

Philosophy 405: Knowledge, Truth and Mathematics
Spring 2008
M, W: 1-2:15pm

Hamilton College
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Guidelines for Writing Seminar Papers

Classes in this course will generally run as discussions of one or two seminar papers. Seminar papers may have a variety of different formats. They should assimilate the assigned readings and summarize important arguments. In contrast to a standard, rhetorical philosophy paper, seminar papers may be mainly exegetical. You need not defend a thesis in the seminar paper, though some theme will be welcome. I expect some critical examination of the readings, though it need not be fully developed.

Often, the readings for a class will cover a variety of topics. You need not discuss them all. In general, the more critical your paper is, the fewer topics you will cover. If you are defending a thesis, rather than emphasizing exegesis, you will probably cover less of the reading.

Here are some general questions you might try to answer in your seminar papers.

What is the big picture? What questions is the author attempting to answer?

Is the author attempting to account for particular mathematical results?

What is the relation between the recommendations in the reading and actual mathematical practice?

What does the author think about the nature of mathematical objects?

Does the author think that mathematical truths are necessary?

How does the author think we acquire mathematical knowledge?

Your seminar papers must demonstrate attempts to grapple with the primary sources. You should also consider the secondary readings. You are stimulating class discussion, focusing our thoughts on the central theses, and raising questions. It is good practice to end a seminar paper with a few questions you believe will be useful for the class to discuss. Classes will begin with an opportunity to present your paper, at which time you may discuss any particular difficulties in the material, or topics that you were unable to cover in the paper.

Each seminar paper is due at noon the day before the class in which it will be discussed (i.e. Sunday or Tuesday). This deadline is necessary for all participants in the seminar to be able to read the paper and prepare comments and questions for class. You may email the paper to me first, or you may email the paper to all the members of the class directly.

All students are expected to come to class having read the seminar paper or papers for that day. Every one should be prepared to ask questions, or make comments, on the paper for that day. Comments on the paper should be constructive.

Students may be allowed to work on one seminar paper, either their second or third, in pairs, with a consequent increase in expectations of length and breadth.