Tackling the Philosophy Essay

A Student Guide

Edition One

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From the Authors

This guide began as a collection of supplementary material for a one-off workshop on essay-writing in philosophy. It is now presented to you as a handbook for students on the basics of philosophical writing. As supervisors ourselves, the four of us began the project out of a desire to offer extra assistance to broader audience of students experiencing difficulty with their essay-writing skills. Thus, the focus below is on essay skills *alone*. Do not feel intimidated or concerned if the topics referred to in the examples below are unfamiliar to you; the material is meant to guide you through a process that is applicable to most essays, regardless of the content.

Finally, a word of caution: this guide is not intended to be a one-stop solution to all of your essay-related problems. The intention is to explain and illustrate a handful of recommendations that address some of the most common mistakes students make when writing philosophical essays. There are numerous resources available to you if you are concerned about your essay-writing skills, beginning with your supervisors. As supervisors it is our job to help you improve your skills, so do not hesitate to ask your supervisors questions! In addition to your supervisors, we strongly recommend that you ask your Director of Studies and/or college tutors about the avenues available to you if you are looking for extra instruction. This guide is only the beginning.

C.B., C.C., A.C., S.S.
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Analysing the Question

Before the writing process even begins, it is essential to understand what the question assigned is asking you. Of course, there are numerous ways of tackling the same question; in this section we demonstrate the kinds of considerations you should take into account when unpacking a given essay question and deciding how to answer it.

QUESTION #1

"Can egoism be both coherent and interesting?"

This question is framed in a way that suggests a 'yes' or a 'no' type response, though clearly, you will need to say more than just 'yes' or 'no' in order to give a good reply. The question is suggesting that the conjunction of being both coherent and interesting might be problematic for egoism, so when starting to think about how to answer, it is important to think about why this might be the case. Are all the coherent versions of egoism uninteresting? Are all the interesting versions incoherent? Is this conflict a necessary result or a contingent fact?

Central Words

Egoism: Specifying what you mean by egoism is going to be important for a good answer to this question. You will at the very least need to give a brief definition near the start of your essay, though, depending on how you want to answer the question, you may need to go into more detail. In this case, there are several different versions or theories of egoism, and you may want to argue, for instance, that one version can be both coherent and interesting while another version cannot. If you decide to make this argument, you will need to define or describe each version that you discuss as well as give a general definition of egoism that makes it clear that both (all) of the theories you are discussing fall under the umbrella term of 'egosim'.

Interesting: What would make a theory of egoism interesting, or alternatively, uninteresting? A theory that is trivially true or true by definition might be uninteresting. Perhaps only plausible theories, or those that offer genuine psychological possibilities, count as interesting. Or, you might think that any theory that is incoherent is uninteresting. For this question, it is likely that your argument will hinge on what you mean by 'interesting', so it will be important to specify your criteria early in your essay – your *desiderata*.

Less central words:

Coherent: this word is specific and well understood enough that you don't need to explore other obscure or technical meanings. You may want to give a brief definition, again near the start of the essay, to make its meaning obvious and clear.

QUESTION #2

'All art is ethically committed, whether overtly or covertly.' Discuss.

Discuss

When you are told to "discuss" a statement, your essay *must* nevertheless take a position. You should say whether you agree or disagree with that statement, given some understanding of the terms involved – you cannot merely rehearse considerations for and against accepting the statement without coming to some conclusion. In some cases, including this one, a reasonable amount of discussion will be needed to establish what we should take the terms to mean.

A part of discussing the statement may also include considering whether the statement is more plausible if we put some restrictions on it, or whether some other related statement might be more plausible (example given below).

Central words

All: The statement is about *all* art, so a first thing to do here may be to think of which kind of art it would be least plausible to make this claim about. How could Chopin's preludes be ethically committed, for example? If we can dismiss the idea that the claim could be true of absolutely all art quite quickly, then we will be able to move on to restricted versions of the statement. For example, perhaps such a claim about all *narrative* artworks could be more plausible.

Ethically committed: This is the central notion in need of clarification. An answer to this question must consider what it would mean for art to be ethically committed, and should preferably consider a few different ways to understand this notion. One obvious way for an artwork to be ethically committed would be for it to make explicit moral claims. On the other hand, an artwork may call for its audience to react with 'moral' emotions, such as admiration, blame or sympathy. Could calling for such emotions in response to certain situations be a kind of ethical commitment?

Both of these suggestions offer ways that ethical commitment might arise through the content of an artwork. So is ethical commitment necessarily tied to the content of an artwork? Or could it come about in other ways? If the latter, perhaps this suggests a way that even a piece of music might be ethically committed.

Overt and **Covert**: Since these words are used in the statement, an answer also needs to mention them, and should distinguish ways for an artwork to be more overtly or covertly ethically committed. The first two suggestions above might be taken as suggestions for what counts as overt and covert ethical commitment. Alternatively, if we think that ethical commitments can arise other than through an artwork's content, perhaps that will provide another way for such commitment to be covert.

Less central words

This question includes the word 'art', and the definition of art is a controversial philosophical topic. However, to discuss it in detail here would take us too far away from the central focus of this question. We have lots of paradigm examples of art (Chopin's preludes, Dostoevsky's novels, Turner's paintings, Shakespeare's plays) and we can use these when considering what this claim could mean, and whether it might be plausible.

QUESTION #3

"'Descartes argues that the immaterial mind is distinct from our material bodies. But, the immaterial can have no causal effect on the material. Therefore, we must reject theories of immaterial minds.' Discuss."

As outlined in the notes on Question #2, this question ends with 'Discuss' and you therefore need to argue for why you agree or disagree with the statement. The statement in this question though takes the form of an **argument**, which provides another potential layer for disagreement. In particular, you may disagree with one or more of the premises, the conclusion, or the form of the argument itself.

The key to a good answer to this type of question is to be clear on what you think is problematic, and what is not, and why.

You might think, for example, that the first premise is not a correct understanding of what Descartes argues for. Or, perhaps you disagree with the second premise about the causal gap between immaterial and material. Or, you might say, even if we grant premises 1 and 2, the conclusion doesn't necessarily follow. In this case, it is not clear from the premises that we must give up theories of immaterial minds, rather than reject theories of material bodies, or that a successful theory must account for a causal effect of minds on bodies.

What you do **not** want to do is simply say the argument as it stands is invalid, and leave it at that. You need to say more. If you want to take issue with the validity of the argument, then you need to discuss the missing premises, and whether you think *those* premises are problematic or not. In this case, you could discuss reasons for thinking we cannot reject theories of material bodies and are therefore forced to reject theories of immaterial minds. Or, you could question the requirement that minds must causally affect bodies.

