GUIDELINES FOR WRITING PAPERS IN PHILOSOPHY[1]

Note: Some papers and assignments may not call for using all of the following criteria. In such cases the applicable criteria should be followed.

NO RULE OF WRITING IS ABSOLUTE.

1. FORM

1.1. Papers should be typed, double-spaced, and on only one side of the page. I will accept hand-written papers, but I strongly prefer typed ones.
  1.1.1. Papers should not have covers. Simply staple them in the upper left-hand corner.
1.2. Format, footnoting, and bibliography should be in accord with some standard manual of style. See E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* or Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. Robert Graves gives several good hints on writing style in *A Reader Over Your Shoulder*. For proper citation use the Chicago or Turabian style. See http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/instruct/guides/chicago-turabianstyle.pdf for a short explanation of these styles. If a citation is at the bottom of the page it is called a footnote, if at the end of the paper, an endnote. Please do not use the APA style in my classes. A bibliography is not necessary if the material is already in footnotes. There are also books devoted specifically to writing philosophy papers: e.g. A. P. Martinich, *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1997), Louis Vaughn, *Writing Philosophy: A Student's Guide to Writing Philosophy Essays* (Oxford University Press, 2005). All quotes must be footnoted.
  1.2.1. Internet footnotes should follow the following format. Give: (a) author's name if available … if not, give the name of the institution, and if that is not available, give "anonymous"], (b) title of the Web site or publication [found usually at the top of the page] (c) date of posting, writing, or original publication of the writing, [if the material is from a previously published source, give a proper footnote for that source] (d) URL, (e) date of access. Here's a Chicago Manual of Style example of a bibliographic entry: Ellison, Jim. "Assessing the accessibility of fifty United States government Web pages: Using Bobby to check on Uncle Sam." *First Monday*, volume 9, number 7 (July 2004) http://www.firstmonday.org (accessed June 16, 2005).[2]
1.3. Spelling and grammar should be correct. Good proofreading is essential to good writing. Be sure to check words that your computer marks as misspelled. Do not assume however that it will catch all of your errors. Common spelling errors that cannot be noticed by your computer include "can not" for "cannot" and "there" for "their." One

---

[1] These guidelines have a long history. They were adapted from Morris Keeton and Earl Harrison, Antioch College in the 1980s and then from Steve Voss, who taught at SJSU in the 80s. They have been amended based on comments by Carolyn Black in the 80s and by other SJSU department members in 2010.
[2] Chicago Manuel of Style Citation Guide, Ohio State University Libraries (March 2006), http://library.osu.edu/sites/guides/chicagogd.php (accessed Aug. 30, 2010)

student of mine recently wrote "disunion" for "decision," "out weight" for "outweigh," and "law suite" for "lawsuit": none of these errors could have been caught by his computer. In addition, students who depend on their computer for spelling often forget to put in hyphens in hyphenated words, for example "long term" instead of "long-term."

1.3.1.   Although many journalists and novelists use sentence fragments, they are not acceptable in scholarly papers. Here are some examples of sentence fragments: "Also, that humans cannot possibly have free will in a civilized society." [The sentence is not finished.]   Usually sentence fragments are really just parts of a larger sentence. For example, one student wrote: "Without free thought, people don the manifestations of machines themselves. Creating waste with abilities." What the student meant to say was "Without free thought people take on the character of machines, thus wasting their own abilities." Here is another example: "This mass devastation would most likely come in the form of nuclear warfare. Nuclear warfare born from the womb of capitalism." The second passage is a sentence fragment. What the student meant was: "This mass devastation would most likely come in the form of nuclear warfare born in the womb of capitalism." Your computer will usually underline sentence fragments with green.

1.3.2.   "They" and "their" should not be used to refer to particular persons. I recognize that the English language is changing and that this is becoming more acceptable. But in formal academic prose we still avoid it. One of the reasons for the rise of the singular "they" is the desire not to use sexist language. However you can avoid sexist language by using the term "one." Remember that if you start a sentence with "one" you cannot then switch later to "they." "If one is expected to write a term paper one avoids sentence fragments" is correct.

