

Guidelines for writing a PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENT



A Philosophical Paper is NOT:

- A RESEARCH paper
 - Most information should come from the writer's head
- DESCRIPTIVE
 - NO flowery words needed!!
- PERSUASIVE
 - Not about feelings

A Philosophical Paper SHOULD BE:

- ARGUMENTATIVE- There should be a CLEAR and OBVIOUS point that the writer is arguing.
- FAIR- This means that the writer must consider possible OBJECTIONS to the point he/she is arguing. The objections should be broken down to prove the theory.
- RATIONAL- The argument should make sense to readers and rationally convince them rather than convincing them rhetorically or metaphorically.
- FIRST PERSON- (write "I think" or "I believe"...) Use personal experiences and anecdotes (examples can be outlandish to illustrate the points!)
- EXPLICIT- Announce everything ("I will argue...", "My first premise is...", "My first objection is...")!
- CLEAR DEFINITIONS- and terms used to support the writer's argument should be defined in words readers will understand.
- CONSISTENT- The argument should not waver at all...the writer should keep the argument strong!

GENERAL ESSAY STRUCTURE: A clearly stated argument supported by clearly stated premises.

INTRODUCTION:

Part 1

- Explains WHY your topic is an important issue (why is it controversial?)
- Must have a VALID DEDUCTIVE argument given in the first person.
 - Example: "I am going to argue that capital punishment is immoral because capital punishment is the intentional taking of a human life and the intentional taking of a human life is immoral." This claim presents the BASE ARGUMENT for an entire paper.

BODY:

Part 2

- Argument FOR the 1st premise of your base argument
 - Must contain a LOGICAL, WELL-EVIDENCED discussion in support of premise
 - Should contain examples that illustrate your point and any definitions that help to clarify your argument
 - Can be multiple paragraphs

Part 3

- Refer to Part 2 for argument FOR the 2nd premise of your base argument.

Part 4

- Refer to Part 2 for argument FOR the 3rd premise of your base argument if you have a 3rd

Part 5

- 1st objective to your base argument (one paragraph)
 - Must be a full paragraph
 - Must discuss a relevant argument that attacks the truth of one of your premises or attacks the argument you gave in support of one of your premises
 - Must mention specifically which premise of your base argument is being attacked
 - Should contain examples that help illustrate objection
 - Cannot contain any evidence against the objection or sentences stating why you don't think the objection is good

*ADVICE: If you cannot think of an objection to one of your premises, then ask someone else or your professor. If s/he cannot think of an objection then you may pose two questions to one of your other premises.

Part 6

- Refutation of the 1st objection to your base argument. Prove the objection wrong!
 - One paragraph
 - Must contain a LOGICAL, WELL-EVIDENCED argument wherein you show either that the preceding objection to your argument (Part 5) is illogical, contains false premises, or commits informal fallacies
 - Should contain examples that illustrate your point and definitions to clarify your argument

Part 7

- Refer to Part 5 for 2nd objection to your base argument

Part 8

- Refer to Part 6 for Refutation of the 2nd objection to your base argument

CONCLUSION:

Part 9

- Should be one paragraph
- *Briefly* restate argument, premises, and objections
- End with a CONFIDENT re-statement of your main claim