

Presentation of Philosophy Essays

This is a document that is intended to show you the type of essay presentation that is expected at university level. In your essay, at the place you are scanning now, should be the introduction. All essays require an introduction, which is merely a summary of: (a) the question; (b) the main points covered in the essay; and (c) an indication of the conclusion you will reach. Essays without introductions are difficult to follow, so you should make sure you include one. Note that an introduction need only be a few sentences long.

Make sure that you include: your name, student ID number, the course number, and the essay title, at the top of the first page of your essay (like this page). Attaching a cover sheet is recommended (these are available at the FIC).

Your essay should be typed, or preferably word processed. If there are reasons why you cannot wordprocess your essay please contact your tutor. (All students are entitled to use the university's word processing facilities – ask your tutor about this.) Please use 1.5 or double spacing, except for the footnote text and indented quotations, and a standard margin. It is preferable to justify your text along both sides as I have done here, as this also makes it easier to read. You *must* use at least a 12 point font as anything smaller is hard to read. Use a sensible font such as Times New Roman or Verdana as anything elaborate is also difficult to read. Make sure the pages are numbered.

Avoid excessive wordiness. For example, why say, "His mortal existence achieved its

termination”, or “He was utterly negated”, when you could just say, “He died”? Using language in an excessive manner will not result in a higher grade, as it is the quality of your thinking, rather than your vocabulary, which is important in philosophy – clarity is of paramount importance. A useful rule to follow is that if you can think of a simpler way of saying the same thing - use it.

3. Paragraphs and Structure.

For each separate topic or argument in the essay you should begin a new paragraph. You must leave a clear line between paragraphs. Using paragraphs helps establish the structure of your essay. Each paragraph should flow on from its predecessor and occur at the appropriate place in the essay - in other words the idea is to make the points you make in each paragraph link together. Paragraphs that do not appear to be in the right place can make the essay confusing and could result in you receiving a lower grade. You may title individual sections or paragraphs if you wish (as I have done with this one), which helps to establish a sense of structure – but don't overdo it.

You must acknowledge all direct and indirect quotations by referencing. Failure to reference your sources could see you charged with plagiarism, which is a very serious offence within the university. Footnoting is the best way to reference. It does not matter whether you print the notes at the bottom of the page, or at the end of the essay (endnotes), as long as they are there. Most word processors have an automatic footnoting feature, but if yours does not you can use the superscript function to place a small marker at the point of reference, like the “twenty-one”

marker at the end of this sentence.²¹ While there are many referencing systems around, the one I have used in this essay works particularly well for philosophy (since you can also include commentary in the footnotes).

Different types of quotation require a different format. Here is an example of referencing an indirect quotation (you do not put quotation marks around these): ...as is evidenced by Aristotle's theory of the social nature of humanity.¹

If direct quotations are short, and circumstances dictate, you can include them in the text (you must put quotation marks around these), e.g. ...as Rachels remarks, "there is no general moral difference between active and passive euthanasia."² Direct quotations that comprise a large amount of text, or those that require special emphasis, need to be separated from the text and indented 1cm (from both margins) with single line spacing (no quotation marks are necessary), e.g.

The question of whether a theory of truth is true of a given language (that is of a

¹Aristotle, Ethics (tr. J.A.K Thomson) (London: Penguin, 1976) p. 74. *NB: Your footnoting from individual books should follow this format (including all the punctuation) - Author, Title (always underline or italicise), translator [tr.] or editor(s) [ed.] (if any) then (place of publication: publisher, year of publication) and page number. If referring to a single page you should use one "p", e.g. p. 147. If you are indicating more than one page you should use "pp", e.g. pp. 147-8.*

²Rachels, James, "Euthanasia, Killing, and Letting Die" in Sterba (ed.) Morality in Practice 5th Edition (Belmont, Ca: Wadsworth, 1997) p. 157. *The format for referencing articles from books is the same as the one for referencing from books except that you put the title of the article in quotation marks and put "in" after it. If you refer to the same work without referring to another in between, then use the abbreviation "ibid." [e.g. if I were to refer to Rachels again I would just write, "ibid. p. 158.", in the footnote text. However, if you wish to refer to the same article again and you have referred to another article in between the two references, then just give the authors name and page number (e.g. "Rachels, p. 160."). If I wished to refer to Rachels again directly after this reference, I would go back to using "ibid.".]*

speaker, or group of speakers) makes sense only if the sentences of that language have a meaning that is independent of the theory (otherwise the theory is not a theory in the ordinary sense, but a description of a possible language)... if the question can be raised whether a truth definition really does define truth for a given language, the language must have a life independent of the definition (otherwise the definition is merely stipulative: it specifies, but is not true of, a language).³

Remember to check your essay to make sure that you have referenced all your sources.

When you use non-English words it is good practice to italicise them. For example you might use the Greek word *akrasia* (weakness of will) if you are writing about Plato. The same goes for Latin expressions, e.g. *ceterus paribus* (all other things being equal), *a fortiori* (with stronger reason), *inter alia* (amongst other things), *et cetera et cetera*. However, do not italicize Maori words.

You must proof-read your essay for spelling and grammatical mistakes. Simple spelling and grammatical errors are unacceptable at university level and can make your essay unclear, which, in turn, may affect your grade. If you are a poor speller you should use a dictionary or spell-check for corrections, but bear in mind that spell checkers will identify only words that don't exist – it won't tell you that you have used “weather” when you should have said ‘whether’. It is also a good idea to get someone else to proof-read your essay for clarity, as it is often harder for you to pick up your own mistakes. If they can't understand what you have written then you need to revise it.

³Davidson, Donald, “The Structure and Content of Truth”, *Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1990) p. 301. *For Journal articles you give the title of the article in quotes, the title of the journal (not underlined), its number, and its date of publication.*

At the end of your essay should be a separate paragraph devoted to the conclusion. The conclusion should contain a short summary of the essay and the conclusion of your argument, as well as any other considerations (e.g. you may wish to note a qualification that lack of space prevented you from investigating).

Handing in an essay that is well structured and well presented is the way to ensure that you get excellent or good grades rather than being merely average. Use this essay as a model if you are unsure, or ask your tutor for advice.