1.3.3.   It is wrong to say, "We may always do things that leads us to get the things we want." It should be "lead."

1.3.4.   *Gender*. It is alright to use "he" or "she" if you have a male or female specifically in mind. But use sex-neutral language whenever you are thinking of persons in general: "a person" works well. Again, do not use "they" or "their" to refer to individual persons.

1.3.5.   *Spelling of Proper Names*. Students commonly misspell the names of the philosophers. Check the name against the spelling in the text or your other source. Common misspellings include "Decartes" for "Descartes" and "Mills" for "Mill."

1.4. Do not use "right justification." If you are using Word, use the "Align left" function. Do not use "Justify." Right justification produces a jumpy line that is unpleasant to read.

1.5. Give Credit. You should give credit to others for ideas that are not your own. For example, it is dishonest to present ideas from research you have done without crediting the source through giving a footnote. In short, when you take material from another writer's work, even if no word-for-word quotation is made, you should footnote the material.

1.6. *Plagiarism*. Failure to use quote marks around quoted text and to attribute the text properly to the author is plagiarism. If you plagiarize you will receive an F on the paper. Turning in a paper written by another student as your own also falls under this category.

2. LANGUAGE
   2.1. Words are intended to communicate. Avoid vagueness and ambiguity. Always make sure that the reader can figure out what pronouns like "it" refer to. Define the key terms in your discussion. It is especially important to define technical terms. Do not use words in unconventional ways without good reason. If you do, tell the reader. Turn to the dictionary when you need help in choosing the right word. A thesaurus may help you to think of the word you want, but do not use a word from the thesaurus if you do not know what it means. Do not use any word you do not understand.
   2.2. Philosophy papers should be as clear as possible. Do not use "big words" just to impress the reader. However you should be familiar with the technical terms relevant to the problem you are discussing and you should use them when appropriate. It is especially important to use the technical terms of philosophy, e.g. "a priori," precisely.
   2.3. Do not use the language of the streets, high school or home life. You are expected to write this paper with language appropriate to college. Avoid slang. For example in the sentence: "Terry could not get it right for nothing" the phrase "for nothing" is slang.
   2.4. Avoid exaggerated or emotionally charged language. For example, a student of mine once said, "Marcuse spitted on all that is associated with money." This would only be appropriate if there was an actual quote in Marcuse's writing in which he said "I spit on all associated with money."
3. RELEVANCE
   3.1. Essays must be relevant to the questions of philosophy. A philosophy paper is very different from a sociology, history or theology paper. A philosophy paper is concerned with the truth of philosophical theories, answers to philosophical questions or interpretation of philosophical texts. You should avoid giving mere informational reports. Philosophy papers are philosophical in the sense that they are engaged with the questions at issue.'
   3.2. Avoid analyzing the style or the psychology of the author unless these things have a strong relevance to the philosophical point.
   3.3. Philosophical questions often ask about the nature of abstract things such as "love" "truth" and "beauty" and about the truth of statements which contain terms of this sort. A good rule of thumb is: if the question can be solved by the methods of science then it is not a philosophical question. However it should be remembered that the nature of philosophy, and hence of philosophical questions, is itself debated by philosophers. And so even the previous point has been questioned by some philosophers.
   3.4. Do not begin your papers with a biography of the philosopher unless this is philosophically relevant. Philosophy papers are not history papers.
   3.5. A philosophy paper should not be too autobiographical. Your personal life and feelings might be relevant as examples - but do not assume that they have any more importance for the reader than any other examples.
   3.6. Avoid using phrases like "I feel." A philosophical paper should be concerned with reasoned beliefs, not with feelings. This is not to say, however, that feelings are bad or totally irrelevant to philosophy. Good philosophical ideas often originate with a strong feeling of some sort. Philosophy moves on from there in a rational manner.

