

Philosophical Essays

What Is A Philosophical Essay?

A philosophical essay bears much in common with the argumentative essay or the position paper, in that students are required to formulate and defend a thesis. On the other hand, philosophical essays differ from argumentative essays or position papers in that philosophical essays must contain objectively good arguments.

In an English class, students writing an argumentative essay must compose a list of defenses that sound convincing, that evoke the desired emotions, and thus persuade the reader to agree with the writer. With such essays, whether or not the arguments presented actually make sense, whether or not the writer articulates a coherent defense is of little importance when compared to *style*.

In a Philosophy class, style is of little importance. In a philosophical essay, the most important requirement is that the writer's arguments are objectively good, that the writer articulates a coherent, consistent and significant position. In short, philosophy is about substance not style.

How To Write A Philosophical Essay:

1. Formulate a rough thesis on a particular philosophical issue. Try to come up with an informed opinion. Some people come ready made with strong opinions on every conceivable issue. To these students I say, "Slow down Kemo Sabe". Reconsider your knee-jerk responses. Other students were born 'on the fence' and are loathe to choose a side. To these students I say, "Be honest with yourself". If you honestly look at the different positions some of them will be unacceptable to you. That doesn't make you intolerant, it just means you are an honest human being.
2. Identify arguments pertaining to your thesis (both pro and con) by major philosophers. Don't forget that you are not the only person to have ever thought philosophically. Don't forget that I am assigning readings that directly pertain to your thesis. Don't forget that I expect you to take advantage of the fact that you have to read the very things you should be reading for your paper. And lastly, don't forget to use this material in your paper!
3. Contemplate the issue and the major arguments pertaining to it. Set aside time to explore the issue and your opinions. Ask yourself questions about your thesis and the issue at hand. Be honest with yourself. In particular, be honest with yourself about how you live your life. Don't give theoretical, fancy sounding answers that contradict the way you live your life. Use your experience to inform your answers.
4. Formulate a refined thesis (one that takes into account the major philosophical arguments). After much contemplation your original thesis should look very different. At the very least, your thesis should now be much more precise but don't be disturbed if you have completely changed your mind. This doesn't mean you are a 'flip-flopper' it means you are a rational human being. Be proud that you are objective and humble enough to change your mind.
5. Write an outline which breaks down the issue into logically distinct sub-issues. By now you should have some idea of how to break your larger issue down into more basic questions. Make these sub-issues the roman numerals of your outline. Try to put the issues in a logical order, a sequence that makes sense.

6. Categorize the pro and con arguments along with your analysis (obtained via contemplation) in the outline under the appropriate sub-issue. This step should help you to refine your arguments.
7. Review your outline for consistency (do you contradict yourself at any stage?), coherence (do your arguments make sense together?), and strength (would open minded adversaries be persuaded by your arguments?)
8. Write a rough draft. Do not turn this draft in. No, don't do it! Leave yourself enough time!
9. Edit the rough draft for content and grammar. Ask someone else in class to read over your essay. People who are not in a philosophy class probably won't understand what you are talking about. Consult the Writing Center. Be sure that your grammar is correct. Use complete sentences. Check your spelling. If you have poor grammar skills have someone read your paper who has excellent grammar.
10. Turn in your essay.
11. Pray to an appropriate deity.

General Reference:

Use MLA style citation.

Use 12 Font Times New Roman

Use Double Spacing.

DO NOT PLAGIARIZE!

I have no mercy when it comes to plagiarism. I have failed students who were about to graduate. I have failed students who needed a passing grade from me to qualify for financial aid. I have failed otherwise nice people who thought they were “on my good side”. I get seriously cranky when I discover plagiarism.

Note: Copying someone else's work without quotation marks and then citing that work IS STILL PLAGIARISM. Copying someone else's work but altering every fifth word IS STILL PLAGIARISM. DO YOUR OWN WORK.

For questions about MLA style citation or grammar or plagiarism try this website:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

Its phenomenal.

Lastly, DO NOT PROCRASTINATE!