

Writing Guidelines

General. In general, you write a philosophy paper to convince via argument. Your overall aim is to clarify and engage reasons for and against some claim. Our logical notions of validity and soundness are useful tools in this process. Suppose someone devises a method of “cloud reading,” something like palm reading, and reasons from the premise that the clouds *say* they shall live forever, to the conclusion that they *shall* live forever. It is natural to object that this reasoning isn’t valid – it is easy to construct consistent stories where the premise is true, but the conclusion is false. But their reasoning becomes valid with an additional premise,

Whatever the clouds say (on this scheme of interpretation) is true
 The clouds say I shall live forever
 —
 I shall live forever

Now the issue shifts to one of soundness and so the truth of the premises. And, supposing that the clouds have been correctly read, it is natural to focus on the first premise. Thus one might ask about other things the clouds have said and whether they are in fact true. One might ask about the *basis* on which the clouds are supposed to be accurate predictors of the truth. Etc. We thus *use* validity and soundness as part of the process by which we identify and clarify reasons for this claim about living forever. And similarly with respect to more serious philosophical arguments, as for Pascal’s Wager or The Problem of Evil. We use our argument forms to isolate and identify premises upon which conclusions are based. Thus a typical paper for this class will *state* an argument *evaluate* it for validity. Supposing that the argument is valid, the paper will then focus on the question of soundness and so on one or more of the premises.

In evaluating reasons for and against a premise, always strive for depth. One of the most common problems with student philosophy papers is that they present arguments of some philosophers X and Y pro and con on a topic and then announce as a conclusion: “X is right.” SAY WHY. *Evaluate* the arguments of others and *argue* for your own conclusions. Beware of lapsing into mere *reporting* or surveying of opinions. Your evaluations and conclusions should result from the reasoning you develop. Thus it would be a mistake to present, say, Mackie’s reasoning according to which god does not need to use evil events to attain good results, and without any objection or reply to announce, “I think the reason god allows evil events is to use them to attain good results.” One can, of course disagree with Mackie! But it should be on the basis of some reasoned reply to Mackie.

Details. (a) As a matter of style, do not worry about using clever language, varied vocabulary or the like. Strive to be clear and precise. Make the arguments clear. That’s all that matters. Along these lines, do not argue by means of rhetorical questions. It is always better to say what you mean than to hope the reader will answer the way you want. (b) Technically papers should be double-spaced. The front sheet should have the title of your paper, your name, the name of the course, and the date. Number pages consecutively. Do not use a colored or plastic cover – they get in the way, and I throw them out. (c) Grammar and spelling matter. If you have problems in these areas, seek help – from the writing center, philosophy assistants in the Logic Lab (UH 052), your professor, or other sources.

Quotation. Because of frequent problems in this area, I'll be more complete about this (this material is based on a document produced by the English department, though edited in a "philosophical" direction):

I. When to cite. Be conservative in the use of quotation. In most cases in philosophical writing, that someone holds a view will not count as support for it. Quotation is however sometimes useful in demonstrating that you are correct in thinking that the person quoted holds a position you will discuss. In general, you should use your own words in description of the views of others. This will show that you understand their views! If a paper is little more than a string of quotes, it is *not* a successful essay.

Suppose you determine that parts of the following paragraph from p. 153 of J.L. Mackie's, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) are important for your discussion of the problem of evil:

If omnipotence means anything at all, it means power over causal laws. If there is an omnipotent creator, then if there are any causal laws he must have made them, and if he is still omnipotent he must be able to override them. If there is a god, then, he does not need to use means to attain his ends. So it is idle to refer, in a theodicy, to any ordinary, factual, means-end, or in general causal, relationships. One would think that so elementary and obvious a point hardly needs to be made; but it does need to be made, and stressed, because it is constantly ignored or slurred over not only in popular but even in philosophical treatments of the problem of evil.

Do not dump the entire paragraph into your essay unless you absolutely require every thought and expression in it. Here are ways of handling this passage in your essay: First, consider putting into your own words the material that you need and then incorporating it into your own paragraph. The paraphrases are underlined so you can see them.

Here, it may be argued that an omnipotent being must be able to override causal laws; so such a being does not need causal means to attain its ends; so causal relationships between good and evil can play no role in theodicy (Mackie, p. 153).

Notice that paraphrase of another's words does not exempt you from the need to document your source. Second, sometimes you will decide to quote part of another writer's passage in your sentences. Such quotation must preserve the meaning of the original and fit into the grammar of your overall sentence.

As J.L. Mackie says, an omnipotent being "does not need to use [causal] means to attain his ends" (p. 153).