4. EVIDENCE AND ARGUMENT
    4.1. Philosophy papers take various forms. They may take a position on a philosophical issue, interpret a philosophical writing, compare two philosophical positions, or simply explain to the reader what some philosopher has said (exposition). All of these types of paper should be based on good evidence.
        4.1.1. Position papers require argumentation, as do interpretive papers. In these cases you are presenting a thesis and defending it. This is also true sometimes in comparison papers.
            4.1.1.1.In position papers, take a position concerning the views of the philosophers you discuss. You do not need to agree entirely or disagree entirely: you can agree with some points and disagree with others. The position you take is your thesis.
            4.1.1.2. In position papers you should defend your position (your thesis) against possible counterarguments.
    4.2. You should be accurate in your statement of facts. One important set of facts is the collection of actual statements made by the authors discussed. Your quotations of these should be accurate. Your paraphrases of theories and arguments should show understanding. One of the things your teacher is looking for is the extent to which you understand the material you are looking at.
    4.3. Many writers discussed by philosophers did not write in English. Thus, in many cases you will be reading a translation of the original work. Be aware of this. If you know the original language you might want to check it: it is the primary source for the philosopher's ideas. Even if you do not know the language, be aware of how the key terms in the original language might have a different meaning than their translations in English.
    4.4. Other facts which are drawn on by philosophers include everyday common sense facts that few would question, the well-established truths of modern science (for instance the theory of evolution and Einstein's theory of relativity), and well-established historical facts.
    4.5. However, philosophers are primarily concerned with the truth or falsehood of philosophical theses, with the reasons and evidence presented in support of these, and with the abstract concepts that are used in them. They are not primarily concerned with facts. In general, philosophical theories are precisely those that cannot be proved by facts.
    4.6. Beware of hasty generalizations, oversimplifications, overgeneralizations, and distortions of positions. In general, avoid the various fallacies: begging the question (arguing in a circle), straw person (attacking a position that is weaker than, or other than, your opponent's actual position), and *ad hominem* (attacking your opponent as a person instead of his or her argument) are the most common of these.
    4.7. Be aware of the limitations of your case. Do the available evidence and arguments make the conclusion drawn possible, probable, or certain? Are there relevant facts that fail to support your thesis? Are there obvious objections to your thesis that should be answered? If there are such objections, state them and suggest possible solutions. Are

you making any assumptions that you do not state? If so, it might be wise to state them.

4.8. You are not required to take one of the positions presented to you by the writers you are reading. Neither are you required to come up with something completely new. Creative philosophical writing often involves borrowing from, and modifying, the positions of others to suit your own vision of things.

4.9. Be consistent. Avoid making statements which contradict one another or which imply contradictions.

4.10. When looking at another person's (for example, a philosopher's) argument, deal with each premise separately, then ask whether the premises are sufficient, if true, to support the conclusion. Several things can go wrong with an argument: individual premises can be false, doubtful, or meaningless; the conclusion can be poorly supported; the key concepts could be poorly defined; the conclusion can be disproved by another argument; and so on.

4.11. There are several ways to support a thesis. One way is to show problems with the main competing views. You may attack competing views by showing that they lead to inconsistencies or to unacceptable consequences. You may attack them by showing that they are poorly argued or based on doubtful or false premises.

4.12. One problematic form of argument is the rhetorical question. An example is: "Who am I to condemn the Nazis?" or "Who is to say what is right or wrong?" It is important for the reader to know exactly what you are asserting. Thus, it makes more sense to replace the question with an outright statement. For example: "No one has the right to condemn the Nazis" or "There is no way to determine what is really right or wrong."

4.13. It is a good idea at the beginning of your paper to formulate the problem and make it more specific. For instance if you are asked to write on the problem of evil you might reformulate the question as "How can God's perfect nature be reconciled with the existence of evil in the world?" A well-formulated question can help produce a well-organized paper.