Be on the lookout for these kinds of questions and their missing premises or invalid arguments. Even if you agree with the conclusion, which is what will be most apparent when you quickly read a question, you need to explicitly engage with the argument *given in the question*, not other arguments you might have for the conclusion.

QUESTION #4

Does the possibility that we are dreaming undermine our right to claim that we have genuine knowledge of the existence of an external world?

This question has lots of key notions in it, some of which invite analysis, and others of which should determine what arguments and considerations you raise in your answer.

The words '**possibility**' and '**dreaming**' indicate which sceptical argument we need to consider, and the phrase '**existence of the external world**' indicates which piece of supposed knowledge is being threatened by this sceptical argument. A good answer to the question would be likely to start by explaining this argument and how it is supposed to threaten the supposed knowledge in question.

Other bits of knowledge about the external world may be threatened by the argument too, and perhaps more successfully. For example, the argument might threaten the idea that I know anything *about* the external world, even if I do know that it exists, and it might threaten the idea that I know particular things about what is happening in it right now, even if I can know some general truths about it. *However*, consideration of these should come after discussion of the particular problem that the question poses, if at all. While any given question is inevitably related to many others, it is essential that you answer the question *asked*. Beware of devoting space to tangents; if you cannot make a clear case for the relevance of a sub-discussion, it is probably best excluded.

The central notion that calls for analysis here is that of **genuine knowledge**. Whether a certain sceptical hypothesis undermines our right to claim genuine knowledge may depend on what genuine knowledge amounts to, so an answer to this question will need to consider how some of the different accounts of knowledge should affect our answer. If different conceptions of knowledge would dictate that we answer the question differently, we will need to take a stance on which is the best conception.

However, we aren't just being asked whether this sceptical argument undermines *knowledge*, but whether it undermines **our right to claim** that we have knowledge. So, we also need to consider what gives us the right to claim genuine knowledge, and whether knowledge and the right to claim it always come together, or whether we might sometimes have the former without the latter. This again will depend on which conception of knowledge we have.

TROUBLESHOOTING – THESIS STATEMENTS

Below is a brief list of *some* of the ways a thesis statement might go wrong. The list is not exhaustive, but the examples and explanations below are designed to provide some basic "Dos and Don'ts" to constructing a thesis statement.

Lack of Argument/Position

"In this paper, I will compare different theories of personal identity—specifically those that identify persons with minds, and those that identify persons with bodies."

The problem with this thesis is that it doesn't take a position. A thesis statement should be able to function as the conclusion of an argument—it should be the kind of thing that could follow from premises. It is not enough to simply *compare*, *observe*, *describe*, etc.; while these are useful things to do in order to make a point, they do not, on their own, suffice as the conclusion of an essay.

Infeasible/Unmanageable Scope

"I will argue that utilitarianism is right."

This thesis takes a position, but it's a MASSIVE one! Remember that you are reading a limited amount of literature, and have only 3000ish words to make your point—you are not going to be able to prove a conclusion as sweeping as this. It is essential that your thesis limit the *scope* of your argument. For instance, you might choose to make a case against a particular author (or authors) who argue against utilitarianism; or you might make a case against a specific objection to utilitarianism. In general, be sure to restrict the scope of your thesis according to whom and what you'll be able to properly discuss in 3000 words. (NOTE: It is common to think that a thesis statement must only be a single sentence. This is not the case. As is becoming evident, there are a number of different things that a proper thesis statement must accomplish, including scope-restriction; it is neither preferable nor (in some cases) possible to all of these things in a single sentence. Do, however, complete the statement within a short paragraph. If your thesis spans more than several sentences, it is more than likely too long.)

Colloquial Language/Imprecise Word Choice

"I feel that causation cannot be a genuine relation since it is merely an idea formed by induction."

The first issue with this thesis statement is the use of the word 'feel'. In common conversation, we sometimes use words such as this when we are making a case for something; but this is not acceptable in formal essay writing. When writing an essay, we are concerned with *arguments* and *conclusions*. While it is certainly true that you often agree with your conclusion, your reader is

not concerned with how you "feel" about it. A thesis statement should tell the reader what the essay will accomplish. Here are a few examples of more preferable verbs to use in this situation: 'argue', 'demonstrate', 'show'.

The second, and related issue with this thesis statement is the use of the word 'cannot'. We use language loosely in our day-to-day conversations; *but, in the context of philosophy, some terms have very specific, technical meanings* (which you might not intend!). For instance, the 'cannot' here means 'it is not possible that' or 'at no possible world'; but the person writing this thesis likely did not want to say that it is *impossible* for causation to be a relation—only that it, in fact, *isn't* one. There's nothing wrong with either of these two claims. However, if you make the first claim, when you *mean* the second, your argument will not work since it will be an argument for the wrong position. Here are some other words to watch out for: '(in)valid', 'logical, 'possible, 'probable'.

Boring

"I will argue that if we define right action as that which leads to what is good, then we can be confident that right action will always lead to what is good"

Recall from "Analysing the Question" that we were concerned about clarifying ambiguous or vague terms. While this thesis statement does this, it does so in such a way as to make the conclusion uninteresting. Here, the question asked whether right actions always lead to what is good. But the author has *defined* his/her notion of 'right' in such a way as to make the conclusion trivially true (i.e. it is true by the stipulative definition answered).

Fence-Sitting

"I will argue that it is unclear whether or not utilitarianism is a good theory"

This thesis doesn't take a firm position at all. It's okay not to give a definitive answer; but if you think there's some reason *why* such an answer can't be given (for instance, doing so depends on answering some prior question), then you MUST that part of your case. A word of warning: fence-sitting is a risky strategy for an essay. Be sure that, if you do something like the above, you are still answering the question

SAMPLE INTRODUCTIONS

Below you will find several examples of introductory paragraphs, some of which suffer from commonly made mistakes, and others of which exemplify one or more hallmarks of a strong introduction. The annotations provided will identify and explain these as they appear in the texts.

INTRO #1

Does the argument from evil prove the nonexistence of God?

