

Structuring Papers – Introduction to Moral Philosophy

Daniel Immerman

27 March 2017

I will give you two tips with regards to structuring papers. The first is to have a good structure and the second is to make clear what the structure is.

First tip: having a good structure

My first tip is to make sure the paper has a good structure. This involves several things. First, there should be a goal of the paper and each of the section should serve that goal.

For example, suppose the goal of your paper is to argue that active euthanasia is always wrong. Then you could have your first section introduce the term “active euthanasia”, your second section introduce an argument that active euthanasia is sometimes right and then offer my objection to it, your third offer an argument that active euthanasia is always wrong and your fourth consider two objections to the argument and offer responses to each.

First tip: having a good structure

Likewise, each section should have a goal and the parts of the section should serve that goal.

For instance, suppose the goal of your first section is to introduce the term “active euthanasia”. Then maybe the first part of the section introduces the term “euthanasia” and the second introduces “active euthanasia”, contrasting it with passive euthanasia.

Similar things regarding having a goal and having each part serve the goal hold for even smaller units of your paper (subsections, paragraphs, etc.)

Second tip: make clear what the structure is

A second tip is to make clear what the structure of your paper is.

I recommend previewing the structure near the start of your paper. For instance, you could write: “In this paper, I will be arguing that active euthanasia is always wrong. First, I will explain what active euthanasia means. Second, I will consider an argument that active euthanasia is sometimes right because it’s sometimes in the best interests of the patients and offer my objection to it. Third, I will offer my own argument that active euthanasia is always wrong. Fourth, I will consider two objections to my argument and respond to each.”

Second tip: make clear what the structure is

You can also use transition sentences to mark when you're switching tasks.

For example, you could write (at the appropriate place) “Now that I've objected to the argument for active euthanasia being sometimes morally right I'm ready to argue that it's always wrong.”

Second tip: make clear what the structure is

If you have multiple of something, it's often helpful to use terms involving numbers (e.g. "First, second, third") to count them out.

For example, if you have three objections to an argument, you could write "My first objection is that ... my second is that ... my third is that."

Practice

For each of the following, say what could be improved.

1. “The main goal of this paper is to argue that active euthanasia is wrong. It is split into three sections. First, I tell you the history of active euthanasia, then I explain what a couple of other people think about it, and then I offer an argument that active euthanasia is wrong.”

2. “Killing animals for food is morally acceptable. Animals provide lots of protein. Also, they taste good. And traditions around eating meat are important for certain cultural purposes. Some say that killing animals for food harms animals, but people matter more than animals and sometimes people need meat for certain purposes, like cultural ones. Also, eating a balanced diet as a vegetarian can be expensive; it can be hard to get enough protein without spending a lot of money.”



Write down a paragraph for your final paper indicating its main goal and how it will be structured. (E.g. “My main goal is to ... I will do three things. First, ... Second, ...”).