

Student comments on what makes for a well-written philosophical text

I have collected the comments you made in your fourth mini-paper regarding what made for good philosophical writing. I have put in parentheses the number of people who made the comment and italicized some comments that we haven't talked about much yet in class but that I thought were quite helpful.

regarding structure

- break things up into sections (9)
- make the sections relatively short (2)
- use clear headings (6)
- explain what the goals of each sections is (3)
- have a good structure (10)
- lay out what the structure will be early on in the paper (5)
- *use words to mark the structure, such as "firstly, secondly, thirdly" or "so far I have done ... now I will do ..." or "some have worried ... a way around this objection ... furthermore, some have argued" (3)*
- write so that things flow well and logically (3)
- don't talk about different topics without clearly distinguishing them, so that it appeared that the same discussion was being had over and over (3)
- make it clear how everything in the text fits together (5)

regarding clarity and precision

- be easy to read (3)
- being clear (20)
- use simple words when possible (20)
- make sure to define key terms (17)
- make sure to present enough information so that a reader could fully grasp the relevant concept (8)
- *sometimes it's helpful to define other related terms, so that the reader can distinguish the term at hand from these others (9) but don't add more terms than are necessary (2)*
- *maintain a consistent position throughout, rather than changing part-way through (2)*
- do not use long complicated sentences (9)
- it's sometimes helpful to use bullet points or italics to help aid the reader (2)
- link to other theories and principles that the reader knows about (3)
- start off simple and then get more complicated later on (3)
- don't use technical terms without explaining them (14)

regarding concision

- be concise (16)
- *don't be repetitive (3)*
- *don't give giving irrelevant information (7)*
- don't drag out the discussion (8)

- that said, make sure to go into depth rather than considering things superficially (11)

regarding examples

- use examples (39)
 - that are real-world (4)
 - that are interesting (2)
 - offering examples of people who hold a particular theory (5)
 - starting with examples first is often helpful (2)
 - make sure the examples are spelled out fully (2)
 - that are current (3)
 - that everyone is familiar with (3)
- explain how a theory is used (3)

regarding arguments

- make sure to give, arguments, objections and replies (33)
- make sure the arguments are good ones (3)
- *when giving arguments, if the premises are somewhat controversial, make sure to explain why the premises are true, rather than just stating them (2)*

other

- draw the reader in (3)
- make the discussion relevant for the reader; explain the practical significance of it (2)
- indicate where the reader can find further discussion of an issue; cite sources (9)
- try to be unbiased (if you're an encyclopedia article) (13)
- some like historical context (6) and some do not (3)
- be accurate/credible (5)
- write so as to hold the author's attention; don't be boring (one tip in this regard — break up long paragraphs) (4)