ORIGINAL VERSION

From St. Thomas Aquinas, who wrote in the mid-13th Century, to J.L Mackie, who wrote in the mid-20th Century, hundreds of philosophers have attempted to prove the existence or nonexistence of a Judeo-Christian God.[1] The following is an examination of what is known as the argument from evil. Briefly, this argument refutes the existence of God, who is defined as an omnipotent, omniscient and omni-benevolent being, by pointing to the existence of evil and suffering and arguing that a God defined as such would not allow for such things, and thus, no such God exists. Through an exploration of the point and counterpoint of this argument, including the freewill defense,[2] this paper will prove that the argument from evil sufficiently proves the nonexistence of God.[3]

Notes:

1. Unnecessary and irrelevant bit of information. While it is a good idea to start by telling the reading the topic to be discussed, it is preferable to do so in a manner that is also informative with respect to your paper.

   We're often taught as younger essay writers to "open with a hook" or to "start very general" – these bits of advice are not applicable to the philosophy essays you'll be writing.

   See the corrected version below for a better opening sentence. *[Back to text]*

2. This is an uninformative explication of what the essay will do. When road-mapping—i.e. offering an outline or sketch of the essay—it's important to be specific about the arguments and positions that will be discussed. It is also important to give some indication of what *you* will conclude in each section; this will tell the reader what work each section is doing. *[Back to text]*

3. This thesis statement is *massive* in its scale. With respect to this particular essay, the literature drawn on was highly limited; the breadth of the material covered was not nearly wide enough to warrant a conclusion such as this.

   It is certainly possible to have a circumscribed conclusion that is still informative! See below. *[Back to text]*

REWRITTEN VERSION

The Judeo-Christian God is defined as a being who is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent.[1] However, the existence of such a being seems to be inconsistent with the existence of evil in the world; it follows from his omniscience that he knows of all the evils that exist, from his omnipotence that he has the power to stop it, and from his omnibenevolence that he should desire to stop it.[2] This, in brief, is the Argument from Evil. The following shall be an examination of this problem.[3] In what follows, I will begin by further explicating one version of the argument from evil—specifically that from Hume.[4] I will then examine two defences to this problem as presented by John Hicks: the *freewill* defence, and the argument from *soul-making*.[5] On the former, I will argue, with Mackie, that the defence is insufficient, since it is perfectly consistent with our having freewill that we always do good.[6] On the latter, I will argue that it is inconsistent with God's attributes that he be unable to allow for soul-making without the existence of suffering.[7] Thus, I will conclude that Hicks' defences do not suffice to dispel the problem of evil, and are therefore insufficient proof of the existence of God.[8]

Notes:

1. Informative opening sentence. *[Back to text]*
2. Brief summary of the problem that is to be subject of the essay. *[Back to text]*
3. Indication of scope. *[Back to text]*
4. Specifics about the material to be covered in the section referred to. *[Back to text]*
5. Details about the defences to be considered. *[Back to text]*
6. Indication of the argument the author will be making. *[Back to text]*
7. Indication of the argument the author will be making. *[Back to text]*
8. More precise and reasonable thesis, given the work that gets done in the essay. *[Back to text]*

INTRO #2

In his dialogues, Plato never answers the questions he poses. Discuss.

ORIGINAL VERSION

Arguably, one of the most striking features of Plato's dialogues is that many end in seeming *aporia* – from the Greek for 'impasse' or 'confusion'. Indeed, in the *Clitophon*, the eponymous character himself expresses great frustration at what he determines must be either Socrates' unwillingness or inability to tell him the nature of virtue.[1] This, however, is a grave error on Clitophon's part. This paper will seek to demonstrate that these Platonic dialogues do not, in fact, end in the confusion that they seem to, but rather, through dramatic detail, provide much insight into Plato's conception of virtue.[2] By first examining the argument made by Clitophon, and subsequently presenting a response to this critique via the analysis of the *Laches*,[3] this paper will demonstrate that it is specifically the conception of virtue as a *techne*, or craft, that leads to Clitophon's misunderstanding.[4] This paper will also draw upon arguments made in the *Protagoras* in order to buttress the observations made in the *Laches*. Finally, at its conclusion this paper will attempt address some of the epistemological questions raised by the Socratic understanding of virtue and how that virtue is to be taught.[5]

Notes:

1. Context-setting. *[Back to text]*
2. General direction of argument. *[Back to text]*
3. How the author is going to achieve his/her objective. *[Back to text]*
4. Specific thesis statement. *[Back to text]*
5. Roadmap, including details of what will be achieved in each section. Notice the lack of 'fluff'! *[Back to text]*

INTRO #3

Are necessity, analyticity, and a prioricity coextensive?

ORIGINAL VERSION

These[1] distinctive terms are often[2] used interchangeably because intuitively there seem to be certain factors in their meaning that link them together.[3] However it can be argued that they are not identical, at least in terms of connotations, because they all are used on different levels of enquiry.[4] Whether they are exactly the same in extent of their meaning has been hotly debated, especially with regard to the universality of logical laws and to possible counterexamples to the assumption that they are coextensive.[5]

Notes:

1. This demonstrative is uninformative. It is best to use the actual noun(s) that are being referred to instead of 'this', 'that', 'it', etc. *[Back to text]*

2. It is best to be as specific as possible. Here the author does not tell us in what contexts they are referring to and the significance of this observation. *[Back to text]*

3. This sentence leaves it unclear as to whether the author agrees with there being a link between the terms in question. This sentence fails to make clear where the level of disagreement lies or why it is of interest, nor makes it clear what the author's position is. *[Back to text]*

4. Again, it is hard to tell by the use of 'can be argued' whether the author does in fact argue this in this paper. This means that there is no clear statement of the author's thesis statement. *[Back to text]*

5. While this sentence gestures towards the areas that will perhaps be discussed, it does not constitute a road map as it makes no indication that they will be used to make an argument nor what the structure of the argument will be. It is in general best to avoid trying to motivate a particular debate by saying that it is in general controversial. This is because almost everything can be construed as 'hotly debated' and also because it does not make clear why the controversiality of a particular area will help you make a particular case with respect to the question. *[Back to text]*

REWRITTEN VERSION

At the heart of the question as to whether necessity, analyticity and a prioricity are coextensive is the connection between the metaphysical, the semantic and the epistemological.[1] For these notions to be coextensive it must be shown that metaphysical necessity can be expressed by and only by analytic statements, and, if this is so, that only these necessary truths and the analytic statements that express them can be known and only be known a priori.[2] In this essay, I outline the differences between these concepts and examine the theoretical links between the metaphysical, the semantic and the epistemological.[3] I consider and reject some counterexamples – such as supposed cases of the synthetic a priori – raised against the position that they are coextensive.[4] Although I conclude that, in light of the failures of these counterexamples, that they should in fact be considered coextensive.[5] I argue that a corollary of this position is that perhaps nothing of great interest or importance is necessarily so, analytically expressed or known a priori.[6]

Notes:

1. Explication of what is of importance when answering this question and outlines the areas where the answer to the question might have broader implications. *[Back to text]*

2. This sets up the success criteria: it states what must be shown in order for the question to be answered. *[Back to text]*

3. This indicates that definitions and examples of the important concepts related to the question will be articulated later on. *[Back to text]*

4. This details the types of argument and counter-argument the author will be using to defend her claim. *[Back to text]*

5. Clear thesis statement which answers the question. *[Back to text]*

6. Indication of the wider issue addressed and the implications of the conclusion considered. *[Back to text]*

INTRO #4

'Genetic engineering will lead to eugenics. Therefore, genetic engineering should be impermissible' Discuss.

