

Student Skills

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There are some academic skills that you should have before you graduate, regardless of your career plans, but that you may not have been taught. This packet contains guidance on some of those skills.

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You should review these at the beginning of the semester.

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You should review these before submitting prose assignments.

Guidelines for Reading

Adapted from many sources, but especially David W. Concepción, 2004, "Reading Philosophy with Background Knowledge and Metacognition" (*Teaching Philosophy* 27: 351–368).

One of the skills you'll practice in this course is **reading**. Of course you're all literate, but there are many kinds of texts and many ways to read. Reading academic, technical, or professional writing is different from reading fiction or reading the news, and it requires some different strategies.

Students often find philosophical and scientific texts challenging, and it's normal to feel frustrated at first. The texts might be dense or highly technical, or they might make frequent references to unfamiliar works or concepts, and it may not be obvious which bits are most important. *Don't confuse your frustration with failure*. The truth is that reading well is hard. Reading for rich understanding and for critical thinking are difficult but valuable skills and they require a lot of practice.

Since you're Honors students, I expect you to help each other. Use the discussion boards on TCU Online to share summaries, vocabulary, and background knowledge. You'll develop strategies for approaching unfamiliar topics, and I will always be happy to talk you through things if you're struggling. And if you make a consistent effort, I promise you will get better at it during the semester.

To start you off, I'm sharing some expert advice on reading. I won't hound you to follow it exactly; you should experiment to find which methods work best for you. But if you take it seriously it should help you in this course, in other courses, and throughout your lives. First I provide some general advice, then a method for reading philosophy and theory.

General advice: reading actively

First of all, *take care of yourself* while you read. Get comfortable (but not so comfortable you doze off). Take breaks if you're reading for a long time; it is important to remain attentive (if you're taking good notes you'll be able to find your place again). Most importantly, **read actively**. Do not simply pass your eyes over every word of the text! That will not help you to understand or question what it says, and it will not prepare you for class. Reading passively is not a half-measure; it's a poor use of your limited time. So don't tire yourself out reading carelessly. Instead, train yourself to stop reading, take a break, then return refreshed.

When you are reading actively, I urge you to **deface your texts** (unless they're library books; then find a work-around). Leave your mark on whatever you read, however you read it, *but not with a highlighter* (see why below). By all means underline and circle passages, but also write in your books and your course packets. Write on articles you print out. Draw pictures and diagrams if that helps you. Make outlines in a notebook. If you read on a screen, don't use Preview or your web browser; download PDFs and fill them with comments (You can do this in Adobe Reader, Adobe Acrobat, and Foxit Reader, even on a tablet). If you are watching a video or listening to something, make notes for yourself.

There are two (and a half) reasons to deface your texts. The first is **comprehension**. Making notes tests your comprehension. If you take notes consistently, you will force yourself to figure out what's most important, articulate it yourself, and paraphrase it in your own words (a highlighter doesn't do that; a highlighter only says "this is important," but not why). The second reason to deface your texts is **recall**. Marking up your texts makes them your own, transforming them into tools that you can review efficiently later on. If you make effective notes, you will be able to see the organization of the paper, recall its most important points, and see what you were thinking when you read it before, all at a glance. This will be helpful later when you're reviewing or writing papers. As you eventually settle on your own method for taking notes, make sure that it is a method that helps you *comprehend* and *recall*. Finally, making notes puts you on the page alongside the author. You are not a passive container for the wisdom of others; you can understand, question, and criticize the experts! So take your place on the page along with them.

Quirks of philosophical writing (things to watch out for)

Philosophical writing is different from many other kinds of writing (as other kinds of writing are different from each other). Below I describe three of its more salient quirks, before describing the best strategy for reading it.

Philosophical writing is argumentative In other contexts you may read for information, or for plot, or for aesthetic experience. When reading philosophy, you should read for *arguments*. You should be able to identify the author's conclusions, and the reasons she gives you to believe her conclusions.

Philosophical writing is dialogical Almost any bit of argumentative writing is a contribution to a conversation already in progress, so you have to catch up on what's already been said. Most texts help you with this by reviewing relevant bits of the conversation so far; some don't. But you have to catch up anyway or you will be confused. In addition, philosophers tend to discuss other points of view as they write. Authors will describe objections to their own views, and alternative ways of thinking. Sometimes the existing objections aren't as strong as they could be, so authors will try to improve on the objections so that they can test their own ideas against the strongest possible rivals. It's as if the author is having a conversation by herself, playing both sides in a dialogue. Try not to confuse what the author writes in her own voice with what she writes in the voice of others, real or imagined. If you think an author has contradicted herself, go back and make sure you understood whether she was expressing her own view or someone else's.

