



# Help! I Need to Write a Philosophy Paper...

## Overview & Purpose

This worksheet confronts some of the typical hurdles students encounter when writing a philosophy paper for the first time. Writing a philosophy essay is completely doable; it is simply a matter of having the right tools to do it. Below are some common worries students have, and the bullet points offer some suggestions to deal with each struggle.

## I understand the material, but I don't know how to write a philosophy essay.

1. First, identify the prompt. Read the prompt, read it again, and then write it in a way that makes sense to you.
2. Then, define each philosopher's position and any definitions that are pertinent to them, as well as the crux of their disagreement/agreement (if there is one).
3. Next, structure in an objection-reply format. (see other handout for specifics).
4. Ensure that your essay focus is narrow. Focus on points of contention, not the historical context of the assignment (unless instructed to do so).
5. Make sure to cut out any excess verbiage. Be clear and concise.

## I'm feeling overwhelmed, I think this essay is too hard.

1. Reread the prompt, and write it in your own words.
2. Once you've identified what the professor wants you to do, actively engage with the material that it addresses.
  - a. This means taking notes on the readings you've been assigned, with special attention to portions that confuse you or those that directly relate to the prompt, and asking questions about the philosophy itself.
  - b. If you are comparing two philosophers, in what ways do they disagree, and why?

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3. If you're still confused on the meaning of the material, it may be useful to speak with your professor or T.A.

### **I've written my essay, but it seems disorganized. Now what?**

1. Try reverse outlining, i.e. summarize each paragraph into one sentence that represents it.
  - If you can't do this, then the paragraph may contain too many different ideas that may need to be split into two or more paragraphs.
2. Try reading the paragraphs you are most concerned about aloud.
  - We often catch mistakes we wouldn't notice much faster when we read it aloud.
3. Try reading the first sentence of each paragraph, one after the other. Do they illustrate the general outline of your paper?

### **I have left my essay for the last minute. What do I do?**

1. At this point, you just have to do your best. Follow the above guidelines.
2. Next time, note the deadline on a calendar that you consistently check.
3. If you are overwhelmed by an assignment, consider visiting your TA or professor's office hours at least a week before it is due.
4. If those options sound intimidating, you can also visit the Critical Thinking Lab.
5. The earlier you start, the more likely you can address the task properly, and the more likely you will be able to showcase your best work. Don't shortchange yourself.