4.14. One bad way of supporting your position is simply to label it as your own, as one that your parents taught you, or as one that you and your friends believe. This is a form of the "appeal to authority" fallacy.

4.15. In philosophy, there are no ultimate authorities. One does not, for instance, base one's conclusions on appeals to religious authorities, whether the sayings of the Pope, the Bible, or Buddha. There are important religious beliefs which have many interesting similarities to positions held by philosophers. However even great religious philosophers like Aquinas and Kierkegaard distinguished between their philosophical work and revealed theology.

4.16. It is often useful to draw additional knowledge from secondary literature. "Secondary literature" refers to commentaries, books and articles that seek to explicate the writings of great philosophers. However, do not use any material from secondary literature that you do not thoroughly understand. (Sometimes it is impossible to say whether something is secondary or primary literature: for example a writing may start off as explication and then switch to defending a particular position. So, at first it is

secondary, and then later it is primary.)

4.17.　　　It is more valuable for you to come to your own conclusions about the meaning of the primary readings than to simply follow the sayings of others. I recommend writing a draft of what you want to say first before even looking at the secondary literature.

4.18.　　　There is no need to tell the reader that these issues have been discussed for a long time or that each person has his or her own opinion about these issues.

4.19.　　　Some writings can have multiple errors. A student once wrote, "I think every persons has their own opinion to answering these two question. In my point of view, I think these two questions are true. In fact, I have my own answer to why they are both true." There are many errors in this. There is no "s" after person, "their" is wrong, "to" is not right here, "question" should have an "s" at the end, questions cannot be true or false, "I think" is not needed, and "answer to why" is awkward. The student meant: "I believe that the answer to each of the two questions is 'yes' and in this paper I will explain why I think so."

5.　ORGANIZATION OF PAPER

5.1. The title is an important part of the philosophical essay. It is the first thing that the reader sees. It can give the reader an idea about what lies ahead. A good title lets the reader know what the topic is to be considered.

5.2. A good introduction is especially important to a good philosophy paper. The introduction should set out the problem that your paper will attempt to solve and give some idea of how you are going to solve that problem. A good introduction helps to keep the paper on the right track. If you commit yourself to refuting a thesis in the introduction then that is what you must do. A good introduction is usually one or two paragraphs long.

5.3. Always keep in mind the overall organization of the paper. Some people find it helpful to outline their paper before writing it. Avoid drifting away from your argument.

5.4. Avoid padding the text with unnecessary material. In particular, avoid quoting at length, especially from secondary sources, unless it is really necessary for the reader to be looking at the passage in question while you are discussing it. I prefer as little quotation as possible. Too many long quotations interrupt the flow of your own argument. It is generally better to paraphrase than to quote. However, quotation from a primary source (such as the writings of a major philosopher) is sometimes necessary in the process of interpretation.

5.5. Paraphrasing puts some material from another author in your own words. It usually is shorter than the original passage and is written in more understandable contemporary English. A good paraphrase expresses your understanding of the material. It may use some individual words from the material paraphrased and may even use some very quotations of important phrases. Just as with quotation, paraphrased material needs to be properly cited.

　　5.5.1.　It is often useful to devote a couple paragraphs to paraphrasing the positions which you are discussing. A paraphrase is a reconstruction of the position which brings out as clearly as possible the arguments which are offered in support of it.

5.6. Quotation. When you quote something you should include the material word for word

exactly as it appears. You can however leave abridge some of the quoted material by putting in "…" for the material that is left out. Avoid too many quotations are quotations that are too long. The reader needs to hear your voice.

5.7. Papers always need rewriting. Rewriting includes some of the following procedures. Cut out material which does not further your argument or contribute to solving your problem. Add sentences where the transition from one sentence to another is unclear. Add examples where these are needed. Add new arguments to support premises which might be questioned by others. Clarify individual sentences by rewriting them. Each paper should be rewritten at least once.