Philosophical writing is precise Language is a precision instrument; each word, grammatical construction, and punctuation mark serves a function. Philosophers often push the limits of language, so this precision is especially important for them. Philosophers don't write so that their words wash over you, leaving you with the general impression of their meaning (unlike, perhaps, some poets); they craft sentences to say precisely what they mean, even after dogged scrutiny and questioning. Sometimes, the correct linguistic tool is not available in ordinary language, so philosophers must invent their own terminology (or borrow special terminology from others). Students sometimes feel that philosophy is wordy and repetitive, or that philosophers use fancy words in order to sound smart and intimidating. These things happen sometimes, but mostly philosophers choose their words with great care. Similar sentences may be slightly different,






wordy-seeming phrases may be more precise than plainer phrases. Philosophers occasionally make mistakes, of course, and express themselves incorrectly. But mistakes like that are rare.

Reading for arguments




Given that philosophical writing is dialogical, precise, and argumentative, there is a three-stage process for reading philosophy effectively. You might not follow this procedure exactly—you will have to find out what works for you, especially with respect to note-taking—but this method is recommended by experts on teaching philosophy, and it is followed by most professional philosophers. It may seem complicated at first but it helps you to make the most efficient use of your time and effort!

Pre-reading If you simply dive straight in and read a philosophical text from beginning to end, you are likely to become confused or misled. Instead, first briefly **inspect** the text like a detective. What is the title? If there are section headings, what are they? What can you guess about the author's conclusion and argument based on these features? What you know about the author, her views or her perspective? Are you reading a book chapter? If so is the chapter part of a collection of essays by multiple authors, or part of a monograph (a book all by one author)? Are you reading a stand-alone article in an academic journal? What's the journal called? Is it for a specialist or general audience? Are there footnotes or endnotes? If so, are they just references or are they substantive? (If they are references you can mostly ignore them. If they are substantive, you might want to read them during the close reading or afterward—footnotes often reveal the juiciest insights into the author's thinking!) Also, skim the first and last paragraph to see if you can easily identify a statement of the author's main topic or her main conclusion.

While pre-reading, assess how you are doing by answering these questions:

-  What should I expect to find in the text in light of the title?
-  What is the topic of the article? What is the author's main conclusion?
-  Are these section headings? If so, what can I learn about the text from them?
-  Is there a references section? If so, what can I learn about the text from them?
-  Are there footnotes or endnotes? If so, are they just citations or should I read them as I read the text?

After your initial information-gathering, do a **fast-read**. This should only take a few minutes. Read the article quickly from beginning to end in order to get a basic understanding of the text. You should make notes in the margins or in a notebook about the structure of the text, but don't get bogged down. You can skim long examples or block quotations. By the time you're done, your notes should reflect answers to the following questions:

-  Where does the author state her main conclusion? (This might not be until the end, and in some texts it might never be fully explicit. But after a fast-read you should have some good guesses.)
-  Are there unfamiliar words in this text? What are they? Look them up if necessary (try the Merriam-Webster Dictionary <https://www.merriam-webster.com/> or the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>). If looking up words helps, share the information on TCU Online. If not, ask about it on TCU Online, or in class. Often, dictionaries won't be helpful for technical language.
-  What is the structure of the discussion? I.e., which parts of the text are assumptions, or conclusions, or arguments, or objections, or examples. See "Helpful notations" below, p. 9.

When you are done you will have a map of the text. It's not a very detailed map, and it has blank spaces in it ("Here be monsters"?), but it should be enough to help you navigate the text without getting lost or turned around.

Close reading Now you're ready to read the text carefully. It may be slower than you're used to. I've heard that philosophers read more slowly than academics in any other field. Not because we're bad at reading, but because reading philosophy involves *doing* philosophy. As you read you should ask yourself: What is the main conclusion? What are the main arguments? What are the assumptions? Can I think of counterexamples or objections to any of the author's claims? When you're finished, you should be able to answer these questions.



