

WRITING A PHILOSOPHY PAPER

The point of a philosophy paper is not simply to report but to analyze and to give reasoned support for certain views. Philosophical analysis involves more than simply reporting yours or other's views (including those of philosophers). Instead, you must engage yourself in an examination of the ideas relevant to your topic —which ideas can be defended by sound reasoning? —what are the consequences of these ideas?

Getting Started

- 1) think through the problem to be addressed
- 2) determine the general conclusions you wish to argue for (your thesis)
- 3) decide on an order in which you will argue for these conclusions
- 4) jot down a sequence (outline) of ideas supporting these conclusions
- 5) use this sequence (outline) of ideas as the foci, or main points of individual paragraphs

Writing the Paper

It is good to have an introduction to a paper that does two things for the reader, namely, it attracts the reader's interest and allows 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 try to state in a concise way: 1) the problem you will be addressing; 2) the position you intend to defend, your thesis (please be specific) and possibly also: 3) the manner in which will go about defending the 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 or to provide added support from others; 3) refutations of alternative views/interpretations; 4) refutation of objections commonly advanced against your thesis.

(When arguing for a view, don't simply assert the superiority of your position over another or "pull rank" by citing authorities. Use logic and evidence.)

General Tips

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 .

Cite all your sources, not just those you directly quote. Using sources is a good thing, not bad (not citing them is the bad thing—very, very bad)

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