

Term Paper Assignment

1. Your term paper will explore a topic in the philosophy of mathematics in greater depth than we have gone in class. The content should be critical, not just expository. Your papers may delve into the work of a single author in depth. You may compare and contrast different authors, e.g. Kant and Frege, Locke and Leibniz, Quine and Field. You might settle on a topic: different definitions of numbers, different positions regarding the infinite, necessity, innateness. Feel free to work with the contemporary material in the second half of the term; it might be more focused than the broad historical work. Benacerraf's "Mathematical Truth," with which we will start after break, might be useful in getting a big picture of the central problem as it stands in contemporary philosophy of mathematics. There are also more technical topics: working through Gödel's theorems, Cantor's transfinite, or the arithmetization of analysis. Feel free to talk with me about a choice of topics.

2. The paper is **due** in four stages.

Thursday, March 3	A one-to-two-paragraph abstract with a proposed bibliography
Thursday, March 31	Précis of your argument with an annotated bibliography
Tuesday, April 19	A full draft
Tuesday, May 3	The final draft

3. The **abstract** need be not much more than a sketch of the topic on which you will work. The ideal abstract is written after you have a paper completed, but it will not play that role here. You are mainly just committing to a topic and a set of readings. Feel free to use one or more of your seminar papers as a part of the term paper.

With the abstract, you should submit a list of maybe five to eight sources, fewer if you're tackling whole books, that you plan to read. Some of those sources will be on the syllabus, presumably, but certainly not all of them should be.

4. The **précis** should present the argument of your paper in some detail. By the time you submit the précis, you should be able to sketch the arguments to which you will be responding and which you will be presenting.

With the précis, you should submit an annotated list of sources, a few sentences for each source, summarizing the key points and how they are connected to your thesis.

5. I expect that the **first draft** will be *longer than* the final draft. 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. Failure to hand in a draft, or handing in an insufficient draft, will reduce your final paper grade by two steps (e.g. from B+ to B-).

6. **Final** drafts should be approximately 2000 to 4000 words.

7. Avoid history and biography. Focus on the arguments.

8. 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.

9. A few idiosyncratic, but non-negotiable formatting guidelines: Do not right-justify your paper. Print on only one side of each page. Paginate your papers.

10. 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.
11. 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 More 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. Connect, rather than merely concatenate, the various assertions in your paper. Beware of beginning paragraphs or sentences with claims like, “Another argument is...” Show how each of the portions of your paper fit together.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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 Descartes’s argument is faulty, not that his conclusion is false.”)

Links to excellent advice for writing philosophy papers are available on the course website.