

WRITING A PHILOSOPHY PAPER

The point of a philosophy paper is not simply to report but to analyze. Philosophical analysis involves more than simply presenting your own opinion or reporting the views of philosophers.

Getting Started

A philosophy paper should always be a response to a particular question or problem. Always read the assignment closely and make sure that you can identify the philosophical problem(s) that you will be addressing in your paper. In approaching the paper follow these steps:

- 1) think through the problem to be addressed
- 2) determine the general conclusions you wish to argue for
- 3) decide on an order in which you will argue for these conclusions

The Introduction

The introduction to a paper should do two things for the reader: 1) attract the reader's interest and 2) allow the reader to anticipate what is to follow in the main body of the paper—never surprise your reader. However, the introduction will also pay off for the writer in that it keeps the paper on track. If you commit yourself to proving a certain conclusion, then that is what you need to do.

In writing the introduction one must state the following in a concise way:

- 1) the problem you will be addressing
- 2) the position you intend to defend, your thesis (please be specific)
- possibly also: 3) the manner in which will go about defending the position

Main Body

The purpose of the main body of the paper is to bring the reader by use of a logical reasoning process to accept the truth of your position.

The succession of paragraphs in the main body of the paper should follow a clear, logical order. Think of this order as forming an argumentative structure of the paper. An argument begins at one point and moves through a succession of points, each of which suggests or entails the next point.

The argument of your paper should consist of the mounting of evidence in favor of your thesis. This evidence can be of various forms: 1) arguments that lend positive support to your position/ interpretation; 2) use of quotations to support a textual interpretation; 3) refutations of alternative views/interpretations; 4) refutation of objections commonly advanced against your thesis.

Conclusion

The purpose of a conclusion is to strengthen the message conveyed by the whole paper and to leave the reader with a sense of completion. The conclusion might include a reiteration of the main points of the argument and a restatement of your main conclusions. You might also suggest implications or consequences of your argument that go beyond the limits of the paper, but do not introduce a new idea that casts doubts on your thesis, nor introduce a whole new subject that would require another argumentative essay.

General Tips

When writing philosophy papers, always try to put things in your own words. Don't try to make your writing sound like someone else's writing, especially other philosophers we have read. Everything you want to say can be said in ordinary English. Avoid philosophical jargon! Make sure you don't use words that you cannot define. The words you communicate most clearly in, are the words that you are most familiar with.

All quotations and examples that are used as evidence for your position should be in a supporting role-- they should be introduced only as backup for points you make in your own words. The reader should not have to interpret the quotations or examples themselves. Tell your reader what you take the quotations or examples to say .

Remember: A philosophy paper can never be too clear, too structured or too precise!!