As you read, correct and add to the notations you made earlier. This time also note passages you find confusing (e.g. by writing "???" in the margin), and note your questions and objections as they occur to you. Don't wait until you're done or you might forget them (Don't just write "WTF!!"—if you're like me you'll forget later why you wrote it). Keep your questions in mind to see if the author addresses them later.

It's also a good idea to take marginal notes (I always do). Don't just write down phrases that name the topic of a passage; try to write down sentences or sentence fragments that express the author's views or arguments. Do this for every paragraph, or just the more important ones, or whatever works for you. You should be able to redescribe important passages (e.g. definitions, argumentation, objections, replies, counter-objections, counter-replies) in your own words. It seems tedious, but it is helpful especially for challenging texts.

It is also good practice to summarize the main points of the reading in your own words when you're done. One of my former teachers keeps a journal where he makes notes on *every* professional publication he reads, with a summary of the piece and his critical response. You don't have to do that. But it can be helpful—when I was in college I did that for some of my Honors courses, and I still find those notes helpful.

As you consider the author's arguments, you should be **critical**. Is every argument convincing? If not, why not? Are the author's reasons really good enough? Does the author make inappropriate or false assumptions? Does the author acknowledge all of her assumptions or are some of them hidden? Are the hidden assumptions good ones? But also, be **charitable**. Philosophers are careful; the author probably hasn't made a careless or stupid mistake, or defended a ludicrous claim without some compelling reasons. If you think the author's arguments are obviously wrong, you may have misinterpreted her. Try to understand why the author found her own argument compelling.

Assess how you're doing by answering the following questions:

-  Do I know exactly what the author is saying? Have I re-re-read passages that were confusing at first?
-  Can I explain in my own words why the author concludes what she concludes? (In the fast-read you get the general idea; in the close reading you should come to understand every step in detail.) It might be helpful to write this summary down for yourself, so that you can remind yourself of the author's argument without re-reading the whole text.

- ☞ Do I understand why every section was included in this text? If a long passage seems irrelevant or redundant, you might have misunderstood why the author included it.

This may seem like a lot to think about at once, but it will become more natural to you with practice.

Critical review So you know what the author thinks; now it is time to determine what *you* think. Do you agree with the author? If so, do you think the author's arguments were good enough or could they be improved? If you don't agree, where do you think the author went wrong in her reasoning? Do you still have questions about the text? If so, go back to confusing passages (you should have marked them) and re-re-read them. As you think about the text, ask yourself the following questions:

- ☞ Is every conclusion in the text well-defended with argument?
- ☞ If a conclusion is undefended, can I think of an argument for it? (This is part of reading charitably.)
- ☞ Are you persuaded by the arguments? Why or why not?
- ☞ Can I think of counterexamples to any assertion the author made?
- ☞ If the author's view bothers me, can I articulate why? Can I explain where and why I think the author made a mistake?
- ☞ Can I think of a way the author might respond to my criticism?
- ☞ What beliefs of mine can't be true if the author is right?
- ☞ If I think the author is right, how will I change my beliefs or behavior from now on?
- ☞ If I don't think the author is right, what did she get wrong so that I can go on believing/behaving as I have?
- ☞ Am I uncertain about how to resolve a disagreement between myself and the author? If so, what would it take to make me more certain? How might I go about trying to resolve the disagreement in the future?


Reading this way is hard, and probably more demanding than much of the reading you've done before. But the skills you develop reading this way aren't only useful for reading philosophy—they help you to understand texts well and to think critically about what you read. These skills help you to read texts in other disciplines, editorials and opinion pieces, and other challenging texts (for your work or your hobbies, and for the rest of your life). And it helps to talk about what you read with others. So talk to your classmates or to me outside of class, and come to class ready with your questions, objections, and reflections.

Summary


Philosophical writing is **dialogical**, **precise**, and **argumentative** (do you remember what I mean by these words?). The following method is recommended for reading it:

Pre-reading

 Inspect the text to gather information about it.


 Fast-read from beginning to end. As you read, make notations to identify:

- Conclusions.
- Assumptions.
- Assertions.
- Important bits of the argumentation.
- Examples.
- Alternative viewpoints the author considers.
- Objections the author considers.
- The author's replies to objections.

 When you're done you should have a shrewd notion of how to:


- State the author's conclusion with some confidence.
- Describe the author's argument in vague outline.
- Recognize the sequence of main topics.
- Identify key terms (technical or otherwise).

