

First Paper Assignment

1. Your first paper is due on **Thursday, October 6, at 4pm**. All papers must be double spaced, approximately four-to-six pages (1000 to 2100 words) in a reasonable font, such as 11 point Times.
2. The topic of your first paper should be some theme in Part II of the course: Reference. One way to write your paper is to contrast one of the readings on the syllabus with a response paper. Some pairs of papers and responses are already on the syllabus. For example, Strawson's "On Referring" is a direct response to Russell's "Descriptions." (Actually, it's more clearly a response to Russell's more-famous "On Denoting," covering many of the same topics.) Russell responds to Strawson in "Mr. Strawson on Referring." Other useful pairs include Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions" vs Kripke, "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference;" Kripke, from *Naming and Necessity* vs Searle, "Proper Names and Intentionality;" Kripke, from *Naming and Necessity* vs Jackson, "Reference and Description Revisited." Alternately, your term paper could explore a new topic in reference. There are plenty of recent articles in the Blackwell (Devitt and Hanley) and Oxford (Lepore and Smith) guides, as well as in the Ludlow reader. See the Course Bibliography (or me) for more selections.
3. However you choose to structure your first paper, it should present a critical evaluation of an argument or debate, and it should involve some reading that is independent of the work we do in class. The course bibliography will help you get started with additional readings.
4. Avoid history and biography. Focus on the arguments.
5. Observe basic rules of grammar and spelling. Avoid jargon. Write simply, and clearly. Proofread your paper. Ask a good writer to read and comment on your paper.
6. Two important, idiosyncratic formatting guidelines: 1. Do not right justify (i.e. fully justify) your paper; 2. Paginate.
7. Any citation method which allows me easily to trace your sources is acceptable. My preferred method involves a list of references at the end of the paper, and citations made parenthetically within the text by merely noting the author and page number: "To be is to be the value of a variable" (Quine 50). If there is more than one work by an author in your list of references, disambiguate using year of publication: "To call a posit a posit is not to patronize it" (Quine 1960: 22). If your list of references contains entries from the same author in the same year, disambiguate using lower-case letters after the year, and indicate the distinction in the list of references: "All we really need in the way of holism... is to appreciate that empirical content is shared by the statements of science in clusters and cannot for the most part be sorted out among them" (Quine 1980b: viii). Internet sources must include a live URL. I must be able to trace the source.
8. Violations of academic integrity, like plagiarism, 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.
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.