ORIGINAL VERSION

Some people worry that genetic engineering is likely to lead to a new form of eugenics, and that since eugenics is a bad thing, we should therefore not engage in genetic engineering.[1] This argument is difficult to evaluate, since people do not all agree on what eugenics actually is,[2] and it may therefore be more productive to admit that there are similarities between genetic engineering and eugenics, and then look at whether they are similar in any of the ways that made past eugenics morally questionable.[3] In this essay I will compare traditional eugenics movements and possible future uses of genetic engineering,[4] and will argue that the value we place on autonomy, which we use to argue against authoritarian eugenics, may actually lead us to the conclusion that we should allow much genetic engineering at the request of parents.[5] However, I will argue that this principle does not support the claim that absolutely any such treatments should be available on demand, although it is difficult to draw a line between acceptable and unacceptable treatments.[6]

Notes:

1. Setting up the problem. *[Back to text]*

2. Identifying a problematic (ambiguous) term on which the problem hangs. *[Back to text]*

3. Explaining how the author intends to approach the question, given the complications with the ambiguous term 'eugenics' picked out above. *[Back to text]*

4. Clarification of specific approach to the question. *[Back to text]*

5. Beginning of roadmap. Explaining that the author will first offer an argument for the premise stated (i.e. "the value we place on autonomy […] may […] lead us to the conclusion that we should allow much genetic engineering at the request of parents."). *[Back to text]*

6. Statement of thesis. Note that the thesis is limited in scope. The author flags the fact that his/her thesis depends on a notion of acceptability, and acknowledges that this is a vague notion. The 'although' indicates that the author takes this to limit the scope of the case being made. *[Back to text]*

Essay Outlines

In this section you will find two different examples of essay outlines. The precise style and content of an essay outline is often unique to the writer; you will, in time, discover what is most helpful to you. The samples below include a couple of outlines that the authors of this guide have found successful. You may, at first, find it helpful to begin by basing your own outlines on one of these.

OUTLINE #1

Question:

'Philosophy will best prepare you for life'. Discuss

Analysis:
Philosophy: does this mean a philosophy degree? Formal study of philosophy? Informal study? Philosophy as 'the love of wisdom', as critical thinking? All of philosophy, or just ethics?

Best – better than studying other subjects? Compared to what?
Prepare – give you helpful skills? Knowledge? Give you the most useful/correct perspective?
Life – living well, knowledge of the realities of life? Life in general, or a particular kind of life?
You – everyone? Will it depend who you are?

What does it mean to be 'prepared for life'?
What might it mean to say philosophy will be the best at this preparation?

Thesis:
Evaluated as it stands, this statement is incredibly strong, and likely false. Considered however within the context in which it is likely to be expressed, it can be interpreted as making a weaker, but true claim. If we understand the statement as claiming that when compared with other degree options, an undergraduate degree in philosophy best prepares you for life, I argue the statement is true.

Outline

1. Introduction - What is the context and subsequent implicit meaning
    a. The statement appears very strong when considered on its own – we can think of many plausible ways in which to understand what is meant by 'philosophy' and 'prepare for life' such that the statement is easily false
    b. But we do hear, if not the exact wording, statements to this effect in some specific contexts, e.g. philosophy open-day at university, or outreach programs
    c. Thesis and roadmap

2. Definitions or setup
    a. Why is interpreting the statement within the context of considering a philosophy undergraduate degree against other degree options, legitimate?

b. Given this context, what is the implicit meaning of the statement?

3. Argument for the thesis
    a. Undergraduate degrees can offer three areas of preparation for life: practical skills, factual knowledge, and habits of reasoning.
    b. The more areas of preparation you have the better, and variety of preparation is better than a high degree of preparation in one area.
    c. Philosophy is the only undergraduate degree program that provides all three kinds of preparation.
    d. Therefore, philosophy best prepares you for life.

4. Objection 1
    a. Against premise b – why think it is the case that greater variety of skills and training is better than a high degree of development in one area, especially given the value the modern economy places on specialization. Variety may have been valuable in the past, but not today. Therefore, philosophy, as a less specialized discipline, will not be the best degree option to prepare one for life.

5. Response 1 – objection mistakenly interprets 'prepare for life' as 'valued by employers'
    a. We might be able to agree that specialization is highly valued by employers, but this is not the only sense in which university degrees are meant to prepare one for life.

6. Objection 2
    a. Philosophy degrees do not necessarily provide all three areas of preparation. If someone studied nothing but math logic, we would be hard-pressed to say she had a varied education.

7. Response 2 - objection makes a good point, but empirically, this is not a worry
    a. Most undergraduate philosophy degrees include requirements to study a variety of philosophical topics and approaches, thereby preventing someone from studying only formal logic. As the objection rightly points out, this is a contingent feature, but there is sufficient empirical data to dismiss the worry.

8. Conclusion
    a. Qualifications, or what is still left open
        i. Reiterate that this argument depends on a particular understanding of the statement, and it is possible that alternative interpretations can be made
        ii. As the response in 6 indicates, the argument also depends on contingent features of a modern philosophy undergraduate degree, so it is possible that in the future, if programs change, that the argument will no longer hold.
    b. Restate thesis:
        i. However, with these qualifications in mind, I conclude that when compared with other degree options, an undergraduate degree in philosophy best prepares you for life.

SAMPLE OUTLINE #2(a) – Short

The following is a model outline reconstructed from the Annotated Model Essay.

It is important to note that this is NOT the only way to construct an outline. The hope is that this example will (a) help you to better understand what we mean when we encourage you to "make an outline" before writing and (b) make more explicit what we take to be one example of a very good structure for an essay.