Close reading


 Read the article slowly and carefully, correcting and adding to your notations. This time, also note:

- Confusing passages.
- Your questions, and whether they're answered.
- Your objections, and whether the author has a reply.

Critical review


 Now think carefully about the author's discussion.

- Do you understand the author's arguments?
- Are there any passages you still don't understand?
- Did you ask any questions the author didn't answer?
- Did you have any objections the author didn't address?
- How should you change your beliefs or behavior in light of your assessment of the arguments?

 If there are parts of the discussion you don't understand, reread them. You might not be able to make sense of it without help (from me or your classmates), but give it a good effort on your own first.

 When you are finished you should be able to:

- State the author's conclusion confidently.
- Describe the author's argument in detail.
- Articulate tentative criticisms of the author's reasoning.

 You should also be ready with a number of questions about:

- How the author uses special terminology.
- How to apply the author's view to specific examples.

Key phrases

Sometimes authors use phrases that mark the structure of their argument or discussion (but not always). Some students appreciate having a list of kinds of phrases to watch for.

Focal statements

I will discuss...

My main concern is...

Thesis statements (main conclusions)

In this paper I argue that...

I will show that...

I hope to conclude...

Premises and reasons

Because..., Since..., For..., Whereas...

Given that...

As shown by...

After all...

Conclusions

In summary..., Thus..., Therefore..., So..., Hence..., Accordingly..., Consequently...

As a result...

We may infer that..., Which entails that...

It follows that...

Objections or criticisms

However...

It could be objected that...

Opponents of my view might claim...

Critics might say...

There is reason to doubt...

Replies or rejoinders

Nevertheless...

This criticism fails because...

My opponent fails to appreciate that...

We should remember that...

Helpful notations

The following notations are suggestions on how to mark up your texts (I don't use all of these but I use some, and some others. Try things out until you learn what works for you).

Structure of discussion and argument

Focal:	General topic this text will discuss (then describe the topic)
Thesis	Main conclusion of the text (then rephrase clearly, if necessary)
Dfn	Definition (of what?)
Dst	Distinction (between what and what?)
e.g.	Example
Asn	Assertion of fact or an important claim for which the author will argue
Discuss	Discussion or explanation of a concept, claim, view, or problem
Rsn	Reason supporting an assertion or conclusion
Arg	An argument (combination of assertion and a reason)
Obj	Objection to an argument or reason
Reply	Reply to an objection
Rejoin	Rejoinder or response to a reply
Concl	Conclusion of an argument
Sum	Summary
Spot	Signposting; description in the text of the structure of the text

Self-monitoring

???	Not sure what the author is saying/doing here
=x?	This means what, exactly?
Good	I like this/I agree with this
No	I disagree with this (come back later and figure out why)

Reader evaluation

Why?	Why should someone agree with this?
[Underline]	This is important
►	(The note to follow is my own response, not what the author says)

Other advice

I collect advice for reading (and other student resources) on my website at www.mikioakagi.net/teaching-resources#reading. Some of the advice I offered above I found in those resources. If these tips don't work for you, or you prefer to read someone else's take, check out the links on that page.

Best Practices for Quoting and Citing

I handle several cases of plagiarism each semester. Almost all of them are unintentional. Review these guidelines to avoid becoming one of them! These remarks are brief, but if you require more guidance, more detailed information and examples can be found easily online. And I am glad to provide further advice if you ask.

When to quote:

- ☞ *Whenever you use phrases or sentences that someone else wrote.* If you didn't compose the words, you need to indicate that by using quotation marks. Failure to use quotation marks properly often counts as plagiarism, even if it's unintentional!
- ☞ If you're quoting a long passage by someone else (more than three lines of text), you should set it apart from the main text in a **block quotation**. This makes it clear that the words aren't yours when the quotation marks would be too far apart to be obvious.
- ☞ If you use a block quote, or if you quote something dense and hard to understand, you should re-express the main idea in your own words. **Frame the quotation** by first introducing it (explain who said it) and then summarizing it (explain what it means and why it's relevant to your discussion). Even if you think the relevance and meaning of the quotation are obvious, your reader may not see what you see. Framing quotations helps the reader to understand why the quote is in your paper. And in this class, it helps you demonstrate to me that you understand what you're quoting.

When to cite:

- ☞ When you quote someone else's words.
- ☞ When you describe someone else's ideas (concepts, claims, arguments).
- ☞ When giving background information (unless obvious or "common knowledge").
- ☞ When in doubt, cite! And unless you're citing a whole work, include page numbers!

