Philosophy 4
Professor Sean Greenberg
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WRITING A PHILOSOPHY PAPER

1. Your paper **_must_** include:
    A.   A **_statement_** of the problem you are trying to solve.
    B.   A clear statement of the solution you propose: i.e., you must state a **_thesis._**
    C.   **_Arguments_** supporting your thesis.

    In the (relatively) short papers that you will be writing in this course, in the first paragraph of the paper you should:
    A.   State the problem that the paper will address.
    B.   State your thesis, and briefly explain the steps by which you propose to establish that thesis.
        It is crucial that the thesis be stated in the first paragraph of the paper!!!

    The body of the paper should consist of the arguments that establish the thesis in the first paragraph.

    Articulating a clear statement of the problem at issue in the paper is more than half the battle. You may not be able to decide on one final solution to that problem: if not, say why not.

    State all of your arguments fully—_never_ trust your reader to supply missing premises, no matter how obvious they may seem to you. (It is helpful to think of your reader as someone who is lazy and tired and unwilling to think for himself.) Space permitting, you should include some discussion of objections to your solution, and your replies to those objections.

2.   When you refer to a philosopher, try to state precisely what he said, and give references to the text (and, when needed, quotations from it) in order to support your paraphrase. (Use quotation only a point of departure, not as a substitute for analysis!) Sometimes authors do not state their views clearly. If one of the passages in which you are interested is ambiguous, show _how_ it is ambiguous. Then follow up the consequences for the philosopher's views of each possible interpretation, or argue for one interpretation.

3.   Stick to the point. Make sure the reader can tell how and why every sentence that you write—let alone every argument that you give—is relevant to the thesis that you are trying to establish in the paper. If you cannot figure out what a particular sentence adds to the paragraph in which it appears, then delete it (however much you might like that sentence). We all write sentences that we like and that we have a hard time parting with. If the sentence is not pulling its weight in the paper, however, it must go. (You might start a file of pretty but useless sentences if you don't have the heart to hit 'delete': over the years, I have built up a large file of pretty but useless pages, and I now have multiple files of pretty but useless articles.)

4.   It is very important to be **_as clear as possible_**. It is much better to write simply and clearly, than to write in a complicated and convoluted fashion. In order to ensure clarity, it is a good idea to write your paper, then let it rest for a few days, and then return to it anew. If you write only one draft, it probably will not be as clear as it would have been if you had gone over the paper a second time. It is also sometimes helpful to outline your paper before writing the first draft; failing that, you should be very clear about what problem you intend to treat in the paper, and you should at least have some idea about the thesis you will defend in the paper.

5.   Your paper will be evaluated on the basis of:
    A.   The accuracy of any interpretations of passages from the texts.
    B.   The clarity of your writing.
    C.   The cogency and relevance of your arguments.
    D.   How interesting your insights are.
    E.   How deeply you dig into the problem.

    Philosophy, as you may have already gathered, is the art of quibbling and drawing distinctions: so be sure to quibble and draw some distinctions.

6.   **_Secondary Sources._** It is not necessary to use secondary sources in writing the papers assigned in this course. Not only is it not necessary to use secondary sources in writing papers for this course, I actively discourage the use of secondary sources in this course. _If, however, you are indebted to a secondary source, this must be acknowledged_: secondary sources include discussions with classmates enrolled in the course or any other classmates; materials derived from the web; and published articles or books. (Discussions with me or ideas that emerge in the course of lectures or discussions need not be acknowledged: with respect to this class they can be considered to be in the public domain.)

If you do not acknowledge a secondary source, you may be open to a charge of plagiarism. (See UCI's policies on academic honesty, which can be accessed from the course syllabus, for further information on this topic; if you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me and I will try to explain.)

If you *do* use a secondary source, it is a terrible idea simply to paraphrase that source: either quote the author or rewrite the point in your own words: in either case, you *must* footnote your indebtedness to the author on whom you are relying, or you will be open to a charge of plagiarism.

7. ***References***. References to the works that we have read can be given parenthetically in the body of the paper, provided that you are using the editions and/or translations on order for the course; if you are using different editions and/or translations of the texts, then you should give a complete bibliographic reference following your first reference to the text at issue.

8. ***Proofread***. Readers tend to be put off by a paper with numerous spelling and grammatical mistakes: it leads them to think—even if this inference is unjustified—that the paper was thrown together at the last minute. Readers are therefore less likely to give you the benefit of the doubt when your points are not altogether clear.

9. ***Matters of style***:
   A. <u>Voice</u>: Whether you write in the first or third person is up to you. Both are routinely found in present-day philosophy. Generally, the third person voice reads more formally. If you choose to write in the first person, be careful that you do not lapse into an informal, chatty style.
   B. <u>Contractions</u>: Don't use 'em.
   C. <u>Slang and Colloquialism</u>: Ditto.
   D. *A common grammatical mistake* occurs when one uses the <u>semicolon</u> (';'): the semicolon may only be used to connect two independent clauses. The colon (':'), should be used to connect two clauses that are related.
   E. Gender bias can be avoided by using the impersonal pronoun 'one' or the plural wherever possible and/or shifting back and forth between 'he' and 'she' when giving examples. It is neither necessary nor desirable to use the clumsy construction 'he or she' or the brutal 's/he'.
   F. The phrase <u>'beg the question'</u> is commonly, albeit incorrectly, taken to mean 'raise the question' nowadays in the popular press. Regardless of what linguists say, common usage is not normative: the phrase 'beg the question' means 'presuppose the answer to some question', and it should be used only in that sense.
   G. <u>Further stylistic advice</u>: Do *not* write, "Kant feels that…" or "I feel that....". Kant thinks, believes, argues, reasons, assumes, infers, concludes, etc., and you should do the same.
   H. Book titles are italicized—e.g., Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*; article titles are enclosed in double quotation marks—e.g., Judith Jarvis Thomson's "A Defense of Abortion."
   I. *You should always* **title** *your paper—"Prompt #1" is not a title—and* **number** *the pages of your paper*.

10. **Resources**
   The Purdue OWL website includes information on writing, citation formats, and a host of other relevant topics: it can be accessed at https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/

A parting note: the failure to attend to the suggestions advanced in this handout will be noted by the reader and it may well bother him and lead him to be less likely to give you the benefit of the doubt when your points are not altogether clear.
(Caveat auctor.)