

HOW TO WRITE A

Philosophy Paper

The purpose of a philosophy paper is to form an argument through a weave of logical sequences. There is no specific format required in writing the paper. Forming an argument takes a logical process often through propositional logic, **modus ponens** and **modus tollens**.

There are two ways to judge a philosophy paper: validity and soundness. A valid argument follows a logical sequence from the premises of the argument. A sound paper is a valid argument with premises that is actually true. An argument can be valid but not sound.

A valid argument:

1. All trees are cotton
2. Cotton has a soft texture
3. Therefore, All trees have a soft texture.

A sound argument:

1. Humans do not have wings
2. I am a human
3. Therefore, I do not have wings.

Premises are statements the author takes for granted or proves to the readers, followed by a conclusion. An author may provide smaller arguments to prove that a premise is true. For example, to prove, "Humans do not have wings." However, the premise in question must be the conclusion of the smaller argument.

Tip: keep the conclusion in mind and don't get lost in the smaller arguments.

MODUS PONENS

$$\frac{P \rightarrow Q, P}{\therefore Q.}$$

"If P implies Q is true, and P is true, then Q is true."

$$P \rightarrow Q, P, \therefore Q.$$

"One that affirms," modus ponens is a valid argument in logic. If we accept the two premises, then the conclusion follows. The argument does not need for it to be "true," so when working with logic problems, it is important not to read into problems that aren't there and take the arguments on face value. These do not portray "real world" problems, but rather, a mathematical model of the real world.

MODUS TOLLENS

$$\frac{P \rightarrow Q, \neg Q}{\neg P}$$

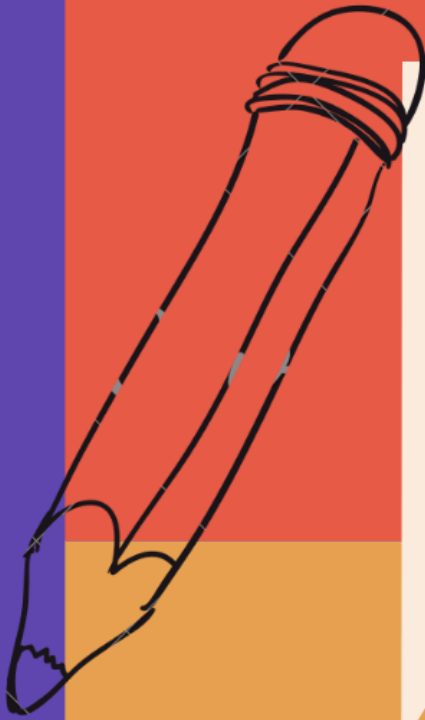
"If P, then Q. Not Q. Therefore, not P."

Modus tollens is a valid form of argument that denies. To deny an argument, we must first deny the conclusion, then prove why the premiss (not P) is not true or in this logically sound. For example,
"If she goes to class, she will wear a backpack,
She did not wear a backpack,
Therefore, she did not go to class."

FORMAT

"You do not have to solve a pressing and long-standing philosophical problem in order to write a good paper. You only need to produce an interesting way of thinking about the problem."
Emily Austen, Wake Forest Uni.

THE FORMAT OF A PHILOSOPHY PAPER IS SIMILAR TO A TYPICAL ESSAY. HOWEVER, IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT PHILOSOPHY PAPERS ARE NOT EXPOSITIONS OR NARRATIVES. PHILOSOPHY PAPERS ARE ARGUMENTS; EACH SENTENCE SHOULD CONTRIBUTE AS AN EXPLANATION OR CONNECTION TO A PREMISE. THINK OF EACH PARAGRAPH AS THE "NEXT STEP" IN THE ARGUMENT.



BASIC LAYOUT

1. **ABSTRACT**
2. **THESIS**
3. **DEFINE KEY TERMS/
STATE PREMISES**
4. **STATE OBJECTIONS**
5. **EXPLAIN EVIDENCE**
6. **CONCLUSION**

ABSTRACT

A SUMMARY OR INTRODUCTION OF YOUR PAPER

THESIS

A CLAIM OF WHETHER AN ARGUMENT IS TRUE OR FALSE

- STATE **CONCISELY & CLEARLY**
- DEFINE TECHNICAL AND AMBIGUOUS TERMS
- WHEN CRITIQUING SOMEONE ELSE'S WORK, EXPLAIN THEIR ARGUMENT IN YOUR OWN WORDS

"IN THIS PAPER, I WILL ARGUE THAT ACCIDENTAL PROPERTIES CANNOT EXIST IN LIGHT OF LEIBNIZ'S SUBSTANCE AND ESSENCES ARGUMENT."

