



WRITING WORKSHOP

PHIL 443

11/29/18

Elise woodard

TODAY'S CLASS

Review Guidelines for writing a Philosophy Paper

- **Anderson:** <https://studylib.net/doc/7621352/guidelines-for-writing-a-philosophy-paper>
- **Jim Prior:** <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

More detail and exercises:

- Crafting a thesis
- Constructing an argument
- Anticipating and responding to objections

Review Grading Standards

- **Anderson:** <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~umer/teaching/rubric.pdf>

LIZ ANDERSON'S GUIDELINES

- 1) **Defend a thesis**
- 2) Give arguments for your thesis
- 3) Avoid filler
- 4) Depth over breadth
- 5) **Objections**
 - 1) Give original arguments, not solely reports
 - 2) Arguments, not opinions

LIZ ANDERSON'S GUIDELINES

- 8) Write for a critical audience
- 9) Use the Principle of Charity
- 10) Support interpretation with textual evidence
- 11) Cite your sources
- 12) Use *brief* quotes
- 13) Read over and revise your paper
- 14) Save, format, and submit your paper

STRUCTURE OF A PHILOSOPHY PAPER

I. Introduction

- I. Topic sentence
- II. Thesis statement
- III. *Road map* of paper and how you'll argue for your thesis

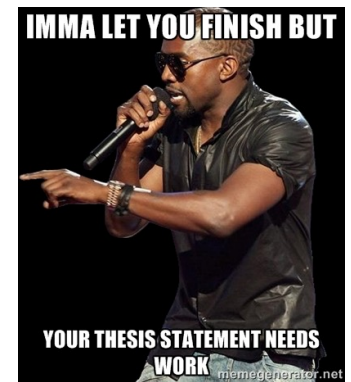
II. Exposition

III. Evaluation (at least 1/3 of paper!)

- I. Positive Proposal
- II. Objection/Response

IV. Conclusion

CRAFTING A THESIS



Your thesis should make a *claim* that is at least somewhat controversial or at issue

- you should have to *convince* your reader

It should have a *manageable scope*

- Keep word limit in mind



Note: Several of the forthcoming slides (besides the exercises) were adapted from Eduardo Martinez's Powerpoint.

CRAFTING A THESIS

Set a clear target:

Make clear what you want to convince the reader of by the end of the paper

If you are criticizing what an author says, make clear exactly what you will argue against

FOCUS: Throughout the paper, stay *focused* on defending your thesis



At all times, keep your eyes on the prize!





CRAFTING A THESIS

Include a roadmap: pair your thesis with an introduction to your argument:

Make the *structure* of your paper clear

Let your reader know where you are leading them and where you are *not* leading them

- Sometimes, it's also helpful to remind your author where you *have* been
- **FLAGGING** is super important in philosophy papers!



INTRODUCTION/THESIS EXERCISE

In this paper, I argue that Lara Buchak's Risk-Weighted Expected Utility Theory is wrong because it rationalizes the preferences in the Allais Paradox. However, those preferences are quintessentially irrational, and thus her view is wrong.

INTRODUCTION/THESIS EXERCISE

In “Instrumental Rationality, Epistemic Rationality, and Evidence-Gathering,” Lara Buchak argues that Good’s Theorem is wrong for risk-avoidant agents. In particular, she argues against “Look-I,” the claim that it is always instrumentally rational to gather cost-free evidence. However, she is neutral regarding “Look-E,” i.e. whether it is always *epistemically* rational to gather cost-free evidence. In this paper, I argue that “Look-E” is true and then use it to pose a problem for Buchak’s proposal. Specifically, I note that accepting “Look-E” and “Look-I” leads to dilemmas, as Buchak herself notes. To avoid these dilemmas, I argue that we should reject “Look-I.” I end by considering an alternative response which embraces the possibility of dilemmas and shows how this result is unattractive.

INTRODUCTION/THESIS EXERCISE

Hume famously said, “’Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger.” Rational choice theory follows Hume in taking an agent’s desires as they are, not as they *ought* to be. Kantians argue that this approach makes us a slave to our desires and thus is deeply flawed. In this paper, I support the Kantian approach and argue that it is a better approach to rationality.

