

**David O. Brink; UCSD
Writing Guidelines**

GENERAL

- In writing a philosophy paper, do not simply state your beliefs or report the beliefs of others. You should make claims about an issue and support your claims with arguments. When you present your view, consider what might plausibly be said against it. When you criticize someone else's views, consider how that person might reasonably reply to your objection.

PREPARATION

- Choose a paper topic that you find interesting.
- It can sometimes be helpful to read recommended readings. But this is not necessary. An excellent paper can be written on the basis of a careful and thoughtful reading of the required material and class discussion.
- In trying to understand a philosopher's views, it is often useful to write a summary or outline of his or her arguments for yourself.
- Review your lecture notes and handouts.
- Determine the structure of your paper in advance. Make an outline that organizes the various issues and arguments you want to discuss into an intelligent and coherent whole.
- If possible, write your paper in two drafts. After writing your first draft, set it aside for a while, then read it through and make revisions of substance, spelling, grammar, and punctuation. You may want to discuss your draft with your TA or instructor.

THE PAPER

- Most papers have a simple tripartite structure: (1) tell your readers what you're going to tell them, (2) tell them, and (3) tell them what you told them. The bulk of the paper should be devoted to (2). (1), also known as the introduction, and (3), also known as the conclusion, should function as bookends.
- Make the introduction brief. Explain the issues that you are going to discuss and the position that you are going to defend. Please avoid banal phrases and filler (e.g. "Topic x has been a great mystery and source of controversy since the dawn of mankind.").
- Make sure the paper has direction. Your claims should all be relevant and consistent and should support your position. Consider obvious alternatives and objections to your position or argument. You needn't pretend to be certain at every point, but, if you are uncertain, give reasons for being uncertain.
- It is generally best to assume that your reader is an intelligent person who has read fairly little philosophy but has read the material in question. Avoid unnecessary jargon and explain most technical terms and concepts.
- Write simple, direct sentences. Whenever possible, use the active voice. Avoid pretentious or banal phrases and personal references or apologies, such as "I feel" or "of course, it's only a matter of opinion". Also avoid vague phrases, such as "x involves/connects up with/relates to y". Explain what is related to what and what the relationship is.

- Do not quote unnecessarily. Unless you are discussing a difficult or central passage, where quotation is appropriate, paraphrase is more appropriate and better demonstrates your grasp of the material.
- If you quote or paraphrase closely, use some standard form of reference to document your source. You should refer your readers to passages in the texts you are discussing even when you are not quoting directly.
- Document your intellectual debts to internet sources as you should any other primary or secondary source.
- Your professor's notes and handouts should be treated like any other secondary source and should not be quoted or paraphrased without proper attribution.
- When you are finished, proofread your paper for coherence of argument, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. It pays to correct errors of this kind.
- Feel free to consult with your TA or instructor about how to write a philosophy paper. You could also consult a general manual of style, such as W. Strunk and E.B. White, The Elements of Style.
- Finally, a reminder about plagiarism. (a) Plagiarism involves borrowing the work (ideas or words) of another and representing them as one's own without giving proper credit to one's source. It can, but need not, involve intentional wrongdoing. (b) Plagiarism is a violation of UCSD regulations governing academic integrity. (c) I take plagiarism very seriously. (d) Because of (b) and (c), students found to have plagiarized work will automatically fail the course and/or be turned over to the appropriate college disciplinary body. (e) Plagiarism is often easy to detect. (f) Students whose work is suspected of plagiarism will have their work checked by www.turnitin.com.