

First Paper Assignment

1. A hard copy of your first paper is due in class on Thursday, February 12, at 9am. It should be double spaced, approximately four to six pages (1000 to 1800 words) in a reasonable font, such as 11 point Times, with reasonable (e.g. one-inch) margins. Paginate your paper. Do not right justify (i.e. fully justify) it.
2. The topic of your first paper should be a theme in Descartes's *Meditations*, one that arises in the *Objections and Replies*. A sufficient collection of the objections and replies, organized thematically, are available in my *Themes in the Objections and Replies*, which is available on the course website. Your paper should consider an argument from Descartes's work, at least one objection to that argument, and Descartes's response(s) to that (or those) objection(s).
3. Your paper must have a thesis in which you defend a specific argument, conclusion, or view. You may defend either Descartes's view or that of the objector you are discussing. Alternatively, you may defend a third view.
4. Standards for academic writing vary by discipline. Philosophical writing should be attentive to every detail. Write simply, and clearly. Minimize use of jargon. Observe standard rules of grammar and spelling. Avoid history and biography. Focus on the arguments. Avoid these common infelicities: Conclusions are based *on* evidence, not *off* of evidence. 'Reference' should not be used as a verb. Do not use 'critique' where 'criticism' will do.
5. Any citation method which allows me easily to trace your sources is acceptable. References to pages in the Ariew and Watkins collection may be indicated, in line: "We owe a great debt to those who point out faults" (Pascal, AW 109). References to *Themes in the Objections and Replies* may also be indicated in line: "It is certain that ignorance is merely a defect, so we do not need any positive faculty in order to be ignorant" (Hobbes, TOR 45). Other sources you consult while writing, including any websites you visit and any persons with whom you talk, must be noted. Provide for these a list of references at the end of the paper in addition to any appropriate in-line citations. Internet sources must include a live URL. I must be able to trace the source. For quotations of five lines or more, indent from both margins, single space, and do not use quotation marks. Avoid citing secondary sources; focus on the primary sources. For citations of personal discussions, a footnote like the following may be appropriate:

In working out the ideas of this paper, I have benefitted from discussions with David Rosenthal and Shoshana Brassfield.
6. Late papers will be penalized.
7. Violations of academic integrity, like plagiarism and failure to cite sources, 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. Feel free to divide your paper into small sections.
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.”)
8. Write tight. Edit down.

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