EXPOSITION

Good exposition is:

- Clear
- Accurate
- Charitable
- Balance simplicity & strength
 - Avoid fluff/irrelevant details
 - But include enough detail to set you up for your positive proposal

Class exercise:

Looking at the prompts, what sorts of things would go into the “exposition” section of the paper?

CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT

Gather materials: Determine what kind of support you need for your thesis.

What assumptions will you make?

How are you interpreting the author(s)?

What evidence will you appeal to?

What are your key premises?



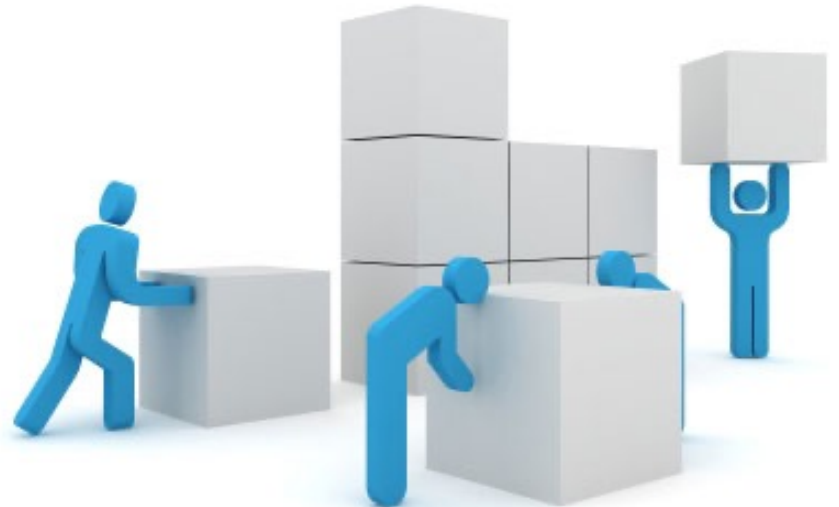
CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT

Set up a clear structure:

How do your claims relate to your conclusion?

How are the *premises* related to one another?

Is everything you argue for *necessary* to defend your thesis?



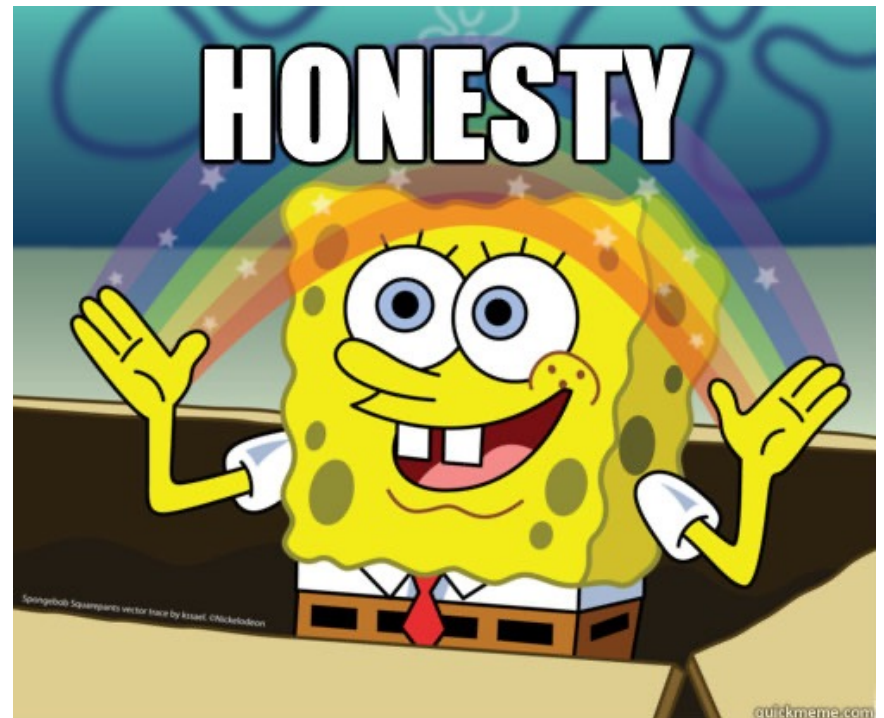
CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT

Be *honest and modest*:

Make clear when you are making an assumption

- Try to defend your assumptions (at least minimally). Sometimes, you just need to take certain starting points for granted, but flag when you do so.

