

Some tips for the final paper

Assessment:

Two in-person exams: 50% (each one 25%), one final essay: 45%, and class participation: 5%.

The final essay should be on a topic previously approved by one of the teachers. More information about the requirements for the final essay, as well as guidance for how to write it, will follow. *Important dates:* the first in-person exam will be on **March 20**, the second on **April 30**. Students are requested to send an essay proposal to one of the teachers by **May 19**.

Deadline for submitting the final essay: **June 3**.

- In a philosophy paper you have to defend the claims that you make.
- It is not sufficient to report your own ideas.
- It is not sufficient either to report the ideas of other authors.
- Your paper shouldn't be a summary or overview of other authors' ideas.

What kinds of tasks are carried out in a philosophy paper?

- For example:
 - Developing a motivated response to a philosophical question.
 - Defending or criticizing a claim.
 - Contrasting the strengths and weaknesses of different ways of thinking about a certain topic.
 - Offering examples or counter-examples that illustrate or put pressure on a certain proposal.
 - Discussing what consequences a claim would have, if it were true.
- Some of these tasks can be carried out together in one paper.

Preliminaries

- A philosophy paper usually deals with a philosophical *question*.
- A philosophical question is not the same as a philosophical *topic*.
- Examples of philosophical topics are: AI, responsibility, empathy, etc.
- Usually, in order to find a question related to a certain topic you have to find something *problematic* concerning the topic.

- The first step is to get sufficient familiarity with a topic.
- Read what has been written about your topic, and be selective in what you read.
- If you are in doubt, and need orientation, ask your teacher(s).

- You might want to ask yourself: Why do I find this topic particularly interesting?
- It might take some time to find out why you are interested in a certain topic.
- After becoming familiar with a topic, it will be easier to demarcate a specific question to deal with.

Usually, a good philosophy paper is...

- ***modest***. it doesn't aim too high (but neither too low: avoid trivial claims)
- ***clear and straightforward***. both in the writing and in the steps of the argumentation.
- ***accurate***. when attributing views to other authors.

- It makes correct use of connective words and expressions, such as:
 - “because”, “since”, “given this argument”
 - “thus”, “therefore”, “hence”, “it follows that”, “consequently”
 - “nevertheless”, “however”, “but”
 - “on the one hand...on the other hand”

Formalities are important

- The reader should never be in doubt about *whose* claims you are presenting or discussing.
- Make sure you use quotation marks when literally reporting passages written by other authors, and include the relevant source.
- Even if you are not quoting directly from a text, but paraphrasing someone else's ideas, you have to indicate the source.
- Use the language correctly.
- The paper must include a title and a complete list of bibliographical references.

More advice

- See Jim Pryor's "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper":

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

- See also Niko Kolodny's "How to Write A Paper for a Philosophy Course":

<https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~ngkolodny/BerkeleyConnectWritingWorkshop.pdf>