

Midterm Paper

Phil 151

ASSIGNMENT

The assignment for the midterm paper is to write an extended response to the prompt that you composed for assignment 1. This response should be around 1500 words. It must also have the following features:

1. A clear statement of the prompt to which you are responding before the beginning of the paper.
2. Specific and detailed engagement with at least one of the philosophers whom we have examined so far in the course. This engagement must go beyond just the suggestion that some aspect of the topic is related to or expresses that philosopher's ideas. You should wherever possible specifically state or define the ideas and concepts you are referencing and then describe the specific reasons that you take them to be relevant.

ASSIGNMENT OUTCOMES

Revision for final paper

As with the last assignment, this assignment will contribute to the following one. That, the final paper, will be a revision and expansion of what you write here. You might consider this a first draft, although keep in mind that you are being graded on that draft– so the quality needs to be presentable. You might also keep in mind that the more effort you put into this paper, the less you may have to work in order to improve it for the final paper. Although, everyone will have to make some substantial changes as you will be required to engage with at least one additional philosopher from the second half of the course.

Peer Review

Following this assignment, you will also be asked to read and comment on a peer's paper. This will be done anonymously through canvas. The idea is to gain experience in giving feedback and that feedback from another perspective may help you with revisions for the final paper. The peer review will be graded complete/incomplete and will be a portion of your participation grade, rather than a part of the grade you receive for the midterm paper.

INSTRUCTIONS

These instructions are meant to provide a road map for what a submission might look like. You do not have to follow them exactly. However, I would be wary of deviating too far from a standard academic format.

The paper should begin with a clear introduction of your topic. The prompt you are responding to should precede the paper but you can pretend that it does not. Put the questions you are going to be addressing as clearly as you can with the aim explaining them to someone who is unfamiliar with your concerns. You should then conclude the introduction with a brief outline of the structure of the paper, i.e. what order your argument or investigation will proceed in, and a summary of what you will argue or conclude.

In the body of the paper, you should stick to the outline that you laid out in the introduction. Try to use paragraphs to separate distinct points or distinct steps in argument. This will make it more straightforward to provide outline in the introduction. It will also both make the paper more readable and make it easier to follow what you are discussing at any specific point.

Try to avoid restating claims that you have already made excessively. It is often good to reiterate important or difficult to grasp points, but sometimes students will fall into a trap of writing a paper that only says what is essentially the same thing phrased in several different ways. That does not typically enhance the paper's quality.

Because this is a short paper, you will probably not be able to examine every aspect of your topic in fine-grained detail. That is perfectly fine. You should try to stay focused on what you take to be the core of the issue. However, whenever you are assuming or taking for granted something that might be controversial, i.e. could reasonably be disagreed with, you should explicitly state that you are doing so. Obviously, you can't just say you are taking everything for granted but clearly marking the scope of your discussion is an important skill to develop in philosophical writing and will help you produce clearer arguments.

Finally, you should end with a concluding paragraph. This should relate directly back to the questions you described in the introduction. Summarize briefly what you said about them and reiterate any important consequences. What you claim in your conclusion and what you say you will claim in the introduction should correspond. You might also point out directions for further investigation if any occur to you.