

Paper Assignments

1. Your papers should present a critical evaluation of an argument in one or more readings associated with the topics we discuss in class. Papers should consist of a thesis, defending or criticizing work we are reading. You may write your papers on topics you present to the class, but this is not a requirement.
2. All papers must be double spaced, approximately four to six pages (1000 to 1800 words) in a reasonable font, such as 12 point Times. The first paper is due on **Tuesday, October 14**. The second paper is due on **Tuesday, December 9**.
3. Avoid history and biography. Focus on the arguments, rather than particular authors' explications of those arguments. These are short papers. Do not try to do too much. You are likely to write longer papers, and have to shorten them. Tightening a philosophy paper, or anything you write, is a useful skill. See below, and the website, for more guidelines for writing philosophy papers.
4. These are not research papers, but some reading beyond the articles on the syllabus is likely to be useful and generally will be expected. The course bibliography will help you get started with additional readings.
5. Observe basic rules of grammar and spelling. Avoid jargon. Write simply, and clearly. Proofread your paper. Ask a good writer to read and comment on your paper; I encourage use of the Writing Center.
6. I will be happy to look at rough drafts, as long as I am given enough time to read them. Normally, you should not expect me to read a paper in fewer than three days.
7. Some immutable formatting guidelines: Do not right-justify your paper. Print on only one side of each page. Paginate your papers.
8. Any citation method which allows me easily to trace your sources is acceptable. My preferred method involves a list of references at the end of the paper, and citations made parenthetically within the text by merely noting the author and page number: "To be is to be the value of a variable" (Quine 50). If there is more than one work by an author in your list of references, disambiguate using year of publication: "To call a posit a posit is not to patronize it" (Quine 1960: 22). If your list of references contains entries from the same author in the same year, disambiguate using lower-case letters after the year, and indicate the distinction in the list of references: "All we really need in the way of holism... is to appreciate that empirical content is shared by the statements of science in clusters and cannot for the most part be sorted out among them" (Quine 1980b: viii). Internet sources must include a live URL. I must be able to trace the source.
9. Violations of academic integrity, like plagiarism, can and will lead to failing grades. Remember to acknowledge any assistance you have had on your paper, including assistance from the Writing Center. **The Hamilton College Honor Code will be enforced.**

Some Guidelines for Writing A Philosophy Paper

1. Introduce your paper by briefly stating your thesis, the conclusion you will defend. Be specific. Your paper should be an extended argument supporting your thesis. Often, it is easiest to write the introduction after you have finished writing the body of the paper. Make sure to include a thesis statement.
2. Argue for your thesis. Each element of your paper should relate directly to your specific thesis. When editing your paper, think about the role that each paragraph plays in support of your thesis. Think about the role that each sentence plays in each paragraph.
3. Provide plenty of road signs along the way. (E.g. “First I will argue..., then I will argue...”; “In the last section, I showed that...”) If you find such road signs too clumsy, you may omit some of them, but make sure you know the narrative structure of your paper, and the role of each part.
4. Consider the best objections to any thesis you defend. Consider responses to those objections, and counter-responses. Avoid straw persons, arguments which no one really holds but which are easy to refute.
5. Avoid arguments from authority. Do not accept without question what any philosopher says. Argue your own point of view, but through the writings of the philosophers.
6. Conclude your essay by summarizing what you intended to say in the paper. You may want to indicate further or related questions. You may choose to indicate the limits of your argument. (E.g. “My argument only shows that Russell’s argument is faulty, not that his conclusion is false.”)

Links to excellent advice for writing philosophy papers is available on the home page of the course website.