

Planning for the Philosophy paper – Making it happen

Step 1: Make sure you fully understand the assignment

- Read through all of the handouts I gave you, covering everything from developing your question to how to focus it.
- Make sure you understand the four different sections, what is required for each one, and what will make for an outstanding overall essay.
 - the **Hybrid / personal** connection uses a personal story / experience to give a clear and thorough sense of what this question means to you and how you've come to have these beliefs about it.
 - the **Literature** section shows a thorough understanding of the book and the ways in which it answers your question. This means using quotation from many different parts of the book, explicating them for message and meaning, and taking the time to go beyond the parts we've already discussed in class.
 - the **Philosophy** section shows a thorough sense of what this thinker has to say about your topic / question. It may not answer it directly, but is your job to work through their ideas and explain the parts you find to be relevant.
 - the **Dialogue** section will be a written conversation between you and another student (or more) and will take place during class time.
 - the **Summation** section takes the time to fit all of these together. In many ways, this is the heart of your paper – take the time to show how the literature and philosophy of another thinker enhanced your own understanding, then give a sense of where you are now and what your “final” thoughts on the question are.

Step 2: Have a clear direction for your philosophical question

- Your question covers a wide range of potential possibilities and connections. Many of you have talked about how the more you look into it and think about it, the more other directions appear – that's great, but choose one of them. There's far too much to be said about your question overall, so your ‘answer’ needs to focus on the aspect of it you find most relevant and compelling.
- **Submit your question proposal.**

Step 3: Gather your own thoughts and get to know your question - Hybrid / Personal section

- Explore your question using the methods we used during our look at Man's Search for Meaning.
- Determine which “personal experience(s)” you will use to help understand your issue.
- Many of you already have a sense of the personal story you will be using for this essay, but you should spend some time thinking about which elements of it you will use. Think about the sub-questions you have created, and how your comments about your own experience will “engage in dialogue” with your analysis of the literary text and philosophical essay.

Step 4: Design research strategy and writing timetable.

- You and I both know how hectic the next few weeks are – use your time wisely!

Step 5: Find, review, and evaluate journal articles, essays, and web sites; identify an author(s) who wrote about your question / topic; identify and locate an essay by him / her

- One section of your essay will involve your close reading of a philosophical essay. You should take the time to read it carefully, as well as explore related issues using a variety of sources. I will be happy to work with you during this process, making suggestions and offering potential sources. Feel free to use those suggestions or find and use another, as long as you clear it with me.

Step 6: Find, review, and evaluate potential literary sources

- Since one section of your essay will involve an exploration of your question through the lens of a work of literature we've read together this year, you will want to spend time considering all of them as you determine which one(s) will make it into your essay. Take into consideration what you have already written about these texts, which ones appealed to you for various reasons, and which ones you were able to "make meaning" out of in a way that now pertains to this assignment

Step 7: Outline or describe overall structure

- Get to know your question and the sub-questions intimately. How will you approach such a broad topic? Think about the different types of questions to ask about your philosophical question (see assignment handout) and use those to organize each section of your essay.
- Determine what your best arguments are to prove your "thesis." Make sure your "thesis" – the answer to your question – is clearly stated
- Consider opposing arguments and examples, from either the literature or the other essay you read. Rebut / reject these, and explain why you are doing so. Show why your interpretation is correct!

Dialogues: These will take place in class on Thursday, May 3rd.

Step 8: Write 1st draft

- We will be in the computer lab all of this week, so you will have a lot of time in class to "flesh out" your ideas and craft them into an essay that clearly expresses what you have to say about your topic and question

Step 9: Revise & rewrite

- Examine and re-consider the structure and flow of your essay. Do the different questions, and your "answers" to them, build onto each other? By the end of each section, is there a clear sense of what all of the terms mean, and what ideas you are advancing about the philosophical question? Share your paper with several other people (we will hopefully be doing this in class) – do they understand what you are expressing? Are your points clear?
- Think about all of the questions I typically ask you, and the feedback you received on other assignments from the year.

Step 10: Put paper in final form by Monday, May 11th.

- **This is the final deadline, even in the case of an absence.**
 - **Late work automatically means you are taking the final.**
 - **Late work is penalized one grade per day.**
- Complete a careful and thorough proofreading of your essay – no typos, all capitalization and punctuation is correct, all quotations are used and cited properly. The language you use in the essay should express the sophistication of the topic, trying to be as specific as possible throughout.
- What makes for an excellent philosophy essay?
 - Neat, professional looking, clear, easy to read information
 - Grammar and spelling are error-free
 - Has thorough, meaningful descriptions of issues in each section
 - Thoughtfully organized – not just stream-of-consciousness – clear signs of revision
 - Powerful description of what the writer believes, and how this exploration lead there
 - Both creative and scholarly
 - Represents 100% effort put into development of philosophical question and your responses
 - Be clear, unambiguous, complete, and accurate
 - *** Passive Understanding vs. Active Mastery:** Students sometimes confuse passive understanding with active mastery. Because material makes sense (passive understanding) when they read it, or when it is discussed in class, they think they "know" it and are disappointed when they earn a low grade. Active knowledge and mastery require not just that you understand the material when someone else speaks or writes about it; they require that you, yourself, are able to clearly and accurately explain what the material means and what it implies. Just as passive understanding of a word does not guarantee that you can use it correctly, passive understanding of a subject is not the same as knowing it. Passive understanding earns a "C", at best. Active knowledge earns a "B". Mastery earns an "A".

Optional but recommended steps:

- Meet with Mr. Rigler. Several times.
- Celebrate an excellent essay as a culmination of a year of growth and insightful thought!