

Paper-Writing Guideline  
Program in Philosophy and Religion  
El Centro College  
Dr. Thames x2697 C340 mthames@dcccd.edu

Medium for Submissions

- Electronic copy submitted to SafeAssign through ecampus to check for plagiarism.
- Hard (single-sided paper) copy submitted in class for grading.
- A paper copy which is not stapled is *not* a paper, it is papers, and I will neither grad nor accept it. All hard copy submissions must be stapled. No binders, folders, etc.
- Email submissions of final paper are *not* permitted.

Page Set-Up

- One-inch margins all-around (Book-style, with 1.25 on left and .75 inch on right, is okay.)
- Typed, on white blank copy-type paper.
- Double-spaced. No triple, variable, or 1.5 spacing.
- No double double-space between paragraphs.
- Regular papers are five pages, and honors typically ten.
  - As for regular papers, what five pages means is: 4.5 to 6.0 pages.
  - Of course, four and one-half pages reaches the middle of page five, not the middle of page four.
  - Honors papers may vary from eight to fifteen or more pages, depending on what the student and instructor have worked out as best for the particular honors project concerned.
- Pagination:
  - Arabic numbers (1234).
  - upper right-hand corner (in header) only. Header should also have the student's last name.
  - First page does *not* have a page number or header on it.
  - Title page does not have a page number or header on it, and does not count in page count.
  - Bibliography comes at the end of the paper, beginning on a separate sheet (no matter how much room there is on the last page of actual text). It is paginated straight from the end of the paper proper—e.g., the paper ends on p. 5, so the bibliography is on p. 6. Of course, it does not count in the page count.

Font

- Times New Roman 12-point or equivalent. By “equivalent” I mean a font that generates roughly the same overall length for the paper. Very large fonts, like Tahoma or Verdana, are usually not acceptable, since they make a short paper look longer.
- Do not use hard-to-read fonts: German fraktur, cursive fonts, highly abstract designer fonts, etc.
- The title of the paper should be in 16-point.
- Section headings should be 12-point **bold**.
- Do *not* use underlining ever.
- Emphasis is indicated with *italics*.
- NonEnglish words and phrases should be in italics the first time they are used in a paper; plain text after that—e.g., *mutatis mutandis*, *je ne se quois*, *muchas gracias*.

## Structure of Paper

- Unless you are a good writer, your paper should have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and have them in that order.
- The Introduction introduces *the paper*, not the topic (philosopher, issue, etc.).
  - The Introduction must tell what the paper will be about—its topic.
  - It must tell why that topic is interesting or worth writing about, from the point of view of the student writing the paper. That is, don't say, This is worth writing about because X was a great philosopher. Well, yes. Of course. That's why we're covering them; they're all great. What I'm interested in is not that, but rather, why *the student* found this thinker or this topic interesting. First-person singular is appropriate for this.
- The Introduction must have a thesis statement. That is, it must say what the writer is trying to accomplish in the paper. I don't mean, of course, Get an A, or Escape this class as fast as I can. I mean, the thesis statement is the student's hypothesis which she is trying to prove about the thinker or issue which she will discuss. Thesis statements sound like:
  - “In this paper I will try to show that...”
  - “At the beginning, I did not think that X would work in this area, and so I set out to prove it.”
- The introduction must not be or sound anything like an encyclopaedia entry. Nor should any of the thinker's biography be included unless it is directly relevant to the points the paper will develop. We already know the guy was born; don't waste time saying so.
- Body.
  - In a five-page paper, there will normally be two to four main points covered. There isn't time for more than that, and often a student doesn't know how to research and develop a single point over that many pages. Introduction and conclusion should not normally be more than about a half-page each.
  - Each point will have something like the following structure:
    - a controversial view of a great philosopher. This will *always* be supported by one or more footnotes, and usually will involve one or more quotations as well.
    - The reasons and evidence that the thinker had for thinking the way he did. This also must be supported with footnotes.
    - A critique of the thinker's view: that is, does the student agree or disagree with it?
    - A critique of the thinker's reasoning behind his own view. Is he coherent? Consistent? Have good evidence?
    - A statement of the student's view, in first-person.
    - The reasons the student has for thinking what she thinks about it—in first-person.
- Conclusion.
  - The conclusion must *conclude* something.
  - It is *not* a summary of the just-written paper.
  - It does *not* introduce new material or ideas.
  - It must always relate back to the thesis: was it confirmed by the student's research and thought on the issue?
  - So conclusions should sound like:
    - “Having done this research, I now think...”
    - “Although when I started I thought [the thesis], I realize that I was misunderstanding the philosopher Y, and I don't agree with him after all.”
    - “The work I did for this paper showed me that issue X was much more complicated than I thought; now I know I must do more research before I can be sure of my own stance.”