This outline is a shorter version. It is neither better nor worse than the more detailed version; *the best style is the one that helps you to write the best essay*. That said, it is often helpful to begin with a short version and then expand it into a more detailed outline.

Question:

Does the value of autonomy support the claim that genetic engineering should be available on request?

THESIS: The value of autonomy, as it is used to argue against authoritarian eugenics, and as it is used in justifying the freedom we give parents in raising their children, supports the principle that *some*, but *not all*, uses of genetic engineering should be available to parents on request.

Traditional Eugenics v. Genetic Engineering[1]

- What is common to both: intention to affect the kinds of people who will be born
- Explanation of traditional (a.k.a "authoritarian") eugenics
- How traditional eugenics is morally questionable
- Section Conclusion: if genetic engineering is similar to traditional eugenics in these respects, genetic engineering should not be available for governments to use regardless of the wishes of prospective parents

[1] The essay did not have labelled sections. The label here is used just for the purposes of organising the outline clearly. The use of headings in essays is allowed, but not mandatory. Some find it helpful to do so, and some do not. Use your discretion.

Arguments in Favour of Genetic Engineering

- ARGUMENT 1: Genetic engineering need not be similar to authoritarian eugenics

- ARGUMENT 2: Parents currently have freedom to affect their children via environmental factors, and so they should be allowed to affect their children via other means as well. This includes genetic engineering.
    - OBJECTION: there is a principled difference between affecting via environmental factors and affecting via genetic engineering.
    - REBUTTAL to OBJECTION: Objector's claim is false!
    - Thus, as there is no principled distinction, genetic engineering should be available at parents' request

Acceptable v. Unacceptable Uses of Genetic Engineering

- We have reason to think some uses of genetic engineering seem to unacceptable. SO, need a distinction between acceptable and unacceptable uses

- PROPOSAL 1 (Buchanan): uses of genetic engineering must be constrained by the child's right to an open future
    - PROBLEMS for Proposal 1:
        - what increases the options open to a child is likely to be a function of the society in which they live
        - (from Agar) may yield good internal distributions of genetic goods, but does not guarantee good social distributions of genetic goods

- COUNTERPROPOSAL (Agar): the goods of genetic intervention should be allocated to individuals in such a way that they will improve the prospects associated with every possible life plan – especially the worst off potential plan
    - Case for Counterproposal
    - PROBLEMS for Counterproposal:
        - does not fully explain what is meant by the worst off potential life plan
        - does not explain which possible life plans parents must consider: all available plans OR all plausible plans without genetic engineering
        - not clear whether parents and society will be able to distinguish between good and bad life plans when making these decisions

SAMPLE OUTLINE #2(b) – Detailed

The following is a model outline reconstructed from the Annotated Model Essay.

It is important to note that this is NOT the only way to construct an outline. The hope is that this example will (a) help you to better understand what we mean when we encourage you to "make an outline" before writing and (b) make more explicit what we take to be one example of a very good structure for an essay.

This outline is a more detailed version. It is neither better nor worse than the shorter version; *the best style is the one that helps you to write the best essay*. That said, it is often helpful to begin with a short version and then expand it into a more detailed outline.

THESIS: The value of autonomy, as it is used to argue against authoritarian eugenics, and as it is used in justifying the freedom we give parents in raising their children, supports the principle that *some*, but *not all*, uses of genetic engineering should be available to parents on request.

Traditional Eugenics v. Genetic Engineering[2]

- What is common to both: intention to affect the kinds of people who will be born
- Explanation of traditional (a.k.a "authoritarian") eugenics:
  - restriction on which people are allowed to reproduce
  - must follow central government policy on characteristics to be selected
- Traditional eugenics morally questionable because:
  - restricts reproductive autonomy
  - government may use societal perspective to define the "best" people to produce
    - ignores perspective of individuals "produced"
  - government may make decisions based on prejudiced views about what constitutes a good life
- Section Conclusion: if genetic engineering is similar to traditional eugenics in these respects, genetic engineering should not be available for governments to use regardless of the wishes of prospective parents

[2] The essay did not have labelled sections. The label here is used just for the purposes of organising the outline clearly. The use of headings in essays is allowed, but not mandatory. Some find it helpful to do so, and some do not. Use your discretion.

Arguments in Favour of Genetic Engineering

- ARGUMENT 1: Genetic engineering need not be similar to authoritarian eugenics
  - Can instead be a system wherein
    - everyone will be able to reproduce who wants to
    - parents will decide which characteristics to select themselves based on their own values
    - parents will then be helped to put this into practice using our new and accurate scientific knowledge
  - By principle of reproductive autonomy (used to argue against authoritarian eugenics) this kind of genetic engineering should be allowed

- ARGUMENT 2: Parents currently have freedom to affect their children via environmental factors, and so they should be allowed to affect their children via other means as well. This includes genetic engineering.
  - OBJECTION: there is a principled difference between affecting via environmental factors and affecting via genetic engineering.
    - Environmental factors change accidental features of a person
    - Genetic engineering changes essential features of a person
  - REBUTTAL to OBJECTION: Objector's claim is false!
    - From Buchanan – environment CAN change essential features, and many genetic interventions (e.g. changing eye colour) DO NOT change essential features
  - Thus, as there is no principled distinction, genetic engineering should be available at parents' request

Acceptable v. Unacceptable Uses of Genetic Engineering

- We have reason to think some uses of genetic engineering seem to unacceptable. E.g.
  - parents do not always know or care what is best for their children
  - parents can also be prejudiced in their opinions about the good life
  - parents should not be allowed to impose their values unfairly on their children
- SO, need a distinction between acceptable and unacceptable uses

- PROPOSAL 1 (Buchanan): uses of genetic engineering must be constrained by the child's right to an open future
  - PROBLEMS for Proposal 1:
    - what increases the options open to a child is likely to be a function of the society in which they live
    - (from Agar) may yield good internal distributions of genetic goods, but does not guarantee good social distributions of genetic goods
      - each child's parents may leave same options open to each child, and certain life plans may no longer be a possibility for anyone

- this would lead to reduction in diversity
- may lead to greater susceptibility to authoritarian government, and therefore, reduced autonomy

- COUNTERPROPOSAL (Agar): the goods of genetic intervention should be allocated to individuals in such a way that they will improve the prospects associated with every possible life plan – especially the worst off potential plan
    - Case for Counterproposal:
        - it is unlikely that we will ever be able to predict which life plan a child will most want to choose
        - parents will not know exactly what life plans will be available when their child grows up
        - Therefore: parents should not try to predict which life plans their child will want to choose, and should not risk closing off any possibilities through genetic engineering
    - PROBLEMS for Counterproposal:
        - does not fully explain what is meant by the worst off potential life plan
        - does not explain which possible life plans parents must consider: all available plans OR all plausible plans without genetic engineering
            - both seem stronger than the restrictions placed on environmental interventions
            - SO need some further justification for why it should be put on genetic interventions in particular
        - not clear whether parents and society will be able to distinguish between good and bad life plans when making these decisions
            - if must consider ALL life plans, the constrain is unreasonable
            - if not, seems like parents would be imposing their own values on their children – runs the risk of being to an unacceptable extent

Annotated Model Essay

The following is an example of an undergraduate supervision essay. It was written by an undergraduate, and has been left unaltered. The essay has been annotated so as to pick out the important elements that make it successful. The hope is that the commentary will help you to understand what supervisors look for when reading your essays.

