

Philosophy 0300, Introduction to Ethics, Fall 1996
Professor: David Gauthier
Recitation Leader: Ben Eggleston

Guidelines for Writing a Philosophy Essay

Format

1. Use a title page showing the title of your essay, your name, the date when you are turning in your essay, the course for which you are writing the essay, and your recitation leader's name. This should be the only sheet where your name appears, so that your reader can grade your essay without knowing whose it is.
2. Choose a title that refers to the theme or content of your essay fairly specifically—not something like “First Essay” or “Ethics Paper.”
3. Print your essay in type of approximately this size (this is 12-point type), double-spaced, with margins of about 1 inch each. (Do *not* hand-write your essay.) Number your pages.
4. Staple the pages of your essay together; do not use a paper clip, a folder, or a binder.
5. Keep an extra copy (either on paper or on disk) of your essay. (You are responsible for providing an extra copy at your instructor's request.)

Style and Content

6. Write your essay so that it could be understood by a reasonably intelligent person who has not read the material about which you are writing. Its content should be understandable to your friends, for example, or to a member of your family who does not have philosophical training. You can make your essay clearer not only by providing helpful background information about the views your are discussing and/or criticizing, but also by organizing your essay so that the reader can easily see its structure. Difficult content is made much more manageable by good organization and clearly indicated transitions.
6. Try to be as clear as possible, both in your own mind and in the words of your essay, about what the point of your essay is: think about what you are trying to show in the essay and explain it to your reader. You yourself may not be sure from the start what the point of your essay is; it is natural for your essay to evolve as you write it. But be sure that the final version of your essay is precise and that it cannot be misunderstood. This does not mean that you have to be wordy; indeed, conciseness is possible and preferable. Nor does it mean that you cannot be imaginative or original; just be sure to present your insights clearly.

7. If you are addressing a specifically assigned topic, be sure that you address all parts of it. This often requires *both* explaining an author's argument clearly *and* critically examining or evaluating it.
8. Feel free to use first-person pronouns when useful, such as to identify an opinion as your own in contrast to someone else's opinion or objective fact.

Academic Integrity

9. When formulating your ideas, you are free to consult whatever sources you want to consult. You must, however, indicate *all* of the sources (books, articles, World Wide Web pages, Usenet news groups, television programs, other people, or whatever) that helped you to develop your ideas for the essay. You will not be penalized for borrowing others' good ideas instead of thinking of your own; the ideas in your essay will be judged on their quality and how well you adapt them to the purpose of your essay, not on whether they are original with you.
10. When writing your essay, do the writing yourself. Any language not your own—whether a sentence from a published source or just a clever phrase or metaphor suggested by another person in conversation—must be attributed to its source. Again, you will not be penalized for borrowing others' good ways of expressing certain ideas, unless you borrow so much that the essay ceases to be legitimately yours. But as long as the essay is not flooded with quotations (i.e., as long as it's plainly a piece of *your* writing), the writing will be judged on its quality (especially its clarity), and not on whether it's all original with you.
11. To cite a source of ideas or language you are borrowing, use a clear system of citations, such as footnotes, endnotes, or parenthetical references like those recommended in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* or Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. There is no particular format for citations to which it is necessary to conform exactly, as long as your citations are clear and exhibit a consistent form throughout your essay.