

First Paper Assignment

1. Your first paper is due at the beginning of class on February 9. It should be double spaced, approximately 600 - 800 words, in a reasonable font, such as 11 point Times, with reasonable (e.g. one-inch) margins. Late papers will be penalized.
2. The topic for your first paper should be an exegesis (critical analysis) of some portion of a single philosophical reading on the syllabus from Classes 3, 5, or 6:

Plato, from *Republic*
Descartes, from *Meditations on First Philosophy*
Locke, "On the Primary/Secondary Distinction"
Berkeley, from the *Principles*
Moore, "Proof of an External World"
Wittgenstein, from *On Certainty*

You may invoke any of the expository work from Kolak and Martin or the illustrative readings, but your space is limited.

3. 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.
4. Do not be misled by the brevity of the assignment. Expect to revise your paper several times before submitting it.
5. In the future, I will recommend consulting others about how to improve your papers prior to submitting them. For this assignment, please work exclusively by yourself.
6. Two important, idiosyncratic formatting guidelines:
Do not right justify (i.e. fully justify) your paper.
Paginate.
7. References to our assigned readings may be indicated in line: "Some truths there are so near and obvious to the mind, that a man need only open his eyes to see them" (Berkeley, §6). Other sources require a list of references at the end of the paper, along with in-line citations. Internet sources must include a live URL. I must be able to trace any source.
8. We may discuss some of your work in class. Any student work I present to the class will be anonymized.
9. You may re-write the first paper, for a possible improved grade. All rewrites must be completed by December 4.
10. Violations of academic integrity, like plagiarism, will lead to failing grades. Acknowledge any assistance you have had on your paper.

The Hamilton College Honor Code will be enforced.

The following guidelines apply to a standard rhetorical paper. Our first paper assignment is to present only an exegetical portion of a rhetorical paper.

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.
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.