Some people worry that genetic engineering is likely to lead to a new form of eugenics, and that since eugenics is a bad thing, we should therefore not engage in genetic engineering.[1] This argument is difficult to evaluate, since people do not all agree on what eugenics actually is,[2] and it may therefore be more productive to admit that there are similarities between genetic engineering and eugenics, and then look at whether they are similar in any of the ways that made past eugenics morally questionable.[3] In this essay I will compare traditional eugenics movements and possible future uses of genetic engineering,[4] and will argue that the value we place on autonomy, which we use to argue against authoritarian eugenics, may actually lead us to the conclusion that we should allow much genetic engineering at the request of parents.[5] However, I will argue that this principle does not support the claim that absolutely any such treatments should be available on demand, although it is difficult to draw a line between acceptable and unacceptable treatments.[6]

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[1] Setting up the problem. *[Back to text]*
[2] Identifying a problematic (ambiguous) term on which the problem hangs. *[Back to text]*
[3] Explaining how the author intends to approach the question, given the complications with the ambiguous term 'eugenics' picked out above. *[Back to text]*
[4] Clarification of specific approach to the question. *[Back to text]*
[5] Beginning of roadmap. Explaining that the author will first offer an argument for the premise stated (i.e. "the value we place on autonomy […] may […] lead us to the conclusion that we should allow much genetic engineering at the request of parents.") *[Back to text]*
[6] Statement of thesis. Note that the thesis is limited in scope. The author flags the fact that his/her thesis depends on a notion of acceptability, and acknowledges that this is a vague notion. The 'although' indicates that the author takes this to limit the scope of the case being made. *[Back to text]*

Both traditional eugenics and genetic engineering involve an intention to affect the kinds of people who will be born.[7] This can be seen as having four components: a decision about whose reproductive activities will make the difference, a decision of whether these people may be allowed to make their own reproductive decisions or must follow central policy, a decision about which characteristics are to be selected for and against, and finally drawing on a body of information to allow decision makers to achieve their aims. Traditional eugenics has usually involved a restriction on which people are allowed to reproduce, and has demanded that they follow central government policy about what characteristics are to be selected. This is called authoritarian eugenics,[8] and it is morally questionable for several reasons.[9] First of all, it restricts reproductive autonomy, which many people see as a fundamental right. It may also involve the government using a societal perspective on what sort of people it would be best to produce, rather than thinking about it from the perspective of those individuals themselves. Finally, whether decisions are taken from a societal or individual perspective, the government may make them based on their own prejudiced views about what constitutes a good life.[10] If genetic engineering was similar to traditional eugenics in these respects, most people would agree that it would be a bad thing, and will therefore say that genetic engineering should not be available for governments to use regardless of the wishes of prospective parents.[11]

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[7] Beginning with the similarities between genetic engineering and eugenics. If you go back and reread the introduction, you will see that this is the first step the author discusses (see: "it may therefore be more productive to admit that there are similarities between genetic engineering and eugenics […]") *[Back to text]*

[8] In the introduction, the author indicated that 'eugenics' is an ambiguous term. S/he also stated that s/he would compare genetic engineering to "traditional eugenics movements". Here, the author clarifies what s/he takes 'traditional eugenics' to refer to. *[Back to text]*

[9] Recall, in the introduction, the author stated that s/he would "look at whether [genetic engineering is] similar [to traditional eugenics] *in any of the ways that made past eugenics morally questionable*.
As such, it is necessary to specify the ways in which traditional eugenics is morally questionable. That is what s/he is doing here. *[Back to text]*

[10] List of ways in which traditional (i.e. authoritarian) eugenics are morally questionable. *[Back to text]*

[11] Here the author reminds us why we have taken the time to talk about authoritarian eugenics in this detail. We've spent a paragraph talking about authoritarian eugenics and the ways in which it's morally questionable. But, after what might look like a detour, it is a good idea to remind the reader of the ROLE the seeming detour plays in the essay *as a whole* (i.e. in the *broader* argument). This sentence tells us just that. *[Back to text]*

However, many people argue that genetic engineering need not be used this way, and that it can instead take the form of liberal eugenics, where everyone will be able to reproduce who wants to, where they will decide which characteristics to select themselves based on their own values, and where they will then be helped to put this into practice using our new and accurate scientific knowledge.[12] These people then say that the very principle of reproductive autonomy which we used to argue against authoritarian eugenics commits us to saying that this should be allowed, and so that genetic engineering should be available on request.[13]

A further argument for allowing genetic engineering[14] when requested by parents is suggested by the autonomy we already allow parents in affecting their children through environmental factors.[15] In our society, parents are allowed a great deal of freedom in how they bring up their children, and many say that to interfere with this would be to interfere with fundamental aspects of their conception of the good life, and so would go against the value we place on autonomy. They also say that it reflects recognition of the benefits to both children and society of children being brought up in a well-integrated family, which has a certain amount of privacy from the rest of society, and which allows particularly close relationships to form. These people then say that given this freedom already allowed to parents, we would need some principled reason not to allow them to use genetic engineering if they wanted to.[16]

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[12] Potential *dissimilarity* between genetic engineering and authoritarian eugenics. *[Back to text]*
[13] Explanation of the argument moving from this dissimilarity to the position that genetic engineering should be available on request. *[Back to text]*
[14] Transitional phrase indicating that we are still discussing arguments in favour of allowing genetic engineering when requested. The reader should never be confused or unsure about what is going on at any given point in an essay. It's always a good idea to tell/remind the reader what you are doing and why. *[Back to text]*
[15] Topic sentence for the paragraph, telling the reader, in general terms, what the paragraph will be about. *[Back to text]*
[16] Notice that this paragraph is not merely a statement of the position, but a recreation of the argument for the claim in the last sentence. *[Back to text]*

