

WRITING YOUR PHILOSOPHY PAPER

Technical Tips

Your paper should have:

- introduction and conclusion
- thesis statement (probably either first or last sentence in introduction)
- citations of both quotations and paraphrases
- parenthetical citations at the end of a sentence: (Ayer 65).
- if you draw on the lectures, cite these too: (Arneson 5/22)
- no or few quotations (in most cases in philosophy papers, it is preferable to paraphrase authors' positions)
- standard format: 12 pt, Times New Roman font, one-inch margins

Structure

The paper topics ask you to do two things: explain the argument of one or two authors relative to a problem, and analyze their arguments. This means your paper should have 2 parts:

1. explanation
2. analysis

You may structure your paper however makes most sense to you. Some possibilities:

explain argument of author 1
explain argument of author 2
analyze argument of author 1
analyze argument of author 2

explain argument of author 1
analyze argument of author 1
explain argument of author 2
analyze argument of author 2

Be sure that your analysis of the argument is distinct from your explanation of that argument. These are separate parts of a paper. Some people are tempted to only explain the arguments without analyzing, while others write papers full of analysis but with very little explanation. Try to avoid both extremes. That said, I expect more than half your paper to be taken up with explanation of the various arguments.

Explanation of an argument consists of two parts: the author's position, and her reasons for her position. Both are critical to a thorough explanation.

Analysis

What is "analysis"?

There are (at least) 3 types of analysis:

- comparative analysis (how are authors' positions related, similar or different)

- elaboration and interpretation of author's position
- critical response to author's position (either in support of the position or against it)

Your analysis should include all three of these. Critical response is the most important, and most difficult.

Critical Response

Do you agree with the author(s) argument or disagree? Why?

This part of the paper is the most difficult. It takes time and thought to figure out what you think about someone's views. People usually run into 2 sorts of problems: they either don't know what to think, or they know that they agree/disagree with someone, but they don't know why. The first step to getting over either of these hurdles is the same: careful development or examination of the authors' arguments (both their positions and their reasons for their positions). Usually, by looking carefully at the authors' arguments, something comes up.

As you study an author's arguments, ask yourself two questions:

Oh yeah?

So what?

The author's reasons for her position may be faulty or incomplete. You may agree with the position but disagree with the reasons the author gives for it. Or, you may think both should be thrown out.

Even if the author provides good reasons for her position, maybe her position ignores some important feature of the problem, or is uninteresting for some other reason.

These are useful questions whether you agree or disagree with the author.

If you disagree with an author, explain what you find wrong with the argument. Is it the position, the reasons, or both? Give your own reasons for thinking the author's argument is bad. Try to **persuade** your reader to also disagree with the author.

If you agree with an author, give additional reasons for thinking the author is right. You may also wish to consider an objection someone might raise (perhaps an objection that was raised in lecture) and explain why that objection is not a problem. Try to **persuade** your reader to also agree with the author.

Characteristics of An Excellent Paper

- clear, complete, and correct explanation of authors' arguments
- interesting and original analysis, supported by good reasons for your position
- polished presentation: no glaring grammar errors, correct and complete citations, etc.