

Department of Philosophy Writing Guidelines

1. Overview

- A. **What is a philosophy paper?**- The primary focus of a philosophy paper is the argument. An argument in philosophy is not merely a disagreement between people. An argument is a set of **premises** or **reasons** that are presented as support or grounds for believing a **conclusion**. If a claim is true, then there must be some good reasons for believing it. The goal of a good argument is to present and defend true conclusions. Philosophy is devoted to uncovering and clarifying the reasons that support conclusions and separating them from the claims that allegedly support the conclusion but fail. In philosophy papers we present, explain, and critically evaluate arguments.
- B. **Types of philosophy papers**- In some cases, a famous and influential argument will be the subject of a paper assignment. Sometimes a philosophy paper assignment will require you to present and explain two or more arguments. And some philosophy paper assignments will ask you to present your own argument for your own conclusion about a given subject. Papers assignments are **expository** when they require that the students present and explain an argument or set of ideas without critically evaluating them. Students writing expository papers should strive to demonstrate a thorough comprehension of the argument with a clear and well-organized presentation. Papers are **argumentative** when they require that the student present and explain an argument or arguments and then critically evaluate them for philosophical soundness by presenting objections or defend them against objections. Students writing expository papers must give a clear and well-organized exposition of the argument, then they should evaluate the philosophical success of that argument. More detailed suggestions for critical evaluations are in sections 13 and 14.
- C. **Purpose**- The purpose of a philosophy paper assignment is to develop students' critical thinking skills, help them acquire an understanding of important philosophical issues, make them better at presenting and evaluating arguments, and make them better writers.
- D. **Clarity**- In a philosophy paper you should strive to state the argument(s) with as much clarity and precision as you can whether it is your own position or someone else's. The conclusions of the arguments and the premises should be stated simply and clearly.
- E. **Thesis**- Every philosophy paper should contain a clearly articulated thesis. Your thesis is the central or overall claim that you are arguing for. If the paper is expository, then your thesis will simply state the expository goal of the paper. "Aristotle endorses a virtue theory of morality," for instance, could be the thesis of an expository paper that asked you to present and explain Aristotle's theory of ethics.

The thesis of an argumentative paper will clearly state the position that you are going to endorse in a philosophical debate. "I will argue that Aristotle's moral theory fails because it does not provide an adequate account of specific moral actions," is an example of an argumentative thesis for a paper assignment that asks you to present and critically evaluate Aristotle's moral theory. "The physicalist hypothesis is inadequate as an explanation of consciousness," is another example of an argumentative thesis in a paper about explanations of consciousness.

2. Structure

A. General recommendations. We recommend that most philosophy papers have the following kind of structure:

I. Introduction.

- Introduce the topic as stated in the assignment.
- Briefly state the thesis that the paper will defend.
- Briefly outline the argument that will support the thesis, discuss the position being presented, or the issues that the paper will discuss, and state the plan for the paper.

II. Exposition.

Depending on the type of paper:

- Explain the argument(s) regarding the topic(s) stated in I, supporting all important attributions with quotes, paraphrases, and citations from the text.
- Make each step of the argument(s) as clear as possible.

III. Critical Evaluation. (not applicable in expository papers)

- Enumerate the problems with the arguments that you laid out in II. Explain and support with textual references.

IV. Conclusion.

- Restate the thesis of the paper.
- Restate the basic issues that you explained in II.
- Restate the criticisms that you explained and defended in III.

B. Introduction

The introduction of your paper should range from a few paragraphs to a page or two, depending on the length of the paper. (A 4 page paper should not have a 2 page introduction, for example.)

In the introduction, avoid abstract or empty sentences like, "I will then describe the argument that Searle gives for his conclusion." A brief statement of the argument is much better and informs the reader about the subject of the paper: "Searle argues that computers cannot think because computers are incapable of intentionality and understanding." Similarly, "I will conclude that Kant's argument concerning space is mistaken because of developments in modern mathematics," is more illuminating to the reader than, "I will draw conclusions in this paper."

Quoting the dictionary definition of terms from Webster's or another desk reference is usually not appropriate for a philosophical paper. The philosophical use of a term are often not captured by a standard dictionary definition.

C. Sections II and III should not be intermingled.

While it may seem intuitive to criticize a point in an argument immediately after you have explained it, the reader is probably not clear at this point on the overall structure or goal of the argument. Be sure you have sufficiently explained the whole argument before evaluating it. And make sure it is clear to your reader at every point whether you are presenting or critically evaluating the argument.

D. Your conclusion should contain no surprises.

That is, try to avoid bringing up new issues, new criticisms, or different comments that belonged in the exposition or critical evaluation section. Students often make very interesting suggestions about what is wrong with the philosopher's position in the last few sentences of the paper without spelling out the details. Such comments belong in the body of the paper. The conclusion should, for the most part, restate the central accomplishments of the paper.

