

RUBRIC FOR ARGUMENTATIVE PHILOSOPHY PAPERS

This rubric is for philosophy papers that are supposed to give an original, in-depth defense of a single, narrow thesis. Underlined terms are explained in the notes at the end.

EVALUATION DIMENSIONS	ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS		
	UNACCEPTABLE	AVERAGE	PROFICIENT
1. Organization	<p>a. There is no title or there is a title that does not make clear the topic of the paper (e.g., "Legal murder", when the topic is the death penalty).</p> <p>b. The thesis of the paper is not announced in the introductory paragraphs (i.e., there is no sentence like "I will argue that ...").</p> <p>c. The paper follows no coherent plan: it reads like a hodgepodge of ideas. The <u>reader</u>¹ wonders how the pieces relate to each other.</p>	<p>a. There is a title that makes clear the topic but not the thesis of the paper (e.g., "The death penalty").</p> <p>b. The thesis of the paper is announced (e.g., by "I will argue that ...") but is formulated unclearly or vaguely in the introductory paragraphs.</p> <p>c. The paper follows a coherent plan, but the plan could be significantly improved by rearranging certain pieces.</p>	<p>a. There is a title that makes clear the thesis (and thus also the topic) of the paper (e.g., "Against the death penalty").</p> <p>b. The thesis of the paper is announced (e.g., by "I will argue that ...") and is formulated clearly and precisely in the introductory paragraphs.</p> <p>c. The paper follows a coherent plan with every piece in a proper place. The reader easily sees how the pieces relate to each other.</p>
2. Reasoning	<p>a. The <u>argument</u>² contains a fallacy, either a <i>formal</i> one (e.g., "<i>A</i> entails <i>B</i>; so, <i>B</i> entails <i>A</i>") or an <i>informal</i> one (e.g., "everyone accepts <i>A</i>; so, <i>A</i> is true").</p> <p>b. The conclusion of the argument is irrelevant to the goal of the argument. (E.g., the argument is advertised as an objection to <i>X</i>, but the conclusion, rather than being that there is a problem with <i>X</i>, is that there is a problem with <i>Y</i>.)</p> <p>c. At least one premise is <i>irrelevant</i> to the conclusion (and is thus <i>redundant</i>: it can be removed without affecting the strength of the argument).</p>	<p>a. The argument contains no (formal or informal) fallacy but is <i>inductively weak</i> (i.e., its premises do not make its conclusion probable, let alone certain).</p> <p>b. The conclusion of the argument is only marginally relevant to the goal of the argument. (E.g., the argument is advertised as an objection to <i>X</i>, but the conclusion is that there is only a trivial problem with <i>X</i>.)</p> <p>c. No premise is irrelevant but some premise is redundant. (E.g., "<i>B</i> entails <i>C</i>" is relevant to <i>C</i> but is redundant given <i>A</i> and "<i>A</i> entails <i>C</i>".)</p>	<p>a. The argument is either <i>deductively valid</i> (i.e., its premises make its conclusion certain) or <i>inductively strong</i> (i.e., its premises make its conclusion probable but not certain).</p> <p>b. The conclusion of the argument is highly relevant to the goal of the argument. (E.g., the argument is advertised as an objection to <i>X</i>, and the conclusion is that there is a serious problem with <i>X</i>.)</p> <p>c. No premise of the argument is redundant (and thus no premise is irrelevant to the conclusion of the argument).</p>
3. Justification	<p>a. The premises of the argument contain major or multiple factual mistakes.</p> <p>b. At least one controversial premise is not supported at all (i.e., it is just stated). ("I feel that ..." does not count as support.)</p> <p>c. The formulation of the argument contains disrespectful (e.g., ridiculing, offensive, or biased) language.</p> <p>d. The reader wonders whether the source of some ideas is you or someone else. (It is <i>plagiarism</i> to present ideas—let alone formulations—that you got from others as if they were your own.)</p>	<p>a. The premises of the argument contain a few minor factual mistakes.</p> <p>b. At least one controversial premise is supported only weakly (e.g., by referring to a single study).</p> <p>c. The argument is respectfully formulated but violates the Principle of Charity (i.e., it gives an unsympathetic reading of others' views).</p> <p>d. The paper makes clear who the source of each idea is but some references are incomplete (e.g., a reference to a journal article includes no page number).</p>	<p>a. The premises of the argument contain no factual mistake.</p> <p>b. Every controversial premise is strongly supported (e.g., by means of a further argument or extensive references).</p> <p>c. The argument is respectfully formulated and conforms to the Principle of Charity (i.e., it gives a sympathetic reading of others' views).</p> <p>d. The paper makes clear who the source of each idea is and gives complete references (including, for a journal article: authors, title, journal, volume, year, and pages).</p>
4. Originality	<p>a. The thesis of the paper is the same as one of the views discussed in your <u>sources</u>.³</p> <p>b. Every argument for the thesis is the same as one of the arguments formulated in your sources.</p> <p>c. Most objections, replies, etc. are from your sources.</p>	<p>a. The thesis of the paper is a minor variation of one of the views discussed in your sources.</p> <p>b. Every argument for the thesis is a minor variation of one of the arguments formulated in your sources.</p> <p>c. Most objections, replies, etc. are minor variations of those formulated in your sources.</p>	<p>a. The thesis of the paper differs significantly from every view discussed in your sources.</p> <p>b. At least one argument for the thesis differs significantly from every argument formulated in your sources.</p> <p>c. Most objections, replies, etc. differ significantly from those formulated in your sources.</p>

