

# **Philosophy**

## **Essay/assignment requirements**

Essays/assignments should be double-spaced and printed on one side of separate A4 sheets of paper. Word processed documents are strongly encouraged. A Department cover sheet must be completed, signed and attached to the front page of all essays/assignments. Cover sheets are available on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the History Building next to the essay drop boxes. Please do not fold essays/ assignments or place in folders, file covers, or plastic envelopes. These tend to get lost. Students are strongly advised to make a photocopy of each essay/assignment before handing it in and to retain all returned and marked essays/assignments.

### **Collection of essays/assignments**

Announcements will be made in class as to when these will be available for collection.

### **Some Hints On How To Write A Philosophical Essay**

There are **four** key points to keep in mind:

- (1) Clarity and Organisation
- (2) Argumentation
- (3) Originality
- (4) Presentation

## **1. Clarity**

- make sure what you write will be intelligible to your reader; always
- remember that you are writing in order to be understood by somebody else - who, unlike you, doesn't have an independent grasp of what you mean.
- say what you want to say simply.
- don't use fancy words.
- better to be clear and prosaic than stylish but obscure.
- the profoundest of thoughts can be expressed simply and clearly.

## **2. Organisation**

- use plenty of paragraphs, one for each separate point: don't mix different points in one paragraph.
- opening paragraph: give a brief statement of your general position on the topic, plus a brief summary of what you are going to do in the essay; this will make your reader feel she or he knows what's coming, and that will make it easier for her or him to follow the essay.
- final paragraph: give a brief summary of what you have established.
- "signpost" your work as you go along: explain, for example, how what you are saying is intended to relate to what you've just said, or to the overall issue you're discussing; pause to say what is coming next - for example, at the beginning of a new section, or if you're going to move on to a new tack; pause every now and again to summarise; use headings if you wish.

### 3. Argumentation

- never simply state your opinion: a philosophical essay should consist of reasoned arguments for your beliefs.
- present your arguments as clearly as possible; label the premises and conclusion if you wish (e.g. P1, P2, etc.).
- make sure your arguments are valid (i.e. that the conclusion follows from the premises).
- anticipate and answer any obvious objections to what you're saying.
- face up to the opposition: state and criticise arguments used by writers opposing the view you are defending.
- don't worry if you don't know which side of a debate to come down on: in that case give a survey of the standard arguments on each side, together with your own comments on the arguments, and your criticisms if you have any.

### 4. Originality

You're a beginner, and nobody is expecting you to produce a highly original research paper. But nor are you expected merely to paraphrase sections of books you've read. Never simply copy or paraphrase and précis someone else's discussion. It is your ability to think an issue through for yourself and write up your own discussion of it that we're interested in. We also want to see you critically discussing what other people (including your lecturer and tutor) have said. In the course of your own discussion, it is perfectly acceptable to use points, which have been made in the books you've read. But when you do this, you must always acknowledge that you are borrowing from someone else's work. For example write in brackets, or as a footnote, something like: this point is made by Dick Clever in *Philosophical One-upmanship*, page 69. This also applies if you use a point which the lecturer has made. To avoid any possibility of an accusation of plagiarism (that is, the unacknowledged use of somebody else's ideas), you must list at the end of your essay all the books you have referred to in writing it.

## **Some further points**

Avoid long quotations. It is your statement of the point that we want to see, not someone else's. A good rule of thumb is to use a quotation only when you want to disagree with what the author is saying.

- Beware of metaphors: for example, talk of “smashing the determinist’s theory” and the like will grate on your reader’s nerves.
- Avoid rhetorical questions (e.g. “Can a caring person possibly think that the life of a foetus has no value?”). If your reader doesn’t agree with you, you’ll just get the opposite answer to the one you wanted – rhetorical questions have no persuasive force, and are no substitute for rationally convincing arguments.
- Fully explain any unusual terms you introduce (whether your own, or from another subject).
- Be relevant: answer the question set, and don’t include irrelevant material, no matter how interesting it may be.
- Write a plan of your essay before you start: don’t just launch out and ramble.
- If you want to produce a polished essay, write a draft, and extract the final version from that.
- Talk with your friends about how to approach your essay. This isn’t cheating. Discussing things with other people will help you to develop your ideas. It is worth getting someone else to look at your essay before handing it in – they’ll be able to tell you whether or not it reads clearly.

## **Bibliography and footnotes**

A bibliography, listing all (and only) books and articles used in preparing an essay (whether or not quoted or referred to explicitly), must be placed at the end of the essay. Entries should be arranged alphabetically by authors’ names, and should follow this pattern:

**Books:** Author, title (underlined), editor(s) (if any), edition used (if more than one published). Ideally you should also include place of publication, publisher, and date of publication. (All this information can be found at the beginning of each book, and on the book’s card in the Library catalogue.)

**Articles:** Author, title (in single quotation marks), journal title (italicised) and year, or if the article appears in a book, editor(s) and title (italicised) of book plus publication details.

**Examples:**

Neusnan, J., *The Way of Evolution*, 2nd ed., Encino: Dickenson, 2006.

Snort, N., 'Interpretation and Experience', *Philosophical Studies* 2 (1999), pp. 26-62.

Werblow, R.J.Z., 'Logicism', in R.C. Zapp (ed.), *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Living Faiths*, London: Hutchison, 2004.

Zapp, R.C., *Universal Truths*, London: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Footnotes are a device for including material whose presence would clutter the main text. They should be numbered, and may either be placed at the bottom of the appropriate page, or collected together at the end of the essay. The main uses you make of footnotes will be (i) giving the origin of a quotation you have used, and (ii) to acknowledge that the point you are making is taken from one of the books you have read. In both cases the format of the footnote is the same: give the author, and the title of the article or book, which should be in single quotes in the case of an article, or underlined in the case of a book, and the page number. (Your bibliography will then give any outstanding details.) For example: J. Brown, Philosophical Meanderings (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), pp.32-64.

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