3. Mechanics of writing

Consult a standard manual of grammar and style for a complete listing of the rules of grammar, punctuation, usage, and style. The American Philosophical Association uses the Chicago Manual of style (listed below). Individual teachers may have preferences:

Style sheets:

Chicago Editorial Staff, The Chicago Manual of Style. 14th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993

Gibaldi, Joseph. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 5th ed. New York: Modern Language Association, 1999.

Guides to grammar and writing:

Aaron, Jane E. The Little, Brown Essential Handbook for Writers. 3rd ed. New York: Addison, Wesley, Longman Publishing, 2000.

Hacker, Diana. The Bedford Handbook for Writers. 3rd ed. Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin

Press, 1991.

Strunk, William and White, E.B. The Elements of Style. 4th ed. New York: Allyn and Bacon Publishing, 1999.

4. Common problems with certain words.

There are a number of writing problems that occur frequently enough to deserve special mention here:

- A. **People often confuse "then" and "than."** The former indicates sequence, either chronological or logical: "If I miss class, **then** I will miss the deadline." The latter is used to show contrast: "Jane is stronger **than** Jack."
- B. **"Very," "really," and "basically," are clumsy words to use in an academic paper.** They do not add anything to the sentence that is not said without them. "Further" often has the same problem or is misused. "He further argues that . . .," says little that, "He argues that . . .," or "He then argues that . . .," does not.
- C. **Avoid using the word, "feels," when attributing philosophical claims to an author.** When we write philosophy papers, we are discussing what the author has claimed, stated, argued, or said. We are rarely concerned with the author's feelings, nor are we in a position to know what they are. "Aristotle claims that rationality leads to the happy life," is better than, "Aristotle feels that rationality leads to the happy life."
- D. **"This," used at the beginning or inside a sentence to refer to something in the previous sentence is often problematic.** Consider, "This is what he means with the *cogito* argument." "This," is a pronoun, but the antecedent, or the noun that it refers to, is frequently unclear. Avoid the term unless it is absolutely clear what it refers to.
- E. **E. Capital letters should not be used for emphasis.**

5. Sentences.

- A. **Fragments.** Every sentence should have a subject and a verb. You should avoid sentence fragments. "Like his example of a triangle." for instance, is not a complete sentence.
- B. **Avoid passive voice.** Your choice of verbs should be careful and deliberate, and it should be active wherever possible. "Arguments were given in support of the liberal position," is in passive voice. No actor or subject is performing the action. "Mill argues in favor of the liberal position," tells us who is arguing and changes the verb from "were given" to "argues."
- C. **Avoid vacuous or empty claims.** Each sentence in your paper is an important opportunity to say something about the assigned topic. Sometimes we write sentences that on the surface seem to make a claim of substance, but nothing is actually stated.

Consider what is said by this example, "From this point forward other issues that Descartes proclaims in the Meditations are expressed and are thoroughly reasoned." When we simplify this sentence it seems to be saying that Descartes expresses and reasons some issues. But this point doesn't need to be made. What is important for a philosophy paper is the content of those claims. A sentence about what specific claims Descartes makes, or how he reasons from one point to the next would be much better.

- D. **Use transitions or write sentences so that the connection to the previous and next sentence is clear to your reader.**

6. Paragraphs

- A. **All paragraphs should have a clear thesis sentence that relates clearly to the thesis of the paper.** Usually the thesis sentence is at the beginning of the paragraph where it can help the reader understand how the point being made fits into the purpose of the paper. The rest of the paragraph should support this thesis sentence with explanations, quotes, and citations from the text.
- B. **If you are going to make a new point, then start a new paragraph.** Be careful about jumping too quickly from one point to the next or mixing too many issues together. Any new or different topics should be gathered together by topic and put into another paragraphs. Each paragraph should have cohesive unity that resembles a well-written paper.
- C. **Use transitions to make it clear to your reader how a paragraph is related to the previous or next paragraph.** Connect your paragraphs in a logical way, even if that means saying in the first sentence of a paragraph something like "Having discussed X, I will now consider Y." "Now that we have seen what the faculty of the will is for Kant, the next issue that needs to be addressed is what conditions make a will good instead of bad," is an example of a transition sentence that clarifies the connection between the issues being discussed in the adjacent paragraphs and helps the reader see the development of points in the paper.