EVALUATION DIMENSIONS	ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS		
	UNACCEPTABLE	AVERAGE	PROFICIENT
5. Clarity	<p>a. Even a reader familiar with your sources often wonders what you are trying to say.</p> <p>b. Several moves in the argumentation are not introduced by <i>transition phrases</i> (like "One might object to the first premise ...", "I reply that ...", "My second reply to the first objection is ...").</p> <p>c. There are many (i) excessively long sentences or paragraphs, (ii) undefined obscure terms, or (iii) cases in which you say first something unintelligible and then explain what you meant.</p>	<p>a. Only a reader familiar with your sources almost never wonders what you are trying to say.</p> <p>b. Transition phrases are almost always present but are sometimes <i>inadequate</i>; i.e., they do not make clear <i>who</i> is making a move (you or an opponent) or <i>to what</i> the move responds (e.g., to the first or second premise of an argument).</p> <p>c. There are a few (i) excessively long sentences or paragraphs, (ii) undefined obscure terms, or (iii) cases in which you say first something unintelligible and then explain what you meant.</p>	<p>a. Even a reader unfamiliar with your sources almost never wonders what you are trying to say.</p> <p>b. Almost every move in the argumentation is introduced by a transition phrase that makes clear both <i>who</i> is making the move (you or an opponent) and <i>to what</i> exactly the move responds.</p> <p>c. There are almost no (i) excessively long sentences or paragraphs, (ii) undefined obscure terms, or (iii) cases in which you say first something unintelligible and then explain.</p>
6. Conciseness⁴	<p>a. The paper is highly repetitive: it makes the same points again and again.</p> <p>b. Many sentences are wordy: the reader finds the writing long-winded.</p> <p>c. There are lengthy or multiple digressions (i.e., passages that can be removed without affecting the argumentation).</p>	<p>a. The paper is slightly repetitive: it makes a few points more than once.</p> <p>b. A few sentences are wordy: their points can be made in significantly fewer words.</p> <p>c. There are a few short digressions (i.e., passages that can be removed without affecting the argumentation).</p>	<p>a. The paper avoids unnecessary repetition: it develops each point only once.</p> <p>b. Almost no sentence is wordy: the reader finds the writing compact.</p> <p>c. There are almost no digressions: almost every sentence contributes to the argumentation.</p>
7A. Precision	<p>a. The reader gets the impression that the writing is sloppy, that you wrote the paper in a hurry or in a single draft.</p> <p>b. The reader can often misinterpret you; your formulations are highly ambiguous (i.e., open to multiple interpretations).</p> <p>c. Your formulations are often highly inexact: what you say is clearly incorrect (e.g., you make category mistakes like saying "this is a false argument").</p>	<p>a. The reader gets the impression that the writing is in general careful but would have considerably improved if you had gone over more drafts.</p> <p>b. The reader can sometimes misinterpret you; your formulations are slightly ambiguous (i.e., open to a couple of interpretations).</p> <p>c. Your formulations are sometimes slightly inexact: what you say is <i>strictly speaking</i> incorrect (e.g., because you use extreme or immodest expressions like "always" or "I will prove").</p>	<p>a. The reader gets the impression that you have carefully thought about almost every single word in the paper, going over multiple drafts.</p> <p>b. The reader can seldom misinterpret you; your formulations are unambiguous (i.e., open to only one interpretation).</p> <p>c. Your formulations are almost always exact: what you say <i>can</i> be even strictly speaking correct (although it <i>might</i> still be incorrect; e.g., some justified beliefs are false).</p>
7B. Language	<p>a. The style is inappropriate for a scholarly paper: it is too colloquial, too impassioned, too flowery, or too impressionistic.</p> <p>b. There are so many grammatical, syntactic, spelling, or punctuation mistakes that the reader is distracted and has difficulty focusing on the argumentation.</p>	<p>a. The style is scholarly (in general sober and factual) but the paper is dry as a result: the reader feels bored.</p> <p>b. There are some grammatical, syntactic, spelling, or punctuation mistakes, but not so many as to be distracting.</p>	<p>a. The style is scholarly (in general sober and factual) but the paper is still lively: the reader feels interested.</p> <p>b. There are almost no grammatical, syntactic, spelling, or punctuation mistakes.</p>

¹ "The reader" is shorthand for "a typical professional philosopher possibly unfamiliar with your sources".

² "The argument" is shorthand for "the specific argument being evaluated (graded)". (On the dimensions of Reasoning and Justification *each* argument in the paper—i.e., Argument for the thesis, Objection 1, Reply 1, etc.—will be evaluated *separately*. On the remaining dimensions—i.e., Organization, Originality, etc.—the paper will be evaluated *as a whole*.)

³ "In your sources" is shorthand for "in class, in the required readings, or in any extra readings that you did or discussions that you had".

⁴ Conciseness will be automatically considered unacceptable if you give (on the "Instruction sheet for turning in papers") a word count for the paper—including notes and references—which exceeds the allowable word limit (specified on the "Course information" sheet) or if you give no word count at all.