Note that you must give citations *even when you're not quoting someone directly*. This makes it clear to the reader which ideas are not yours, and where they came from. It's a way of showing your work. You don't need to include a citation after every sentence that describes someone else's ideas; you can use one citation after a string of sentences if they're all in the same paragraph and based on the same source.

Patchwork paraphrase

"Patchwork paraphrase" is the unattributed re-use of the words or sentence structure, sometimes with some words or phrases replaced by synonymous expressions. The practice is common among many students at TCU, but it is **academic misconduct**, and specifically **plagiarism**, *even if you cite the source!* It is plagiarism because you are borrowing framing and organization from others without giving credit.

- ☞ Find resources on patchwork paraphrase (and on other topics) on my website at www.mikioakagi.net/teaching-resources#plagiarism.

Use high-quality sources


It is good practice to consult and cite the highest-quality sources available to you. Academic works (such as journal articles and book chapters) go through an editorial process in which they are fact-checked and criticized by experts before being published. Journalistic sources (e.g. newspaper or magazine articles) typically also go through a fact-checking process. These are **high-quality sources**, even though not everything you read in such sources is true or reasonable.

By contrast, many other sources you find online are highly variable in their quality. High-quality academic and journalistic sources can be found online, along with other sources controlled by journalistic norms (e.g. some podcasts). But you may also find student papers and projects, notes, blog posts, and propaganda. These are **low-quality sources**.


When you use a source to provide evidence for facts, try to use high-quality sources whenever possible. Better low-quality sources (like lecture slides or Wikipedia on a good day) will include citations themselves, so you can find the high-quality sources that they used. Low-quality sources can be useful tools for discovering better sources. But if there are higher-quality sources available for some claim, find and cite those instead.

Strategies for avoiding accidental plagiarism


You may have to experiment to discover what works for you, but here are some commonly recommended strategies.

 Label authors (/works) in your notes.


- Keep track of which ideas come from which authors/works.

 Use quotation marks properly when taking notes.

- Mark which words are not your own.

 Look away to write

- Organize your thoughts based on your own argument, rather than modeling your writing closely on another author's discussion. Then write without looking back at the other sources.

 The system of separation

- Take notes on your sources before writing, then write from your notes rather than from the sources. This helps you to organize your understanding as you prepare.
- Mark quotations properly in your notes, so you know which words are your own.

 Use outlines (e.g. the Mumford method: <https://sites.google.com/site/stephendmumford/the-mumford-method>)

- With an outline it can be easier to rearrange ideas and work out the order of topics for your own discussion. You can also think about what topics you need to add, or can eliminate.
- Stephen Mumford recommends composing your thoughts in outline form first, and only writing when you're satisfied with the outline. He claims it saves time and effort for him. It also helps you to express ideas in your own way, rather than the way others expressed ideas before.

Guidelines for Writing

Analytical writing

In this class you will practice **analytical writing**. You will discuss various claims, views, and arguments with precision, distinguishing them clearly from each other and describing their consequences. Be as clear about your own arguments as you are about the arguments of other authors by explicitly describing the assumptions of your arguments, your reasoning, and the consequences of your arguments.

The focus in all of your prose for this class should be on **arguments**. You will not write reports that summarize information on some topic. Instead you will describe and evaluate the reasoning for various conclusions. For expository assignments (about what others have said), you describe the arguments of others. For other assignments, you describe the arguments of others as well as your own arguments, explaining your reasoning for your own views. In each case, you should make the reasoning as explicit as possible.

However, the point is not to *persuade* your reader by any means. Rather, your papers should explain your careful reasoning, even if your reasoning is controversial or you expect it to be unpopular. Therefore, you should explicitly acknowledge the assumptions and weaknesses of your argument, rather than hiding them. Put another way: you should make it as easy as possible for someone who disagrees with you to pinpoint precisely how and why they disagree. For example, you might point out why others would disagree with your claims, or object to your arguments.

Finally, because this kind of writing is hard, you should **choose your topics carefully**. It is best to discuss one critical opinion clearly rather than to discuss a smorgasbord of opinions in little detail. If you're doing it right, by the late stages of writing you will find it harder to stay below the word limit than to meet it. Best, then, to start by being selective about what to discuss!