7. Writing Style

- A. **The diction of a college paper should be more formal than conversational English.** We all say things like, "I don't buy that argument," or "What does she say about that?" in conversation, but those kind of casual and colloquial comments are not appropriate for the subject matter or context of a college paper.
- B. **We should avoid cliches in our writing.** Phrases like, "For thousands of years, philosophers have wondered about. . .," and "for all intents and purposes," are cheap

sayings that get casually thrown into a paper indicating to the reader that the author does not choose her words carefully. Sayings like these get used so often that they lose their meaning. The latter example gets misspelled as, "for all intensive purposes," because people have lost sight of what it is supposed to be expressing.

- C. **Avoid auto-biographical details about your experience in writing the paper.** Comments like, "I had a hard time reading Nagel," or "This assignment has taught me a lot," are not appropriate. The assignment is to address the paper topic, not give a diary entry or a casual statement about personal history.
- D. **"I believe," or "It is my opinion that," are often unnecessary in a paper, as well.** You are the author of the paper, so it goes without saying that the claims made in it are yours (with the exception of quotes and paraphrases). Adding that a claim is your "opinion," usually doesn't inform your reader of anything new. In fact, such claims may undermine your efforts to convince the reader.
- E. **Avoid wordiness.** We often include words in our sentences that are not necessary. Consider the differences between, "In an effort to further prove her view, Smith describes an experiment that shows her point," and, "Smith illustrates her point with an experiment." Sixteen words have been reduced to six. Ask yourself what is lost by changing, "The fact that the author believes that social justice is possible leads her to defend the claim that people should participate in their democratic systems," to, "She argues that people should participate in their democratic systems because social justice is possible." Twenty five words have been reduced to fifteen and with a dramatic improvement in the sentence.
- F. **Discussions of philosophical works, even ancient ones, should be in the present tense.** Aristotle, for instance, has long been dead, but the text which contains his arguments is still with us; it is current and living in a sense. The ideas in it are read and understood in the present. So replace, "Aristotle argued that," and "Hobbes' view was," with "Aristotle argues," and "Hobbes' view is."

8. Quotes

- A. **You should make use of relevant quotes to support any major attributions that you make to the author being discussed.** If you claim, "Descartes believes that the mind is indivisible," for instance, you should give a quote and citation of the passage where he makes that claim.
- B. **Quotes need to be introduced.** At a minimum, you should write, "Descartes claims," "Socrates states," or "Wittgenstein believes," and then give the quote. An unattributed quote floating in the middle of the text of your paper is confusing to the reader, its source is not clear, and is stylistically poor.

- C. **Quotes need to be explained.** The relevance, implication, and meaning of the author's claims in a quote need to be explained immediately after or before you give a quote. The majority of paper should be your own words, with support from the text.
- D. **Long quotes.** Any quotes 4 lines or longer should be single-spaced, indented, and introduced. ("Locke claims, [return, indent, begin long quote]) Be cautious about using quotes of this length. The paper should be primarily your own words. If you are going to use a quote of this length, be sure it is a good one and that all of it is relevant to the point you are making.
- E. **Using an Ellipsis.** If the quote is not all relevant, use an ellipsis (" . . .") to omit unnecessary parts. The ellipsis is only needed when you omit internal parts of the quote, not at the beginning or end. It is understood when you use a quote that there are omissions before and after. If you use an ellipsis, be careful not to distort or alter the author's claims through omission or by taking something out of context.
- F. **Citing your sources.** In every case where someone else's work, ideas, research, or writing is used in your paper, a citation must be given for appropriate credit. Citations should be given as footnotes, end notes, or in another standard and approved format. Typically, you will not be required to look at secondary sources in lower level courses. If you do, and if you use any of the ideas found in a secondary source, then you must give full credit in the form of a footnote or endnote, and a bibliographical citation. See the next section for guidelines. Using someone else's ideas from a secondary or primary source without giving them credit is plagiarism, a fancy way of describing stealing. The University's policy on plagiarism is available at <https://www.csus.edu/umannual/student/stu-100.htm>
- G. **Do not use quotes for emphasis.** Quotes "should not" be used to add extra stress to words as they are in this sentence.
- H. **Use/mention distinction for words.** Use quotations around a word if you are saying something about the word (mentioning it) to distinguish it from a case where you are using it (e.g. "good" is a frequent topic of philosophical writing).

9. Citations.

Use a standard format for citing your sources.

The easiest method of citation is the Modern Language Association's (MLA) parenthetical documentation. The principle behind this method is to cite sources in parentheses immediately after quotes or paraphrases and include only the information that is necessary to identify the source to the reader in the works cited page.