5.8. Sentences need to be complete units. Sentences that contain several unrelated clauses are called "run-on sentences." These should be divided into separate sentences.

5.9. Paragraphs also need to be complete units. Think of each paragraph as a unit containing a series of closely related sentences. Paragraphs can be too long or too short. Paragraphs that are a page long are probably too long. Most paragraphs that are only three or four lines are too short. Revision often involves cutting longer paragraphs into shorter ones or expanding shorter paragraphs by adding new sentences.

5.10. A concluding paragraph that sums up the argument of the paper is sometimes helpful for the reader. However it is not necessary if you have already said what you intended to say and do not think that a final wrap-up will actually help the reader. You should not introduce new material in the concluding paragraph.

5.11. Martinich suggests the following as the basic organization of a philosophical essay: state the proposition to be proved (the thesis), give the argument for that proposition, show that the argument is valid, show that the premises are true, state the upshot of what has been proven. This is one way to organize a philosophy paper: but as we have seen there are many others.

6. CREATIVITY

6.1. Although creativity is not necessary for a good philosophy paper, it is often a plus. Creative work is not just original but also deeply engaged with the material. (There can be original foolishness.)

6.2. How to be creative. Make connections that are not immediately obvious. Look deeper into the question than you would normally look. Question your own assumptions. Imagine situations in which your view would prove to be true or your opponent's position would prove to be false. Feel free to use hypothetical examples that read like science fiction. Feel free to borrow ideas from other thinkers and transform them for your own purposes, always giving credit where credit is due.

6.3. True creativity can only happen when you have a thorough understanding of the material.

6.4. There are many methods that can enhance creativity. Think out loud, have dialogues with yourself, explain your ideas to someone else, write down any idea that comes into your mind over a period of time and then select from the resulting collection, take a walk in the woods or on the beach and think about philosophy.

7. SOURCES [see the supplement at the end for additional information about sources]

7.1. One of your most important resources is your instructor. Your instructor can help you with your writing during his/her office hours. He/she can assist you with revising your

papers. Your instructor can also provide you with suggestions for research. Together, student and instructor can engage in a dialogue that will give you good material for your writing.

7.2. There are several important resources in the library. <u>*The Philosopher's Index*,</u> which is available through the on-line catalog, contains references to most of the articles and books written in philosophy over the last 40 years.

7.3. <u>Books</u>. You can discover whether the library has certain books by using the on-line catalog. All students are expected to be able to use this valuable resource. Most Philosophy books are on the sixth floor of MLK Library in the B section. This section contains several histories of philosophy and whole shelves of commentaries on philosophers and philosophies. There are entire sections on Ethics, Logic, Philosophy of the Person, Aesthetics, Philosophy of Mind, and other subjects. There are also sections related to philosophy in particular countries and continents: England, France, Germany, Africa, Japan.

7.4. <u>Journals</u>. The library has several journals in philosophy, mostly through its on-line databases. There are also some physical journals in the basement.

7.5. <u>The Encyclopedia of Philosophy</u> is another good resource

7.6. <u>The Internet</u>. The internet is becoming a better source for information. However, it is still not nearly as good as the library. Most recent research is reported in the journals and academic books, and few such items are on-line. The main problem with internet sources is that the quality of the writing ranges widely, from really terrible to quite good.

8. FINAL COMMENTS

8.1. There are no ultimate authorities in philosophy. Never assume that simply because a textbook says X that X is true, unless the matter is purely factual and uncontroversial.

8.2. Never assume that since you are a mere undergraduate or graduate student you can have nothing to contribute. Each individual has his or her own perspective on the world which constitutes his or her own unique source of creative thoughts. Every great philosopher was once a beginner. And even if you are not someone who will become a great philosopher you can contribute to the conversation.

9. SUPPLEMENT ON SOURCES

9.1. Because of changes in technology, research methods are constantly changing in philosophy. Here is what I currently tell my students in my Introduction to Aesthetics Course.