Notice the use of square brackets '[]' to indicate material which is not in the original, but clarifies the author's original meaning. Third, you also can make a quotation stand by itself. Confine such direct quotation to no more than two or three sentences, lest your point be lost in the author's words.

As J.L. Mackie says, "if there is a god, then, he does not need to use means to attain his ends. So it is idle to refer, in a theodicy, to... causal, relationships" (p. 153).

Notice the ellipsis (dots) after “to” since the author decided that the intervening material was unnecessary. Aside from material included with brackets or excluded with ellipses, quotation must be exact. Finally, if you really do need to include the entire passage, make sure that you clarify your interpretation of the quoted material. Separate your paragraphs from the quoted material by skipping a line. And do not put quotation marks around the material that now is a block quotation:

J.L Mackie argues that causal relationships can play no role in explaining why an omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good god would allow evil.

If there is an omnipotent creator, then if there are any causal laws he must have made them, and if he is still omnipotent he must be able to override them. If there is a god, then, he does not need to use means to attain his ends. So it is idle to refer, in a theodicy, to any ordinary, factual, means-end, or in general causal, relationships (p. 153).

I think Mackie is mistaken...

Whether you paraphrase another writer or quote that person directly, *you must acknowledge your sources*. If you do not, then you are guilty of plagiarism. In this day-and-age of word processors with the opportunity to cut-and-paste from electronic sources, it is easy to find yourself using or rearranging the words, phrases or ideas of others. But any such activity requires acknowledgement. The important point is made very well for the Georgetown University Honor Council,

You're not in college to play a cat and mouse game with your professor to see if you can fool him or her by using someone else's work. You are in college to hone your mind into a reliable thinking machine that will serve you well throughout the rest of your life. This is the number one skill you are here to obtain: thinking. Why do you think the system of education has changed so little over the past few thousand years? Just as great teachers such as Jesus, Confucius or Mohammed sat with their disciples, so you sit with your professors. You present your thoughts to one who has had greater experience thinking than you have, and this one coaches you little by little to become a better thinker yourself. Presenting someone else's work turns this relationship into a fraud, and cheats you out of the very thing you are in college to get. What you would be getting away with, if you are not caught, is wasting your money (http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/hc/plagiarism_print.html).

II. How to cite. For Prof. Roy, at least, it does not matter what style you use, so long as it somehow provides full bibliographic information – at least sufficient for someone else quickly to locate the exact source. But do not make up your own style. Every student should have some reasonable style manual. Standard works are,

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 4th ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973.

Achtert, Walter S., and Gibaldi, Joseph. *The MLA Style Manual*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1985.

Footnotes are the traditional method of citation. However, in-text references linked to a bibliography may be simpler, and have become popular in recent times. Here are some principles that can help with in-text references: In-text citations go right after your paraphrase or quote, before the end punctuation of the sentence, but after the quotation marks. If the source is clear from context, it is enough to include the page reference within parentheses,

“... or in general causal, relationships” (p. 153).

If the source isn't clear from context your reference is,

... (Mackie, p. 153). / ... (Mackie, 1982 p. 153). / ... (Mackie, 1982a p. 153).

depending on what sources by the author appear in your list of works cited (see below). The citation is to the author of the material quoted, not to the editor of a book in which the author's work appears.

If at all possible, you should quote and cite Mackie directly, and not Plantinga's or Roy's quotation of Mackie. Quoting an original author rather than a second-hand summary gives the reader confidence that you have the original right, and allows the force of the original to come through without dilution.

III) List of sources. In-text citations must be linked to an alphabetically arranged List of Works Cited. The list is keyed to the authors' last names. You should refer to a full style manual for a complete list of principles and examples. Here are some cases that may help for the limited requirements of our course, in the author-date style:

a) For book by one author:

Smith, James. 1988. *The Bronx Zoo*. New York, New York: Manchester Press.

b) For an article/story/chapter in an anthology:

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. 1968. “My Kinsman, Major Molineux.” *Best American Fiction*. Ed. Gilbert Klotz and Mary Kidd. Middleton: Guido Press.

c) For an article/story/chapter reprinted in an unpublished classroom reader:

Mackie, J. L. 1982. “The Problem of Evil.” *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). Reprint in *Philosophy 192: Introduction to Philosophy of Religion*, classroom reader for T. Roy, Phil 192, Summer 1998, CSUSB.

d) For an article in a journal:

Katt, Milo. 1973. “Big Time Scams.” *Money and Politics*. 4: 46-57.

e) For an article in an internet encyclopedia:

Hájek, Alan, “Pascal's Wager,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2004 Ed.), E. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2004/entries/pascal-wager>.