**Writing in Philosophy**

**What does philosophical writing share with writing in other disciplines in the humanities?**

* A lot of philosophical writing is source evaluation—how does the writer understand the central argument of X’s essay, and what is their claim about it?
* Philosophical writing generally centers around a student-generated claim, and the writer will usually be using one or more sources to support and inform their argument. As in much of the humanities, students are not just recounting what’s going on in a text, but using text(s) to provide insight into, and evidence for, the students’ interpretations and arguments!
* Clarity, precision, and conciseness are paramount.
* Peer revision is important for creating a strong final draft!

**What is different about it–  in particular, what is different from writing about literary texts?**

* A significant portion of evidence for philosophical arguments can be self-generated. It’s difficult to write a literary analysis paper without a good chunk of text to support your claim, but philosophy papers can use *situational examples* as evidence.
* Analysis does not necessarily need to go beyond the text. Deep textual interpretation *is* analysis.
* Philosophical writing prioritizes precision over variety, so be wary of synonyms for synonyms’ sake. In literary writing we are often encouraged to use synonyms to avoid repetition, but in philosophy, repetition can provide clarity.
* Anticipate counterarguments**.** Somewhat counterintuitively, disregarding nuance or disagreement makes you *less* convincing, not more. Nuance is not something to be afraid of. One of your first steps should be to formulate your opponent’s views as charitably as possible, so that your argument against them can be strong and complete.
* Philosophical thinking and writing are new to many, and take time to learn. A lot of philosophical texts are dense, and it can feel impossible to get a grip on them, let alone make an argument. Don’t be discouraged! Talk to your professor and peers and *start early* when writing papers.

**What might students writing in philosophy for the first time want to consider?**

* Don’t be intimidated by jargon! It is *way* more important to be clear and precise than to use big words. *Clarity*, *precision*, and *structure* will all ensure that your reader follows your line of thought; vocabulary will *not*.
* Many students are excited to jump right into voicing their opinions on a text; while this is important, don’t neglect the text itself! Explaining the theories at work in your own words is a great first step to check your understanding and pinpoint the relevant aspects of the text for your particular paper. Beware of relying on jargon in order to avoid deep understanding—restate things in your own words.
* Confusion can be a good thing! It often signals that something philosophically interesting is taking place.

**What to do if your professor didn’t provide a prompt?**

* If no specific prompt is given, start with a philosophical or textual issue. It can be as simple as, “How should we be understanding this particular quote?” or as complex as, “Which of these philosophers is right about a particular issue, and why?”
* Start with a discussion of what’s going on with the text, and then stake your claim. Make sure the reader understands what precisely is *being* discussed before you start to argue about it!
* Papers can be analytic (*what’s going on here?*) or synthetic (*connecting perspectives across texts*); interpretive (*how should we understand this?*) or argumentative (*here’s why I’m right!*), but *all* papers have thesis statements that are *student-centered*; no matter what your claim is, it should be at the very heart of the paper. You’re not writing a book report!

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