It might be argued that there is a principled difference between influencing your child through environment and through genetic intervention[17]: the first alters only accidental features of the child, while the second fundamentally alters the person they are going to be. However, Buchanan points out that this argument fails, because environmental interventions can alter phenotype, and may therefore alter many of the things we take as most essential in our concept of self, whereas many genetic interventions do not involve altering such essential characteristics, for example a change in eye colour cannot really be thought of as producing a new person.[18] It therefore seems as though we do not have a principled reason for saying that parents should be able to affect their child as much as they are currently allowed to, but that genetic engineering should not be available at their request.[19]

However, despite these arguments,[20] there also seem to be several reasons why we should not make absolutely any form of genetic engineering available on demand.[21,22] For example, we might argue that parents do not always know or care what is best for their children, that they can be just as prejudiced in their opinions about the good life as a government, and that they should

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[17] Potential counterarguments to the argument just outlined.

Notice how the essay is progressing much like a conversation might. This is what is meant by moving "dialectically". The dialectic of a debate refers to the exchange of arguments that respond one to the other. It can be helpful to imagine a conversation between two imaginary interlocutors – one on either side of the debate:

A: Argument. Therefore, conclusion.

B: Objection.

A: Response to objection.

Etc. *[Back to text]*

[18] Objection to that counterargument. *[Back to text]*

[19] Conclusion, suggesting what follows from the success of the objection immediately above.

Here, the author is somewhat unclear. The intention was to conclude the objection, and state the problem it creates for the position expressed in the first sentence of the paragraph (i.e. the position that there is a principled difference between influencing one's child through genetic engineering and doing so through environment). A better way to phrase this sentence would have been as follows: "Therefore, as there isn't a principled reason for distinguishing the two different ways parents affect their children, it seems genetic engineering should be available at their request." *[Back to text]*

[20] Signals the beginning of the case against the arguments presented in the previous three paragraphs. *[Back to text]*

[21] Indicates the specific topic (i.e. reasons not all forms of genetic engineering should be available on demand) *[Back to text]*

[22] The previous three paragraphs offer a potential argument for permitting genetic engineering when requested. In those paragraphs, the author used terms like 'it seems' or '*they* argue' in order to distance him/herself from the position. Here, the author indicates that s/he is about to begin his/her case against that position. *[Back to text]*

not be allowed to impose their values unfairly on their children. For example, we would probably all agree that no parent ought to be allowed to make their children glow in the dark, no matter how central this was to their own ideas of the good life. It therefore seems as if we need to draw some distinction between acceptable and unacceptable uses of genetic engineering, despite a commitment to the value of autonomy in parental reproductive choices.[23]

Several suggestions have been made for how this distinction could be drawn, and one of the most promising actually uses the value of autonomy in deciding what the restrictions should be.[24] This is the suggestion from Buchanan that uses of genetic engineering must be constrained by the child's right to an open future. This suggestion argues that not only should we respect the autonomy of parents, but parents should also respect the autonomy of their children, and should help them develop the capacity for choice and the skills necessary to make their own decisions as they grow up. This then means that genetic intervention will be wrong if it closes off too many options for a child. This suggestion clearly fits in with the values of a society committed to individualism and autonomy, and Buchanan suggests that it will also put the child in the best position to be able to correct for any accidental mistakes of their parents in genetic or environmental intervention.

However, this proposal also faces certain problems.[25] One of the most serious seems to be that what increases the options open to a child is likely to be a function of the society in which they live, for example being male drastically increases the options open to you in many societies. The worry is then that this constraint on genetic engineering would end up reifying certain social prejudices.

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[23] Conclusion of point being made in this paragraph, and indication of what needs to be done next. *[Back to text]*
[24] Topic sentence for paragraph. *[Back to text]*
[25] Indication that the author is about the present a counterargument to the argument in the previous paragraph. *[Back to text]*

A similar worry[26] is addressed by Agar. He thinks that the suggestion above may well lead to good internal distributions of genetic goods, i.e. within the genetically engineered individuals, but it does not guarantee good social distributions of genetic goods. This is because, once genetic engineering is allowed, it is possible to separate life plans from the individuals who occupy them. This means that even if a reasonable number of options are left open to every child, each child's parents may leave more or less the same options open to each child, and certain life plans may no longer be a possibility for anyone.

Agar argues that if genetic engineering is available on request this is likely to happen, since no society can be optimally adapted to provide for every life plan, and so parents are likely to close off the same life plans for their children. This would then lead to a reduction in diversity, and Agar thinks this might undermine a powerful pragmatic justification for liberalism, namely, that since we all have different conceptions of the good life, no one conception can be allowed to shape our institutions. An increasingly homogenous society might then be more susceptible to an authoritarian government, and so genetic engineering on request might actually mean people's autonomy was reduced.[27]

Agar then suggests a solution to this problem.[28] He says that although we may one day be able to predict how genes will combine with environment to produce certain capacities, because the choice of life plans is psychologically mediated and depends on such a variety of factors, it is unlikely that we will ever be able to predict which life plan a child will most want to choose. Furthermore, parents will not know exactly what life plans will be available when their child grows up. He says parents should therefore not try to predict which life plans their child will want to choose, and should not risk closing off any possibilities through genetic engineering. He

[26] Indication that the author is continuing with another counterargument. *[Back to text]*
[27] Conclusion of counterargument that began in the previous paragraph. *[Back to text]*
[28] Beginning of response to that counterargument. *[Back to text]*

therefore proposes the following additional constraint on genetic intervention: the goods of genetic intervention should be allocated to individuals in such a way that they will improve the prospects associated with every possible life plan – especially the worst off potential plan. This will mean that parents cannot close down any life plans that would otherwise have been open to their child, but must try to create well-rounded children if they engage in genetic engineering at all, and so no life plans should be pushed out of existence.[29]

I think that the problem Agar identifies is serious, and it is attractive that his constraint deals with it only through thinking about the future autonomy of individuals. However, I think it also faces several problems.[30] First of all, he does not fully explain what is meant by the worst off potential life plan in his definition, nor explains exactly which the possible life plans are that the parent must consider. It is unclear whether they are supposed to look at all the life plans currently available in their society, or only those that would be a plausible option for their child without genetic engineering. If the first of these intended, it seems that the constraint might be too strong. In either case, it seems that it might be stronger than the restrictions placed on parents over what environmental interventions they can use, and so we might need some further justification for why it should be put on genetic interventions in particular. Finally, it is not clear whether parents and society will be able to distinguish between good and bad life plans when making these decisions. For example, must the parent take into account what would be most helpful to the child if they were to choose a life of crime, or decided to become a religious fanatic? If parents are forced to consider absolutely all possible life plans, I think the constraint

