

Term Paper Assignment

1. Your term paper is due in three stages, an abstract, a full draft, and an edited final version. All papers must be double spaced, approximately eight to twelve pages (2000 to 4200 words) in a reasonable font, such as 12 point Times. A one-to-two-paragraph abstract of your paper is due on Tuesday, October 18. A full draft of your term paper is due on Thursday, November 10. The final draft is due on Thursday, December 1.
2. I will return your drafts, with comments, in time for you to do some re-working of the paper. But, the final draft does not depend on my comments. You are responsible for editing and improving your paper.
3. Here are a few ways to approach your term paper. Other options are permissible. Feel free to speak with me about your choice.

A. Choose a thought experiment. Research the philosophical topic the experiment illustrates. Defend a thesis regarding your topic, with an eye to methodological questions. What is the role of intuition in the argument you are defending or criticizing? Are there competing intuitions at stake? Are there experimental results which would help settle the matter? This will be a traditional philosophy paper, informed by the research on intuition and experiment we are studying.

B. Consider one of the X-Phi experiments, either from the readings assigned in class or from other research. Analyze the data, and results. Discuss the background philosophical topic. What does the data tell us? What relevance does the experiment have to philosophical discourse? How does the experimental approach differ from a traditional armchair approach?

C. Engage the intuitions/experimental philosophy debate by defending or criticizing one or more of the articles on our syllabus. Articles at the end of Part I will be good starting points. The articles in Part IV will be most applicable. For this kind of paper, you will probably have to engage some of the more specific philosophical topics, like free will or descriptivism, though in less detail.

D. Write a traditional paper. You could contrast foundationalism and coherence theories of knowledge, with an emphasis on the role of intuition in philosophical reasoning and an eye on the possibility of gleaning experimental knowledge relevant to epistemic theory. Another standard approach would be to engage Goodman and Rawls, and perhaps others, on the topic of reflective equilibrium. There is a lot of literature on this topic in the post *A Theory of Justice* world. It is likely that you would focus on the use of reflective equilibrium in moral reasoning, but you need not do so. You could compare of the method of reflective equilibrium with the scientific method.

E. Do your own X-Phi. Design and execute an experimental study around some topic of your choosing. X-Phi mostly involves constructing a survey and running some simple statistics on the results. Emily Esch may be helpful to you when she visits. I will be more than happy to help, of course, as well.

For all topics, the course bibliography will help you get started with additional readings.

4. Avoid history and biography. Focus on the arguments, rather than particular authors' explications of those arguments.

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.
6. Two important, idiosyncratic formatting guidelines:
Do not right justify (i.e. fully justify) your paper.
Paginate.
7. 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.
8. 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 General 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.
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...") Make sure that you and the reader 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 indicate questions for further research. You may 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 course website.