

Basic Guidelines for Philosophy Papers

Hi, my name is Luke Champollion and I'm an honors philosophy major at ETSU. In this video, I discuss basic guidelines for philosophy paper. The most important component is the thesis followed by major supporting claims. The thesis should be developed and defended using a clear line of reasoning and appropriate evidence where possible. Ideally, this entails an acknowledgment of opposing views and a legitimate attempt to intercept potential objections to one's ideas. Remember, philosophers place importance on proper reasoning and strict analysis. They aim for absolute precision in explanation and argumentation. Before moving on, I will provide a definition for the overarching topic, philosophy, of course. It's a good idea to provide definitions early on in a [college paper writing service](#). According to ETSU's Department of Philosophies and Humanities, philosophy is an attempt to reason clearly and critically about all areas of experience: science, religion, art, politics and morality. Its purpose is to understand and evaluate our most basic beliefs and values and to integrate them into a coherent view of ourselves in the world. One might reasonably say that philosophy is the foundation of civilization. No religion, government or personal viewpoint has ever existed without a philosophical framework. Following this definition, the purpose of a philosophy paper is to reason clearly and critically about a specific area of experience. There are many. For example, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science or philosophy of language. Writing for a class, you will already be working in a general field. It's important to further narrow one scope to a specific topic and an appropriate problem or question. Ask yourself what interests me about this field of philosophy I'm currently studying? Call this the research problem or the research question, and most established fields' basic problems already appear well laid out.

For example, Descartes' mind-body dualism presents one of philosophies most famous questions: how can a non-physical mind interact with a physical body? Realistically, an undergraduate paper will not solve this problem. A better goal is to become acquainted with the history of the problem by reading some primary literature by Descartes, later objections to his ideas and more recent secondary literature about mind-body dualism. This process is called a literature review and it's necessary to any research paper. In general, one should read primary literature and further investigate secondary to develop a strong understanding of a topic. This prevents endorsing old ideas in predictable ways or, worse yet, falling prey to ideas that have been clearly refuted. It also enables one to effectively grasp and paraphrase important arguments. In a basic undergraduate philosophy paper, it is good practice to work with one argument in depth, so, although there may be multiple theories about mind-body dualism, it is best to primarily address one theory in a paper. Other ideas should still be acknowledged but focus remains the key. After a thorough literature review, it is important to offer a summary of the main argument at hand, just as your own paper should have a thesis, major supporting claims and a line of reasoning with appropriate evidence where possible, any good philosophy argument will have these components. Look for the thesis statement first, what is Descartes arguing about, what is his main point? Ask how you could summarize the argument in one neat statement. The main goal in summarizing an argument is to give an accurate account that the original author would agree with. In a sense, this provides a type of definition to your own readers. Striving for accuracy, one should use healthy skepticism. Don't take anything for granted even if you generally agree with an author's arguments. Keep an eye open for statements that don't make sense, claims that don't seem to support larger claims and unqualified assertions. This helps to develop challenges or counterclaims to an author's thesis. It also leads to a balanced, well-rounded paper. Summarizing an argument, one must avoid the straw man fallacy, which amounts to poor or deceptive paraphrasing. Just as a real straw man could be blown over with little effort, a straw man argument is easily dismantled. Remember, there's no honor in defeating a dummy. Instead, seek out a live opponent and identify its demeanor, constitution, strengths and weaknesses. After summarizing the argument, you should take a stance. Do you agree or disagree with the overall argument? Are there certain parts you disagree with even though you agree with the main point? Alternatively, are there parts you agree with even though you disagree overall? As you develop your paper, you will need to defend or attack an author's argument. In other words, think critically.

Broadly speaking, the thesis will be a positive or negative statement. Push for further reasons for critique. For example, maybe Descartes is wrong about mind-body dualism for such-and-such reasons. On the other hand, you may decide that Descartes is too formidable an opponent.

As the old saying goes, if you can't beat them, join them. In that case, you should try to be a good sidekick to your author. In this example, this would mean suggesting ways in which Descartes can improve his argument or remedy weaknesses. So, to recap, your paper should have four primary sections, first, a clear thesis that explains the point of the paper, second, a literature review that explains the author or author's position on the given topic, third, an analysis of the author's position that discusses strengths and weaknesses, and fourth, your own position and thoughts about the topic. Above all, remember that clarity is key. Your paper should have a clear, well-defined format that makes it easy for readers to follow and understand the argument at hand. Present the author's thoughts fairly and accurately and then build upon the author's thesis by offering your own take on the material. That's all I have for you today but for more information on philosophy and the major and minor offered at ETSU.