.”
- **Roadmap:** DO tell the reader how you will be proceeding in your paper. It is very helpful if you give in the introduction a *short* roadmap as to the stops that your paper will be making on the way. (Depending on how specific your thesis statement is, the thesis and the roadmap may overlap to some extent, and maybe some sentences can serve double-duty.) For example, “First, I will outline Locke’s conception of the social contract. Then I turn to Rousseau’s objection to Locke’s picture, and finally I set out the reasons why Locke’s position is not as vulnerable to this criticism as it might first appear.”
- **Skip the Fluff:** Because these are short papers, DON’T begin with a lot of background about the thinker you are talking about or the problem you are addressing. For instance, several sentences explaining who Aristotle is, or why the question of political authority is important, would be out of place. In short, include as little “fluff” as possible. In short papers, most of the introduction should usually either be stating the thesis statement or explaining the structure of the paper.

### ARGUMENT

- **Target Audience:** Whenever you write, you should think about who your target audience is. In this case, think of yourself as writing for your classmates: other students who have done the reading, but who may not have thought as carefully about these particular issues as you have. More precisely, you should think of your audience as composed of people who are interested in the topic and who are open-minded, but who are not necessarily predisposed to agree with you. Even though you are writing for your classmates, you should not assume that they remember everything that is said in the texts. If you refer to an idea or argument, you should remind your readers of it by explaining it to them and citing the relevant part of the text.

- **Selectiveness and Concision:** Because this is a short paper, you are going to have to be selective in what you include in your paper and concise in your manner of explaining it. Focus on what you judge to be the most important arguments.
- **Citing page numbers:** Be sure you engage closely with the text. When you refer to something an author says, even if you do not directly quote it, you should cite the page number either in parentheses or in a footnote. This way, if the reader is skeptical of your interpretation, it is easy for him to check which part of the text you are basing your reading on. If it is clear from the context which author you are discussing, you can simply insert the page or section number in parentheses at the relevant place. If the text has chapters or sections that tend to be shorter than a page, then it is better to use these instead of page numbers.
- **Direct Quotations:** Direct quotations from the author are *sometimes* appropriate, but should be used sparingly. Long quotations should generally be avoided, especially in a short paper. The danger of employing too many quotations is that you will use them as a crutch: instead of explaining what an author says, you simply reproduce their own words. Such a paper is unlikely to further enlighten or persuade someone who has already read the texts you are discussing. Furthermore, without explaining an author's argument in your own words, it is not clear that you really have a grasp of its main ideas.

When should you use direct quotations? Without aspiring to give you an exhaustive list, here are three good reasons:

- (1) **If you think your readers might be skeptical that the author really says what you are attributing to her**, then quoting the author's own words can be useful as evidence.
  - (2) **If you feel like a particular statement warrants extensive comment or interpretation.** It is often a good idea to directly quote what you think is the author's central claim, and then explain what that claim means and doesn't mean. Or perhaps you think the statement is ambiguous and you want to show two ways of interpreting the statement.
  - (3) **If a particular statement that the author makes is really emblematic of the idea you have been attributing to him.** For example, perhaps you have spent the whole paragraph explaining a particular concept. You might want to end the paragraph with a sentence that sums it all up in a few words: "As Aristotle says, 'SHORT DIRECT QUOTE...'"
- **Coherence of Paragraphs:** Make sure that every paragraph has a main point, that it is clear to the reader what that main point is, and that every sentence in

the paragraph contributes to making that main point. For this reason, it is a good rule of thumb to start paragraphs with topic sentences that state the main idea of the paragraph.

- **Overall Essay Organization:** Make sure that the role of each paragraph in the larger argument is clear. Sometimes you need to do more than make your point; you need to explain why you're making the point that you're making. For instance, if you're explaining the idea of a law of nature, you might need to tell the reader why you're explaining this here and now and what role this explanation has in your overall argument.

You may use a few section headings to help organize your paper if you like—just make sure that the final product reads like a coherent essay and not a series of short essay responses.

Sometimes, to forge a connection between two ideas, it can help to introduce a paragraph with a summary of the preceding and a rhetorical question. For example, "Hobbes, as we have seen, thinks we are all free and equal in the state of nature, but why should that make the state of nature a state of war?" However, this device should be used selectively; it would be tedious if you used it time and time again.

- **Your own view:** An important part of doing philosophy is thinking about whether you find particular arguments persuasive or not and the reasons you have for making this judgment. This part of the paper should be not less than half a page in length and could be longer. Note that I am not looking for your "personal opinion." What I am interested in are the *reasons* why you find one view more persuasive than another – reasons that could persuade the reader to adopt your view. Your position does not have to be unqualified. Perhaps you agree with one text in some ways, another text in other ways. (One thing that is nice about nuanced answers is that it is a straightforward way of making an original contribution.)
- **Conclusion:** Conclusions can be hard to write, especially for short papers. Here is what I suggest.
  - Briefly tell the reader what you have accomplished in your paper. What questions have you answered, and what are the main points that you have made?
  - You can also add thoughts that look beyond the content of the paper. Maybe what you have said about Aristotle's ideas about the purpose of the political community have broader implications for a range of issues that you did not have space to discuss. You can make such suggestions

here in the conclusion which direct the reader as to what some possible implications of your position are.