## Style

- The style guides for all of Dr. Thames's classes are:  
The *Chicago Manual of Style*, editions 14-16.  
Turabian, Kate. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations. Essays and Term Papers* Quick Study Guide, format T.
- All philosophy and religion papers are critical thinking exercises. That is, they must all contain the student's own original thinking, *not simply a report* about the philosopher's views.
- For this reason, the student in philosophy *should* write in **first-person singular** when asserting her own views. (Don't say "we" unless you are schizophrenic or the Queen of Britain.) So "Plato says" is fine for reportage; but one's own thought should be owned and claimed by oneself. So when the student says his own view, it should sound something like,
  - "I'm not sure, but it seems to me that..."
  - "After thinking about it, the way I feel about X is..."
  - "I believe Y, and so..."
- Avoid colloquialisms unless quoting someone: so the oral dialect word "Aiiight" should turn in academic writing into "It is all right," and the colloquial question, "Nome sane?" should be written, "Do you know what I am saying?"
- Avoid profanity and crudity unless reporting or quoting profane or crude persons or situations. (Sometimes students use profanity when speaking in their everyday voice in what are called "opinion papers." Up to a point this is fine. But in formal academic writing, such as a term paper, it is not. Unless you're from Detroit...)

## Citations

- *You must only use footnotes.*
- No endnotes are allowed.
- *No in-text citations are allowed.* If I see "xxxxxxxxxx (Smith, 2008)", it's *wrong*. Period.
- Chicago humanities style rules. Use NoodleTools or your word processor's citation management menus. So
  - Descartes, Rene. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Tr. Fred Frederick. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002 (1644), in the bibliography. The footnote would be similar, but must have the page number where the quotation or information was found after the date. So: Uof Chicago Press, 2001 (1644), p. 127.
  - Book titles, journal and magazine titles, music album titles, names of ships, and so forth are italicized. No bolding, no underlining.
  - Article titles, song titles, etc., in quotation marks.
  - Always include translator (tr.), editor (ed.), compiler (comp.), and so forth if pertinent.
  - Any substantive information, not just quotations, which is not part of general American knowledge, must be footnoted as to source. So where the person studied, what view dominated at given time in a certain country, how most scholars think about X—any statement like that must have a footnote, at least at the end of the paragraph in which it occurs.
  - Do not cite yourself, or me. Material discussed in class may be used, and should not be footnoted—but it should not, normally, be used very much. It does not flatter me, and it does not usually help me to see the student's own thinking.
  - Online versions of print sources must have the complete *print* bibliographical information *plus* the *complete* url of the website and webpage being cited, *and* the date accessed (i.e., looked at by the student). Online-only sources must have the total url and the access date.
  - Failure to cite is plagiarism, regardless of intent.

- Unless there is a reason not to, one should normally use gender-neutral language for gender-neutral or gender-inclusive situations. Also, proper terms for groups are either the standard academic-administrative demographic ones (for instance, Hispanic) or the people's own term for themselves (say, Latino/a), and not slang or derogatory terms, no matter how mainstream or innocently meant (bitch, ho, etc.).

#### Sources

- For online sources, *only* materials accessed through the El Centro library's philosophy or religion web page is acceptable. No googling, no wikipedia.
- Only ebooks accessible through the El Centro library are acceptable.
- Normally, there must (in PHIL 1301) be at least one citation from *Sophie's World*, at least one from *Sophie's Reader*, at least one from the El Centro library databases (usually Academic Search Complete) and at least one from a philosophical encyclopaedia or dictionary. At least one of the quotations from at least one source must be primary—that is, the exact words of the philosopher or religious leader being discussed.
- But the number of citations is completely dependent on the kind of paper the student is writing and how they are structuring it. Long, detailed discussion of a matter concisely expressed by a philosopher in a famous saying may generate very few footnotes. Brief touching on many points, or examining how various other thinkers have understood a particular issue, may generate a lot of footnotes. I'm looking for...the right number: as many as it takes.
- I strongly recommend students get physical books from the El Centro Library or, via TexShare, from other area academic universities' libraries, or from the humanities section of the main public library (not branch libraries) downtown.
- The only general-interest encyclopaedia which counts as an academic source is *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The definitive dictionary for English is *not* Merriam-Webster, but the Oxford English Dictionary, or the American Heritage Dictionary, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition or later. The specialty philosophy and religion reference works on the Library's website and in hard copy in the library are the other encyclopaedia- and dictionary-type works that can be used. Did I mention, *No wikipedia?*

#### The Point

In every case, Dr. Thames is trying to get the student's own thinking. Her opinion? Well, not “just” her opinion, but her considered, educated, thought-out opinion—yes! In no case is he looking for a book report, encyclopaedia article, or attempt to sound like him. The grading focuses overwhelmingly on the evidence and reasons the student brings to bear in expressing their own appreciative critique of others or in expressing their own views as such. The great philosophers or religious texts are there primarily as spurs to thought; no student should think that they will be, or that he wants them to try to be, an expert on Buddhism or Plato in a five-page paper. The papers are assigned in order to

- give students practice in considering what it is that they really think.
- give students practice in expressing themselves.
- given students a sense of how their own voice will sound in the global historical conversation about important issues.