

Paper Assignment

General Guidelines

1. Your paper is **due on December 6**. Late papers will be penalized.
2. All papers must be typed or computer-printed, double spaced, **four to six pages** in a reasonable font (12 point Times, for example). This means approximately 1200 to 1800 words.
3. Do not right-justify your paper.
4. I expect you to observe basic rules of grammar and spelling. Proofread your paper. Asking a good writer to read and comment on your paper can be helpful. See below for a few specifics.
5. You may use quotes from the readings in our books by merely noting the author and page number. For example: "The unexamined life is not worth living." (Plato, 38a) You may quote your class notes. Cite them: "Blah blah blah." (Marcus, class notes, 9/22/04) **I strongly discourage you from using other sources**. If you do use another source, you must include a proper bibliographical reference, including author, title, and publishing information, or current URL. I must be able to trace the source.
6. If you plagiarize, you fail. I am interested in what you have to say, but I do not expect you to generate 1500 words of original scholarship. Your main task here is to be clear about what others have said, and to present it in your own way. Sometimes, for brief passages, some one else will just say it better than you can. Quote it. Cite any ideas that are not your own. (E.g. "Descartes argues that..."; "According to Locke,...".)

How to Write Your Paper

1. Pick a topic from the list below.
2. Introduce your paper by taking a position and briefly stating it. This is your thesis, the conclusion you will defend. Be specific. Your paper should be an extended argument supporting your thesis. Often, it's easiest to write the introduction after you have finished writing the body of the paper.
3. Argue for your thesis. Each paragraph should directly relate to your specific thesis.
4. Consider possible objections. Don't accept what the philosophers say if you don't agree with it. Argue your own point of view, but through the writings of the philosophers.
5. Conclude your essay by summarizing exactly what you think you said in the paper. If you didn't say it well, at least I'll know what you were trying to say.
6. Make sure to cover each point in the topic you choose.

Some Comments on Spelling and Grammar

1. Do not rely on spell-checking or grammar-checking programs, alone.
2. *Its* is a possessive pronoun, as in "The cat cleaned its paws." *It's* is a contraction meaning 'it is'. Normally, we use apostrophes to indicate possession, but not in this case.
3. *There* indicates location; *their* indicates possession; *they're* means 'they are'. (E.g. They're crying because Bobby spilled their milk on the table over there.)
4. Use one space after a comma, and two spaces after a period. Use one after a semicolon; better yet, avoid semi-colons. Using semicolons is like tinkering with the insides of the TV. Don't do it unless you know what you're doing.
5. When quoting a source for more than five lines, indent the quotation, single-space it, and don't use quotation marks. Be sure to cite any quote, of course.
6. Spell out numbers less than and including one hundred.
7. *Then* indicates a conclusion or a change in time. *Than* indicates a comparison. If the Giants finish with a better record than the Jets, then I will eat my hat.
8. Avoid biography. Mill's birthplace is unlikely to be relevant to your thesis.
9. Omit needless words. (See: Strunk and White. *Elements of Style*. §13. <http://www.bartleby.com/141/>)
10. *E.g.* means 'for example'. *I.e.* means 'that is'. If you want to use either of these, make sure you understand the difference.

Paper Topics

1. Descartes rejects the resemblance hypothesis in 'Meditation Two'. What is this hypothesis? Why does Descartes reject it? What's Locke's opinion about the resemblance hypothesis, and why? What's Berkeley's opinion, and why? Who's right? Why? Be specific.
2. Descartes begins the *Meditations* by doubting the existence of a physical world. By the end of 'Meditation Six', he agrees that there must be a physical world. How does he reclaim the world? (What, specifically, is his argument that the physical world exists? On what does it depend?) What is Descartes' world like? What is Berkeley's position on the physical world? How does he argue for it? How is his argument similar to Descartes' argument? Who's right, and why?
3. Locke and Berkeley disagree about the nature of the external world. Locke says that the world is material. Berkeley says that there is no such thing as material substance; all reality is mental. What exactly do they each mean? How does they support their views? Where exactly do they agree and disagree? Who is right, and why? Be careful not to create straw men, here.
4. What role does God play in Descartes' *Meditations*? Be specific. What role does God play in Berkeley's *Principles*? Be specific. Would either system be more acceptable to a religious person? Would either system be more acceptable to an atheist? Is there reason for a scientist to prefer one view over the other? Provide reasons for your answers.
5. Berkeley considers various objections to his position in §§34-84 of the *Principles*. Choose two or three of these objections and defend either Berkeley or his critic. Explain each objection in detail. Is it an objection that either Locke or Descartes would make, and why? How does Berkeley defend his position? Who is right?

Important: Any other topic must be cleared with me before you write the paper!