

Writing A Philosophy Paper

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Essay Writing Pointers

- Use gender-inclusive language. Instead of "he"/"man" language, try using terms like "we" instead: this includes both genders ("a person... she" or "one... she" indicates a singular subject; try using this formulation in conjunction/ instead of "a person... he" or "one... he.")
- Some people have a tendency to belabour a point to compensate for a lack of clarity, or reasoning, or both. Avoid doing this. Especially avoid simply repeating your point instead of defending it. This will not help in persuading the reader, who is only persuaded by arguments.
- Illustrate points with examples.
- Don't be afraid to use "I" as in: "I argue that Thomson's argument fails." But don't think that using "I" is a license for touting your own opinion: "I strongly believe that Thomson's argument fails." Remember, philosophy is about presenting a persuasive argument, not about giving subjective opinions. We have editorial pages for that.
- Use active sentences: e.g. "Thomson argues that abortion is morally permissible." instead of "abortion is thought to be morally permissible according to Thomson"
- Put punctuation inside of quotations: see quote above.
- Use quotes sparingly.
- Citations: give credit where credit is due. Cite both direct quotes and paraphrases. Failure to do so not only is a breach of academic integrity, it is subject to severe penalties -- see the course outline.
- Put endnotes in brackets like this: "Blah blah blah" (Author 2005, p.50). You must have a bibliography with this format
- Put footnotes like so: "blah blah blah."¹ And if you cite again with a footnote citation style, it's like this:

Some author said blah blah blah that I'm talking about here.²

- Consult a style manual when in doubt.
- Use 11 or 12 point standard font. Double space the whole paper. Don't put extra spacing between paragraphs: what's the point? Useless space on the page does nothing for appearances.
- Leave one inch margins on each page (that means all sides of the page). Include page numbering, but never on the first page.
- Use a separate title page. That means your title is on the cover page, so it doesn't suddenly reappear on the first page of your essay. Remember to include your name, the title, my name, the course title.
- Use only your Cape Breton University account to email your attachments to me in Moodle. Clearly indicate the document name and file type - which should always be RTF or PDF.

¹ Maggie Someone, "Another Day in the Life of Something" (2nd Edition. G. Lee Bowie, Michaels and Solomon, eds. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996) p.201.

²Someone p.201.