Establish what you need to make your point. If possibility is enough, you do not have to establish necessity



ARGUMENT EXERCISE

1. If Buchak is right to deny the Package Principle, then Dutch Book arguments are flawed.
2. Buchak is wrong to deny the Package Principle.
3. Therefore, Dutch Book Arguments are flawed.

ARGUMENT EXERCISE

1. Positive freedom is valuable (assumption)
2. Expected Utility Theory is silent on the value of positive freedom (assumption)
3. If a theory is silent on something valuable, then that theory is flawed (assumption)
4. Therefore, Expected Utility Theory is flawed (1—3)

ARGUMENTS

NB: you do not need to put your argument in premise/conclusion form.

Most people prefer to put their arguments in prose form, however, sometimes it can be a helpful exercise to try to translate your argument into premise/conclusion form.

- Help you make sure your argument is valid
- Makes clear what assumptions you're making

OBJECTIONS

Give yourself a formidable opponent:

To make your paper more convincing, anticipate how others might object.

If you are criticizing an author, you might use the text to construct possible responses to your criticism.



OBJECTIONS

Objection-generating strategies:

Have you made a controversial assumption?

What are you least confident about?

Run your argument by a friend and see what they find questionable



OBJECTION EXERCISE

1. Positive freedom is a good thing (assumption)
2. Expected Utility Theory is silent on the value of positive freedom (assumption)
3. If a theory is silent on the something value, then that theory is flawed (assumption)
4. Therefore, Expected Utility Theory is flawed (1—3)

Which premise(s) do you think are the weakest? Talk to a neighbor about your objection.

How could the proponent of this argument respond to your objection?

How could you strengthen this argument?

SOME WRITING PITFALLS

ADOPTED FROM JOSH HUNT

Paragraph pitfalls: a paragraph that is too long and winding, trying to cover too many points in a disjointed or unfocused manner.

- **Remedy:** typically, try to develop and defend a single key idea in each paragraph. The paragraph should begin with a clear topic sentence. Generally, a topic sentence introduces the main idea of the paragraph or states a claim similar to the one that you ultimately defend in the paragraph.

SOME WRITING PITFALLS

ADOPTED FROM JOSH HUNT

Plagaristic Paraphrase: a sentence or long phrase that is pretty easily identifiable as merely a slightly reworded or slightly modified sentence in some other piece of work. At the very least, you should provide a page number citation if you do this, and even then it still looks bad.

- **Remedy:** generally, if you use three or more words verbatim, then you should put these words in quotation marks and provide a page number citation, e.g. Josh says, “if you use three or more words verbatim, then you should put these words in quotation marks and provide a page number citation” (Hunt 2018, 1)
- **Extreme remedy:** just avoid quoting anything! Put everything in your own words, using a nontrivial paraphrase if necessary. This demonstrates comprehension and avoids quotation marks popping up everywhere.
- You may also cite **LECTURE NOTES** and **HANDOUTS**

SOME WRITING PITFALLS

ADOPTED FROM JOSH HUNT

Objecting to including an objection: it is a natural temptation—one that I have had for many years—to avoid raising serious objections to your argument. After all, if you’ve made your argument well, then shouldn’t it be completely unobjectionable? (Wrong!)

- **Remedy:** fixate on the following truism: there will always be someone who disagrees with you. Try to put yourself in their shoes: what is the most plausible view that disagrees with the position you are defending? Figure out what they would think is the greatest weakness in your argument. Point out this weakness yourself, and then try to (responsibly) rebut their objection, in a manner that they might find compelling or at least have to take seriously.

STYLE & GRAMMAR PITFALLS

Make sure that your writing is clear (e.g. all referents disambiguated, sentences are typically short and crisp, technical terms are defined, etc.)