General advice

Style Use short sentences. Use simple, clear language; avoid fancy words unless you need them. When discussing abstract topics (like we do) the best way to sound smart is to write as clearly and plainly as possible. It's okay to be repetitive with technical terms. Use "I" when you talk about your own objections or beliefs.

Make the structure of your reasoning clear by using **connective** words like "because," "since," "nevertheless," &c. But make sure to use them correctly—don't say "because" unless what you say after it is a reason for believing what you say before it.

Avoid rhetorical questions—often in student papers they're a way to sort-of say something controversial without really committing to it. Take a stand and say the controversial thing, or at least answer your own rhetorical questions explicitly. Remember your papers are about arguments, and questions can't be reasons. Answers to questions can be reasons.

When you edit, try to check that every sentence in your paper is true. It's harder to do than it sounds.

Signposting Signposting is language that explains the structure of the paper itself, and where you are in that structure. For example, “I will begin by summarizing...” or “Before I describe that argument, I will explain...” or “Next I will discuss...” This is considered bad practice in some writing genres, but is acceptable and often helpful in analytical papers. You can skip signposting in short assignments, but do signpost in the final paper.

Precision in writing It's often good to clarify what you mean by a word, or to labor over a piece of reasoning (another author's or yours). I find that it helps to assume that your reader is intelligent and educated, but *mean* and *lazy*.

Your reader is **mean** because she will find any excuse to say you're wrong. If you say “Pets are furry friends,” she'll think “But lizards and fish can be pets, so you must think that lizards and fish have fur.” And your reader is **lazy** because she won't follow your argument unless you lay out every step. If you leave a gap—by leaving a premise implicit, for example, or asking a rhetorical question—she won't fill it in for you. So if you say “Goats are great because they're cute,” your reader will wonder “but what does being cute have to do with being great?” You need to fill in all the gaps for your reader. It may seem tedious to cater to such a reader if you write about familiar topics like pets and cuteness. But when reading about abstract, complicated topics it's easy to get lost. So give your reader all the help you can!

Avoid some common mistakes in student papers by following this advice:

- 👉 Use words like “concept,” “claim,” and “argument” correctly. Avoid the word “idea” if one of these other three is more precise. And remember *don't talk about claims if you can talk about arguments, and don't about concepts if you can talk about claims*.
- 👉 Avoid justifying your arguments by using dictionary definitions. They're often not precise enough for our purposes, or irrelevant to technical or philosophical topics.
- 👉 Be wary of vague expressions like “this goes back to...” or “this brings up the question of...” Instead, try to characterize relations between ideas more specifically. In general, your discussion should follow the structure of arguments, not the structure of discussion. So if you're describing a paper we read in class, don't write about Y after X just because an author discussed Y after X. The structure of your paper should always be motivated by what you want to talk about, not by the way others have written.

Citations Give citations—with *page numbers!*—after any direct quotation, or after providing any information that is not your original research or thought. Combining and integrating insights from several sources is an original contribution, but each source should be identified clearly. If you use quotations longer than a sentence, you should always explain what they mean in your own words. You may use any citation style that you are comfortable with—MLA, APA, Chicago, AMA, &c. If you don't have a preferred style, I like the Chicago author-date system. And remember: parenthetical citations list the *author* of the text you're quoting or citing, not the editor of a volume or the writer of a piece that quotes the thing you're citing. If you're using a quote you found in someone else's paper, cite both the original source and where you found the quote (e.g. “Aizawa 2015, p. 3, qtd. in Akagi 2018, p. 3548”).

Don't appeal to authority In most academic and technical writing (including for this class), you should think for yourself instead of deferring to an authority. Thus, it is rarely appropriate to describe the credentials of authors you discuss (e.g. their degrees, job titles, &c.). Normally the point of reciting someone's credentials is to establish their authority on some topic, which is fine in journalism but irrelevant to us. You shouldn't defer to the authority of people with degrees and titles; instead, you should engage with their claims, arguments, and evidence, assessing the merits of their ideas as their intellectual equal. It is almost always irrelevant that an author is a professor of something, or director of a center, or whatever. Just describe what they said, what you think about what they said, and why you think it.