[29] In this paragraph, notice that the author paraphrases and explains Agar's position, rather than simply quoting Agar *ad nauseum*. It's important to show the reader (in this case, your supervisor) that you've not just read a text, but have *understood* it. Always try to give your rendering of an argument (which can, if you like, be supported by, or interspersed with textual evidence). *[Back to text]*

[30] The author here indicates that s/he is about to offer his/her own independent argument.
NB: it is fine to say that you "think" something PROVIDED you follow that up with an argument for it. It is never enough just to say that you think *x*. *[Back to text]*

will be implausible. However, if we say that they can distinguish between good and bad life plans, it seems that parents must once again be imposing their own values on their children, and that this might then happen to an unacceptable extent.

In conclusion,[31] I think that the value of autonomy, as it is used to argue against authoritarian eugenics, and as it is used in justifying the freedom we give parents in raising their children, supports the principle that some uses of genetic engineering should be available to parents on request.[32] However, I think that if all possible genetic interventions were available on request, this would involve failing to appreciate the value of autonomy for members of future generations. I therefore think this value supports the idea that there should be some restrictions, although it also seems to contribute to the difficulty in knowing what these restrictions should be.[33]

[31] Signalling the beginning of the end. *[Back to text]*
[32] Restatement of thesis. *[Back to text]*
[33] Explanation and qualification of thesis as argued in the body of the essay above. *[Back to text]*

Suggested Essay Templates

Good essays may follow many different structures. In this section you will find examples of two different structures that are frequently successful. Beware, though—structure alone is not everything. The use of either one of these should not be assumed to guarantee success; similarly, neither will deviating from these guarantee failure.

TEMPLATE #1

1. Introduction

Good introductions are often a bit like a map of the paper: they tell the reader what the topic is and how the paper is going to answer a certain question about it. It may therefore be a good idea to write the introduction after you finish the paper, when you know what you've actually done.

2. The problem or topic

It is often a good idea to discuss the topic or problem in some detail before diving into responses to it. For example, in an essay on scepticism, you need to spend a bit of time establishing what scepticism is. In an essay on functionalism, this section would involve establishing what the core functionalist claims are, and perhaps what different varieties it might take.

This section will also often include arguments for the position under discussion. Indeed, these may be inseparable from outlining the position, or the focus of the essay may be some particular argument.

This section is a good place to motivate the rest of your discussion. For example, in an essay about scepticism, this would be a good place to comment on what the result would be if we couldn't refute the sceptic, or on philosophically interesting features of the debate.

3. The first response to 2.

Here, you present a first response to the problem you have outlined, or a first argument against the position you have presented. This will go something like this:

a) Outline what the response says.
b) Present a problem with it
c) Consider how one might reply to this problem
d) Present a counterargument
e) Repeat stages b-c/d as many times as desired. (NOTE: Cover what you consider to be the most serious problems for the response under discussion, and avoid presenting a list of straw men.)
f) Conclude your discussion by summarising why the response failed or survived, or identify something else that needs to be discussed in order to reach a conclusion.

4. Subsequent responses

Follow steps 3a-f for other responses. Comment on the relationships between the solutions where possible – do they fail for the same reasons? Do they inevitably fall into one of two traps (suggesting that there might be a dilemma involved)? This helps to make the essay seem more connected, and gives you material for your conclusion.

You almost certainly won't be able to cover every possible response. As in 3e, try to concentrate on the ones which cause the biggest potential problem to the position outlined in 2, or the best potential solutions to the problem outlined in 2.

5. Conclusion

Among other things, this should probably include as precise an answer as possible to the question you have been set, and a summary of how you arrived at that answer.

6. Bibliography

For a supervision essay, you should include a list of the things you have managed to read.

TEMPLATE #2

Approx word count*		
200	Introduction	• Brief introduction to the problem and the topic of the essay, keep it brief though, you will go into more detail later. • Thesis statement • Roadmap
600	Exegesis	• Mainly descriptive • Describe the argument or debate that is the focus of your essay • Be sure to keep the description to relevant aspects of the positions rather than the whole view. For example, say you want to challenge Williams' claim that egoism is not an inherently irrational position, and you think one of his five arguments defending the egoist is flawed. You need to describe in detail how the one argument you are interested in works, but not the other four.
600	Argument	• What is your view? • Most importantly, this should be *your* argument – why do you think the argument you described in the exegesis section is wrong, or how can you provide a defense of a position.
400	Objection	• How might someone disagree with your argument? • It should be a good objection, that you spend some time developing. You want to convince your reader that this is an important objection that your argument needs to address to be successful.

	... and response	• After posing a serious objection, be sure to respond to it! • You don't necessarily need to be able to show that the objection is categorically wrong, perhaps you must modify your argument in order to address it, but you do need to show how your argument can come back.
100-200	Conclusion	• Remind the reader what you have argued for. • Also important to point out what you haven't argued for, what your argument doesn't show.

*based on a 2000 word essay. This is very much a rough guideline and not a fixed rule!

Additional Resources

If you are interested in reading more about essay-writing in general, or philosophical writing in particular, you might be interested in some of the following resources.

Some helpful general comments and tips:

Horban, Peter. "Writing a Philosophy Paper."
http://www.sfu.ca/philosophy/resources/writing.html

There are two pages of general notes on writing philosophy in your *Undergraduate Handbook* (p. 7-8): http://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/u_grads/ugrad-handbk12-13.pdf

Excellent writing guide on grammar and sentence style:

Strunk, W. and White E.B., *The Elements of Style*. The Penguin Press. New York 2005.

Other good books on writing philosophy:

Martinich, A.P. *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*. Blackwell. 2005.

Thomas, Dixon. *How to get a First: The Essential Guide to Academic Success*. (electronic copy available on MyiLibrary)

Contact the Authors

Whether you are a supervisor, Director of Studies, or tutor with concerns and/or comments about *Tackling the Philosophy Essay*, or you're a student with questions about finding your way through the material, you are welcome to contact the authors at ttpestudentguide@gmail.com. We look forward to receiving your feedback on this ongoing project.