

Second Paper Assignment

1. Your second paper is due at the beginning of class on February 23. It should be double spaced, approximately 800-1000 words, in a reasonable font, such as 11 point Times, with reasonable (e.g. one-inch) margins. Late papers will be penalized.
2. In your second paper, compare and contrast the arguments of two philosophers on a single topic discussed in Classes 7-10. You may choose between comparing the arguments of Newton and Leibniz on the nature of space and comparing the arguments of Zimmerman and Smart on the nature of time. 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. Feel free to consult others about how to improve your papers prior to submitting them. The Writing Center has excellent peer tutoring; make an appointment in advance. Acknowledge any assistance you have had on your paper.
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 second 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.

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.
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.
9. Here are two sample templates for philosophy papers:

A. Single-philosopher paper

Thesis: A argues that p, but not-p
Careful exposition of A’s argument
Considerations opposing at least one premise
Alternative positive account (lessons from A’s failure)
Modest conclusion, repeating thesis

B. Compare and contrast

Thesis: A argues that p. B argues that q, which is incompatible with p. B is right and A is wrong. (Or, both A and B are wrong.)
Careful exposition of A’s argument.
Careful exposition of B’s argument.
Considerations favoring B’s argument over A’s argument (and/or considerations against B’s argument)
Alternative positive account

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