

Paper #1: Topics and Guidelines

1. Assignment: Write an essay of 600-900 words (~2-3 pages), on some philosophical topic from unit one.

2. Due Date: A rough draft is due Monday, 2/26, by the beginning of class. By that time, please your paper electronically to Blackboard. (Click *PHIL 150* → *Written Assignments* → *Paper #1 Draft* → *Scroll to Assignment Submission* and click *Browse My Computer*).

You will receive comments on your draft (worth 5% of your final grade), and then revise your paper in light of them (worth 10%). Your final draft is due Wednesday, 3/6, by the beginning of class. (Again, please upload your paper to Blackboard.)

3. Late Penalty: Late papers will be penalized –10 points (out of 100) for the first day, and –2 points for each additional 24 hour period after that. Example: A draft turned in at 11:59pm on 2/26 receives –10 points; one turned in on 2/27 receives –12 points; etc.

4. Suggested Topics: In your paper, you will argue for or against some philosophical view presented in unit one. Below are some suggestions.

Note: You may design your own paper topic based on the material from unit one, but **you must first get instructor approval for any topic NOT listed below.**

- 1) **Skepticism:** Present an argument for external world skepticism, and then argue either that the skeptic's argument is sound, or unsound (i.e., argue either that we *can* or *cannot* have knowledge about the external world).
- 2) **Personal Identity:** Present the problem of the persistence of personal identity through time, and then argue for your preferred view about it (e.g., argue in favor of the body, soul, or psychological continuity view, or some hybrid).
(It is not required, but if you like, you may situate your paper in the context of the question, *Could I survive being uploaded?*)
- 3) **Consciousness:** Argue for your favorite view of the nature of consciousness (i.e., defend physicalism, property dualism, or substance dualism). For example, you might present Descartes's argument for substance dualism, and argue that his argument is sound, or unsound; or present Jackson's Mary's Room argument, and argue that it is sound or unsound; etc.
- 4) **A.I. Consciousness:** Alternatively, argue for your preferred answer to the question, *Could artificial intelligence ever be conscious?* (e.g., present Searle's Chinese Room argument, and argue either that it is sound or unsound).

5. How to Begin: First, decide which of the above topics you want to discuss. Then decide what stance you will take regarding that issue. Did any particular topic or reading excite you? Do you feel passionate about any of these issues? Write about that.

Next, **you must read** [The Pink Guide to Taking Philosophy Classes](#), by Professor Helena de Bres (see the two tabs on writing; for a pdf version, go [here](#) and view pgs. 11-17). Also check out Jeffrey Kaplan's video tutorial, [Guide for Writing a Philosophy Paper](#).

6. Structure: After completing the preliminaries, you will write a paper where you (i) **introduce** and explain some philosophical thesis, argument, or problem. As you explain it, be sure to **motivate** it; i.e., make it sound plausible to the reader that it might be a sound argument, or that the problem is a legitimate and troubling problem, etc., *even if* you ultimately plan to refute it. Then, (ii) **critically grapple** with what you've presented by way of, e.g., raising an objection to the argument you've presented, or a problem for the view you've presented, or a potential solution to the problem you've presented, etc. You should always choose what you perceive to be the *strongest* response(s) to the view you are discussing. (iii) You will then **evaluate** the objection, or solution, by explaining why it is either successful or unsuccessful. Then, (iv) add a concluding remark, stating what **conclusion** the reader should draw from your discussion.

For instance, if you were writing on topic #1, you may want to use something like the following structure. (*Note: this is merely an example; the structure is ultimately up to you*)

Sample Structure for: Defending Skepticism by way of Refuting Chalmers' Proposal

- (a) Write a brief **introduction** explaining what you are about to do. Be sure that your paper has a clear **thesis**. That is, you are trying to **persuade** the reader to agree with you about something.

(For instance, in this example, I'll argue that the mere possibility that we are in a skeptical scenario does undermine our knowledge about the external world.) [*Roughly 1-2 sentences*]

- (b) **Present the view** you are defending or refuting, or the problem that you are trying to solve.

(In this sample paper, I'll explain what the problem of external world skepticism *is*; i.e., I'll detail *how* the problem arises, and *why* it is such a difficult problem to solve. To achieve these goals, I've decided to tell the story of the brain in a vat, and explain how presenting that story (supposedly) undermines our ability to know things about the world.) [*Roughly 1 page*]

- (c) Provide the details of your favorite **objection** to the view that you have presented, or **solution** to the problem you have presented.

(Here, I'll present Chalmers' solution, being careful to explain *what* his solution is, *how* he arrives at it, and *why* he thinks that his proposal has solved the problem.) [*Roughly 1 page*]

- (d) **Critically assess** the objection or solution. Do you agree with it? Why or why not?

(I'll be assessing Chalmers' proposal. I'll argue that he *has not* successfully solved the problem, being careful to provide my reasons for *why* I agree with him. To achieve this goal, I'll argue that his solution fails in a scenario where we were only recently envatted, since in that case, statements such as <I have hands> would still be false.) [*Roughly 1/2 a page*]

- (e) Write a brief **conclusion** summarizing what you have just done.

[*Roughly 1-2 sentences*]

7. Grading Rubric: Primarily, I will be looking for two things when I assign grades:

- (1) Clarity: Do you explain yourself in a way that is **clear, concise, persuasive, and well-organized**? Imagine that you are writing for someone who has never taken a philosophy course. Your writing should be clear enough so that they would (a) easily **understand** you, (b) would **learn** something new about a philosophical problem and the ideas of a historical figure, and (c) maybe even be **persuaded** by you.
- (2) Critical Reasoning: Does your treatment of the view demonstrate your ability to think critically? It should be apparent that you have thought about the view and the objections **carefully**, that you **understand** their implications, and that you have **put some thought into** your response.

For a more detailed rubric of what I look for when grading, consult the list of do's and don't's on pages 14-17 of *The Pink Guide to Taking Philosophy Classes* ([here](#)). You may also find it helpful to review Questions #10 and #12 of [my FAQ](#). There, I detail some of the most common mistakes that students make in their papers, as well as some suggestions for how to improve on written assignments.

8. Academic Integrity: As per the syllabus, any student caught cheating or plagiarizing will immediately be issued an F for the course and a report to [the honor council](#).

Plagiarism is defined as any instance of presenting someone else's work or ideas as your own (e.g., by copying an internet source, another student's work or ideas, or any other source at all without citation). So, be sure to cite any and all ideas that are not your own.

*Note: Even with citation, turning in an exact copy or a slight re-wording of someone else's work is still plagiarism. Do not turn in a copy or a slightly re-worded version of the readings or my lecture notes. The purpose of this assignment is for me to be able to assess *your* ability to communicate clearly and persuasively, and *your* understanding of the material. So, your work needs to be put into your own words.*

In addition, it should go without saying that the use of Chat-GPT or any other A.I. to generate content for this paper constitutes plagiarism and is not permitted.