- You can also qualify your argument, by noting that although you think that the arguments that you have made are valid, that perhaps there is something to be said even still for the other side.
- In general, don't spend a lot of space on the introduction or conclusion. Both should be relatively brief so that you can spend most of your time on the body of your paper.

### **WORKS CITED and REFERENCES**

- A Works Cited page is not necessary if you are only using the reading assignments from class. However, if you do use external sources, then you should give their full bibliographic information either in a Works Cited page or in footnotes. (This will not count towards your word limit.) You should use a standard style of citation, but you can use whichever style you prefer.

If you are using an older edition of the Cahn anthology or other versions of the readings, you must provide the bibliographical information.

- For the most part, I discourage any external research, since it is likely to distract you from analyzing the arguments in the texts assigned. However, you will not be penalized for doing external research, so long as you fully cite whatever sources you borrow *text or ideas* from. Failure to acknowledge your sources constitutes plagiarism. All of this being said, a paper that relies too heavily on external sources will often show less original thought, perhaps less engagement with the primary source material. Therefore, using external sources can *indirectly* lower your mark by making it a weaker paper.
- One important exception to the rule of thumb against using sources not assigned in this class is that you may feel that something you have read previously, perhaps a text from another class, is relevant to your discussion. For example, perhaps you have read another philosopher in another class, and you want to refer to some of his ideas. Or maybe you want to refer to a news story that directly bears on your topic. This is perfectly appropriate; just make sure you cite whatever you use.
- You do *not* need to cite the lectures or things said in discussion section; we can regard these as the common intellectual property of the whole class.

**HOW WILL MY PAPER BE MARKED?** Here are some things that we will look for when we mark:

- **Grasp of Basic Ideas:** Does the student demonstrate familiarity with the text? Does the writer show that she understands the main points made by the authors? It is not fatal to make small errors of interpretation, but we can usually tell when you basically know what you're talking about and when you don't. One common mistake is to latch onto one very small part of the text (often towards the beginning), and then try to build up your entire interpretation from that. This usually leads you to misunderstand the whole point that the author is making. Also, many philosophers develop their own views by engaging with rival positions. Make sure you don't mistake the philosopher's discussion of a rival position for his statement of his own case.
- **Organization:** Does the paper have a logical structure? Is there some point that the paper is trying to make (or is it just a loose collection of thoughts)? Does the reader have to work really hard to figure out that structure, or does the writer make that structure clear to the reader?
- **Clarity:** Is the paper written clearly and unambiguously. When we mark, we cannot constantly be giving you the benefit of the doubt; we can't keep thinking, "Well, there is a possible way of construing that sentence that makes it sort of correct." Such papers will naturally receive lower marks than papers which make very clear arguments which are not easily misunderstood. Of course, we won't willfully misunderstand you, but you should write *not* so that you **can** be understood, but so that you **cannot** be **misunderstood**.
- **Engagement with the Text:** When attributing an idea to an author, does the paper cite the relevant page number? Does the paper effectively put arguments into its own words, rather than merely quoting the text to avoid having to do so?
- **Depth:** Has the paper dug deeply into the issues or has it proceeded at a superficial level? Does the paper consider objections to its points? Does it give serious consideration to other points of view? Is the paper convincing in answering these objections? A paper that is otherwise very competent but which never digs into the issues in any depth is usually a 'B' or 'B+' paper.
- **Originality and Insight:** Does the paper demonstrate independent and creative thinking? Or is the paper simply regurgitating what was said in lecture or discussion section? Of course, it is perfectly appropriate to use points made in lecture or discussion section as jumping-off points, but a really good paper will add new thoughts to these or consider these points from new angles. A paper

that is otherwise excellent but shows little or no original thinking is usually a 'B' or 'B+' paper.

### HOW CAN I GET HELP?

- First, your TA will be holding special office hours to discuss the paper before the paper is due. Your TA will make these hours known to you. As a general rule, the more you have thought about how to write the paper, the more your TA will be able to help you.
- You are encouraged to have your classmates, friends, or whomever proofread your work and give you comments. It is essential, however, that you do any actual writing. Proofreaders may help you rewrite a couple of sentences as an illustration, but it is not permissible for the proofreader to rewrite large sections of the paper.
- You are also highly encouraged to utilize available writing centres.

The Philosophy Essay Clinic:  
(especially recommended)

<http://undergraduate.philosophy.utoronto.ca/philosophy-essay-clinic/>

St. George Campus Writing Centres

<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/arts-and-science>

Writing Centre Workshops

<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/writing-plus>

The Writing Centre website has also put together some useful advice on writing that you may be interested in: <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice>

Finally, English Language Learners may find additional resources at:

<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/faqs/english-as-second-language>

<http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/advising/ell>