Writing advice for the final paper

Make an argument The most important part of your paper is your view, and your argument for that view. Your papers should feature a **thesis** or **conclusion**, even if it's just "shit is more complicated than Rawls thinks in X particular way." (Don't forget the particular way.) Your papers should also feature an argument that supports the conclusion. I.e., you must give persuasive reasons for others to accept your conclusion. It is better to say one or two things clearly and precisely than it is to give a menu of opinions vaguely. *Every sentence* in your paper should be organized around your argument: to support, clarify, or contextualize it. Any sentence that does not relate somehow to your argument should be deleted.

Structure of the final paper Your final paper (but not your short assignments) should have an **introduction**. Never begin with a dictionary definition or a phrase like "Since the dawn of time, man and woman have pondered..." Get to business right away. You can use your main conclusion as your first sentence, if you like. It's also best to be specific, even in an introduction. For example, don't just say "I will describe A's argument for *p* and then raise an objection"; instead, give your reader juicy clue about what the objection will be.

The body of your final paper should contain a **summary** of relevant claims in your source and class materials, and of relevant arguments where possible. Try to be as clear as you can, distinguishing between the author's assumptions, the author's reasons, and the author's conclusion. But don't get bogged down giving too much detail—knowing what to leave out is as important as knowing what to recount. Zero in on the most important part, and say enough to contextualize your own commentary.

You should also provide your original **critical opinion** on that central argument. Be sure to bolster your commentary with arguments (reasons your reader should believe what you do, or see things the way you do), and flesh out your discussion with examples (or counterexamples). If you raise **objections** to the target article, your discussion should be at the level of "mere counterargument" or higher (see "Philosophical Methods," p. 5). If you defend the article from an objection, your reply to the objection must be at the level of "mere counterargument" or higher. Flesh out your discussion in as much detail as possible with examples, references to texts, thought experiments, &c.

Your final paper should end with a **conclusion** that clearly and succinctly summarizes the main line of reasoning in your paper. It should not contain any new arguments, unless they are incidental to your main point.

Pet peeves

I generally don't take off for violating these rules but I think this is good advice:

- ☞ I balk at the use of masculine pronouns ("he," "him," "himself") as default pronouns. There's a trend I like in philosophy to use feminine pronouns by default just to change things up. So do that, or see the first item in the list of anti-pet peeves below.
- ☞ Avoid the words "proof" or "prove." Proofs can be constructed in mathematics and formal logic, but most arguments don't "prove" anything. More commonly, you'll want to write about reasons that "support" a claim, or that are "evidence" for a claim, &c.
- ☞ Be careful with the words "definition" and "define." A definition in philosophy is a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for being something, not a perspective on something or a claim about something.
- ☞ Take care with possessives for names ending in 's.' If something belongs to Dr. Chalmers, it is *Chalmers's* or *Chalmers'*, not **Chalmer's*.
- ☞ Try to be careful with irregular singulars and plurals, e.g. "phenomenon" (sing.) & "phenomena" (plural), "criterion" & "criteria," "schema" & "schemata," &c. (Perhaps surprisingly, "syllabuses" and "octopuses" are both acceptable plurals in English, and better than "syllabi" and "octopi.")
- ☞ Try not to use the word "societal" when the word "social" will do.

I also have a few **anti-pet peeves**, which might be worth sharing just to balance things out. These are things that bug other people, but I promise you as a philosopher of language that they are fine:

- ☞ The use of singular "they" (as in "Someone just arrived and *they* are waiting outside") is an ancient and honorable part of English grammar. It is older than singular "you."
- ☞ Split infinitives are also acceptable in English (e.g. "...*to* boldly *go* where no one has gone before.").
- ☞ Prepositions at the ends of sentences or phrases are fine in English.
- ☞ I like plural "data" ("data *are*..." vs. "data *is*...") but frankly both are acceptable in English.

Writing resources

I've posted several resources at <http://www.mikioakagi.net/teaching-resources#writing> (including a lightly edited version of a paper I wrote in undergrad, with commentary on what's good and what could be better). Many of those resources are specific to philosophy writing, but for the most part should be helpful for analytical writing in general. If you're having difficulty, I encourage you to stop by the Writing Center in Reed 419 (817-257-7221; more information at wrt.tcu.edu, including an appointment scheduler). They won't help you with content but can help you with style and writing habits.

Come see me!

Finally, I recommend enthusiastically that you meet with me, during my office hours or by appointment, to discuss your papers. Especially if you're nervous or having trouble! But also just to talk things out, make sure you're on the right track, or whatever. Please come prepared with a draft, an outline, or just your notes.

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