Make sure the transitions between paragraphs and sentences are clean: you want each sentence and paragraph to be connected to what came before it!

- Transition words are your friends! (e.g. “Next,” “Then,” “Thus,” “Therefore”)

Grammar (etc.)

- Semicolons go between two complete sentences that are highly related to one another.
- Commas go before lists and between two complete sentences where there is a conjunction between them
- In-text citations: Elise argues that PHIL 443 students are the best (Woodard 2018, 1).
 - Note where the punctuation is!!!

Grading Rubric: Philosophy Papers[†]

PHIL 443: RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY (GSI: ELISE WOODARD)

	Basic (0–1)	Fair (≈2)	Good (≈3)	Excellent (≈4)
Thesis & Focus	Lacks a discernible thesis. Fails to stay on topic. Rambles. No road map provided to reader.	Thesis implied or stated poorly. Frequently strays from focus. Substantial fluff.	Clearly stated argumentative thesis. Occasional bits of fluff, or takes too long to get to thesis.	Crystal clear thesis statement upfront. No fluff. Road map provided to reader indicating how author will argue for thesis.
Structure	Essay fails to have a discernible structure. Frequent patches of disconnected thoughts. Readers might feel lost in a maze.	Loose organization: multiple ideas might be jumbled together rather than separated. Paragraphs lack topic sentences. Failure to guide the reader with transitions.	Clear organization: Most paragraphs have a single clear idea or point. Transitions are adequate and generally clear.	Flawless organization: each paragraph has a clear idea/focus. Each paragraph has a clear topic sentence. Paragraphs are deftly and smoothly connected.
Exposition	Fails to engage with any reading or lecture/section. Topic tangentially related to class.	Engages with another viewpoint, but that viewpoint is presented in a way that is uncharitable, or writer seems to be arguing against a strawman.	Accurate exposition, with some minor errors or misinterpretations.	Flawless and illuminating exposition.
Evaluation	No evaluation. Author's own viewpoint absent.	Author makes some attempt at evaluation, but the evaluation is too brief or not on point.	Lots of middle ground between 2 and 4. Perhaps the author only develops an objection or a response well. Or they do a moderately good job at each. Etc.	Well-developed and thoughtful evaluation. Author raises plausible objection to their own viewpoint or to another viewpoint. Author then considers a response (either on their own behalf or someone else's) and evaluates it.
Style & Mechanics (out of 2)	Vague or needlessly abstract language. Misused words. Monotonous or choppy sentences. Inappropriate tone or style. Frequent or extensive errors in word use, grammar, punctuation, and/or spelling. (0–5)	Some words may be vague, imprecise, or needlessly abstract. Occasionally awkward sentence structure. Generally appropriate tone. At least a few sentences are free from error, demonstrating competence. (≈1)	Minimal instances of previous problems. Some sentences needlessly long or confusing. A few problem sentences that distract the reader but do not impede clarity. Plausibly proofread but not seriously enough. (≈1.5)	Precise word choice. Varied sentence structure. Reads like it could be published. No problem sentences. Almost entirely free of spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. Looks extremely well proofread. (≈2)

[†] Adapted from Josh Hunt's rubric.

OTHER RESOURCES

Sweetland:

<https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/undergraduates/writing-support.html>

Mumford Method:

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/Arts/Documents/MumfordMethod.pdf>

- suggested by Calum McNamara
- THINK SLOW, WRITE FAST



LSA

GAYLE MORRIS

SWEETLAND CENTER FOR WRITING
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

BONUS TIPS FROM ELISE

~~Write~~ Write early and often

Focus energy from the beginning on your *positive proposal*

- Choose your prompt partly based on whether you think you have something original/substantive to say about — not on what you think it's *easiest* to present.

Create an outline (Workflowy is great for this!)

- First: do a rough sketch of your paper before you start writing
- Throughout the writing process: continue to update your outline
- Finally: check your outline against the final version of your paper
 - Did you do everything you said you'd do? Does your paragraph structure correspond with your outline? Does each paragraph have a topic sentence? Etc.