9.2. Library and Electronic Resources

    9.2.1. **Something new is the Assignment Calculator. It can help you organize your time while doing your papers.** http://tutorials.sjlibrary.org/tutorial/calculator/

    9.2.2. **Books** Both physical and electronic books may be found through the Clark Library catalog at http://catalog.sjlibrary.org/search/   Many philosophy books on aesthetics are found in the BH section on the 6th floor of the library.

    9.2.3. One way to access materials relevant to this course is to go to SJLibrary.org then to "LibGuides," then to "Humanities and Arts" then down the alphabet to "Philosophy" then click on "Journal Articles." Or go directly to http://libguides.sjsu.edu/content.php?pid=61925&sid=455419

9.2.4.   If you access one of the on-line journals or databases, such as "Philosopher's Index" and "JSTOR" you will need your user name and your password. The user name is your Library Card number, and your password is the access code (usually the last four digits of your phone number.)

9.2.5.   In the **Philosophy** page you will find, among other things, the **Philosopher's Index**. It indexes nearly all articles and books in philosophy since, I believe, the 1940s.   There are short descriptions of most of the articles. You can research a topic by doing a keyword search.   For instance, you could write in "Dance" and it would reveal all articles written by philosophers on dance, and many books as well. If you want to make your search more specific, use two or more key words connected by the word "and," as in "Theater and Plato." Philosopher's Index does not provide full-text journal articles, but gives directions on how to find them.

9.2.6.   You can also gain electronic access to full-text in many journals. Under "Newspapers, Magazines and Journals" in the Philosophy page you will find a list of journals in philosophy, both on-line and in print, available through the library. Under "Background and Reference Sources" is a list of dictionaries and encyclopedias of philosophy.

9.2.7.   **JSTOR is my favorite electronic data base.** It includes not only several philosophy journals but also several journals in "Classics." Mark both when you wish to research a topic in Ancient (Greek and Roman) aesthetics. For example, many important essays on Plato appear in Classics journals. Similarly, you can do research in various arts categories, for example in music or theater arts.

9.3. On-Line Sources

    9.3.1.   There are now many on-line journals in philosophy. Some are listed at *Philosophy Resources and Internet Episemelinks* **http://www.epistemelinks.com/Main/Journals**

    9.3.2.   Another source of online information about on-line research in philosophy is *Noesis* **Philosophical Research On-line** http://hippias.evansville.edu/

9.4. LINK+ and Interlibrary Loan

    9.4.1.   If you want a book that is not in our library you can order one online through the library site LINK+. The book comes in one to two weeks.

    9.4.2.   If you want a photocopy of an article in a journal not accessed by our library or a book not available through out library or LINK+ go to *Interlibrary Services* (also online at the library site). You will need to get an account with them. These may take up to a month, and it might be easier to go to another college library.

9.5. Other Libraries

    9.5.1.   Santa Clara University library is just a few miles away. You do not have to be a Santa Clara University student to use the library, although you cannot check books out.   Other good libraries relatively nearby are at California State University East Bay and UCSC.

9.6. Bookstores

    9.6.1.   My favorite bookstores around here for philosophy are *Stanford University Bookstore* and *Borders* in Palo Alto. *Barnes and Noble* on Stevens Creek is also

pretty good, as is the branch in the Pruneyard in *Campbell*. My favorite used bookstore is *Recycled Books* on the Alameda in San Jose. There is another branch in Campbell. Further away, I like *Moe's* on Telegraph Ave in Berkeley, *University Press Books* on Bancroft in Berkeley, *Green Apple Books* on Clement Street in San Francisco, and *City Lights Bookstore* in San Francisco.   For aesthetics and philosophy of art I also like the various art museum bookstores in the Bay Area, especially the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. If you are looking for books on architecture, the best is *Architectural Books* on Montgomery in San Francisco.

9.6.2.   On-line. My favorite on-line bookstore is Amazon.com   You can actually read large portions of many books without purchasing them through using the "look inside" function.