DEFINE KEY TERMS

EXPLAIN DEFINITIONS
STATE YOUR MAIN ARGUMENT OR LIST YOUR PREMISES AND CONCLUSIONS

OBJECTIONS

RESPOND OR PROVIDE COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

EVIDENCE

AN ARGUMENT OR BETTER ARGUMENT

- EXPLAIN WHY THIS EVIDENCE IS RELEVANT AND WHAT WE CAN CONCLUDE FROM IT
- EXAMPLES OR HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLES ARE USEFUL SOURCES OF EVIDENCE TOO
- DO NOT ARGUE FROM WHAT THE DICTIONARY SAYS

CONCLUSION

SO WHAT?

- HOW DOES YOUR ARGUMENT RELATE OR CHANGE A PREVIOUS ARGUMENT?
- WHAT DOES YOUR ARGUMENT ENTAIL IN THE GRANDER SCHEME OF THINGS?

States main premises and conclusion

Note the application of the premises
listen above in a step-by-step example
and the author elaborating concisely
the relationship of the conditions and
events.

The way humans use language to communicate seems to be based on the following assumptions:

- I) (A) knows the language spoken
- II) (A) knows that the other party (B) knows the language spoken
- III) (B) knows that (A) knows the language spoken.

Let us see how these requirements are met in the above example: my niece knows the language and knows what terms like "red" and "teaspoon" mean (condition I). She knows that I know the meaning of those terms (condition II), and she knows that I know that she knows the meanings of those terms (condition III). Condition III is the part that makes my niece ponder selecting the red teaspoon, since she knows that I know what "red" and "teaspoon" mean and not only does she know this, she knows that I expect her to know. In short, when I asked for the red teaspoon, I knew that she understood what I meant and based on her understanding of my knowledge of same that I would notice if she brought me a green fork instead.

Mehran Sheqhaqi, "Language and Consciousness"

Natural language ontology is a branch of both metaphysics and linguistic semantics. Its aim is to uncover the ontological categories, notions, and structures that are implicit in the use of natural language, that is, the ontology that a speaker accepts when using a language. Natural language ontology is part of 'descriptive metaphysics' to use Strawson's term or 'naïve metaphysics' to use Fine's term, that is, the metaphysics of appearances as opposed to foundational metaphysics, whose interest is in 'what there really is'.

What sorts of entities natural language involves is closely linked to compositional semantics, namely what the contribution of occurrences of expressions in a sentence is taken to be. Most importantly entities play a role as semantic values of referential terms, but also as implicit arguments of predicates, and as parameters of evaluation.

a part of the summary/abstract in "Natural Language Ontology" by Friederick Moltmann

The abstract provides simply, definitional or common truths about a term or concept. It may introduce key philosophers or vocabulary without going into great detail. The sentences are brief and concise.

It is okay to repeat the same words that are used for the same definitional purposes. Do not be afraid of sounding "repetitive." again, a philosophy paper prioritizes concision and coherence more than stylistic choices.

Samples

TIPS:

**BEGGING THE
QUESTION: DO
NOT DO THIS**

"USING A PREMISE THAT ONE
COULD DOUBT IF NOT FOR ONE'S
PRIOR ACCEPTANCE OF THE
CONCLUSION"

CONCISION:

BE STRAIGHT TO THE POINT;
CUT OUT UNNECESSARY,
ELABORATE SENTENCES

ROADMAP:

STATE THE GENERAL IDEA OF
YOUR PAPER TO YOUR READERS;
LIST YOUR ARGUMENT OR MAIN
PREMISES AND CONCLUSION

CERTAINTY:

IT IS CRUCAL TO BE CERTAIN
WITH YOUR OWN LOGICAL
STATEMENTS. ONE CANNOT BE
"CAREFUL" OF LOGIC

"PHILOSOPHY IS A WAY OF LIFE. "

PROFESSOR GALLEGOS

A professor's guide on writing a philosophy paper that sheds light on a real world issue

- The mutual relevance of the philosophical analysis and the real-world issue is made clear, and an objection to the conclusion is considered
- A philosophical question is identified, and enough context is provided to clarify and motivate the question
- Their central reason(s) for believing that their view is true is articulated accurately and clearly, supported by judicious quotes from the text and at least one example

"The dark side of comedy. What is the ethical value of laughter? Some philosophers have been skeptical of laughter, arguing that it is driven by an antisocial delight in others' misfortune. Others argue that it is ethically neutral, because it is driven by the simple desire to relieve tension. \ I argue that although Solomon's analysis improves on the alternative views of laughter, his account is challenged when we consider the Netflix comedy special, Nanette. In this stand-up performance, the comedian Hannah Gadsby presents a compelling case that laughter is structurally incapable of creating genuine social solidarity for certain classes of people—namely, for those who are most marginalized and vulnerable in our society. This suggests that while laughter may support virtue in many cases, laughter is indeed ethically suspicious in precisely those areas that are most important for shaping the ethical landscapes in which we live. "

An example of using a world issue to shed light on a puzzling philosophical question