- A. If the author is mentioned in the sentence and only one source from that author is being used, all that is needed is the page number in parentheses. For example:
 - McCann (234) presents an argument that if God has no accidental properties then he cannot be temporal.
2. If the author's name does not appear, include it.
 - Is an eternal being capable of grasping tensed propositions? And if not, can any being incapable of knowing tensed propositions be omniscient (McCann, 243)?
2. If there is more than one work by the author, the work intended should be specified by date.
 - Conceptual relativity applies even to such fundamental concepts as "individual," and "object" (Putnam 1987, 18).
 - Using this method obviates the need for most endnotes and footnotes. The only notes needed are commentary notes by the author--and go sparingly on those. All the works used in the paper are listed in a works cited page at the end of the paper. Use the following forms:

A. Book

- Hacker, Diana. The Bedford Handbook for Writers. 3rd ed. Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin Press, 1991.

B. Article in Anthology or Textbook

- McCann, Hugh J. "The God Beyond Time." Philosophy of Religion. 2nd ed. Ed. Louis P. Pojman. Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1994. 231-245.

C. Article in Academic Journal

- Putnam, Hilary. "Models and Reality." The Journal of Symbolic Logic. 45:3 (September 1980) 464-482.

D. Article in Newspaper

- Bork, Robert H. "Again a Struggle for the Soul of the Court." New York Times 8 July 1992: B5.

E. Internet Source

Specify the title or filename and the source:

- Peter Davson-Galle, "Realistic Truth Relativism, Frameworks of Belief and Conceptual Schemes," Electronic Journal of Analytic Philosophy, 1:6 (Spring 1996), 8.
<http://www.phil.indiana.edu/ejap>

Works Cited

All entries should be listed alphabetically by author and chronologically within an author on a separate page at the end of the paper thus:

- Bork, Robert H. "Again a Struggle for the Soul of the Court." New York Times 8 July 1992: B5.
- Davson-Galle, Peter. "Realistic Truth Relativism, Frameworks of Belief and Conceptual Schemes," Electronic Journal of Analytic Philosophy, 1:6 (Spring 1996), 8.
<http://www.phil.indiana.edu/ejap>
- Hacker, Diana. The Bedford Handbook for Writers. 3rd ed. Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin Press, 1991.
- McCann, Hugh J. "The God Beyond Time." Philosophy of Religion. 2nd ed. Ed. Louis P. Pojman. Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1994. 231-245.
- Putnam, Hilary. "Models and Reality." The Journal of Symbolic Logic. 45:3 (September 1980) 464-482.
- _____ . The Many Faces of Realism. LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1987.

10. Proofread and edit your paper carefully.

- A. There should be no spelling mistakes in an academic paper, particularly since automatic spell checkers are so common on word processors.** Double check your spellings of proper names and philosophy terms that will not be in your spell checker.
- B. Check your paper carefully for grammar and punctuation mistakes.** Some of the most common mistakes in college writing are commas, and apostrophes in contractions and possessives. Consult the English grammar books listed above for specific rules. Strunk and White's The Elements of Style is a short and handy reference for grammar rules.
- C. Reading your paper out loud or having someone else read it can be helpful when proofreading.** You or your reader will notice awkward phrases, run-on sentences, non-sequiturs, and other problems that you would not notice otherwise.

11. Explain each step of the philosopher's arguments carefully and deliberately.

New terms need to be explained and the inferences that the author makes from one step of the argument to the next should be clear. A common mistake on philosophy papers is a failure to explain important concepts and arguments.

12. Audience.

You should write your philosophy papers as if your audience is intelligent and college-educated, but does not know about the issue you are addressing, and has not read the texts you have read. Do not write your paper for the instructor of the class, omitting important facts because you think she already knows them. One of the main goals of the writing exercise is to train students to carefully think through the issues themselves and learn to express and explain them clearly. Understanding a philosophical problem cannot be accomplished without being able to explain it simply and clearly. So in your paper you should strive to demonstrate that you understand all of the relevant issues, the steps in the arguments, and the problems associated with the arguments.

13. Critical evaluation.

You will often be asked to write a critical evaluation of a philosopher's position or an argument. An evaluation is a demanding task with specific guidelines. It is not simply an expression of the writer's opinions as many students think, although your views are a central part of it. As teachers, we want to see a demonstration of your critical reasoning abilities focused carefully on the topic. If you have been successful in the exposition portion of your paper, you have explained a number of specific steps and concepts that the philosopher(s) or arguments make in order to arrive at a philosophical conclusion. In the critical evaluation portion of your paper you should reconsider those steps with an eye towards identifying mistakes, missing or assumed premises, or important unexplained issues.

An argument can be criticized on the basis of four criteria:

A. The argument can be criticized for lack of clarity in the reasoning.

Sometimes the problem with reasoning is that it is just unclear what the author is trying to say. Of course, you must be careful when making this criticism that the problem is not your own lack of effort to understand challenging material. Nor is the point of this criticism to make a stylistic comment about vague writing. Hence, it is never permissible just to say that things aren't clear. You must say precisely what is not clear, and why this impedes your ability to understand and evaluate the reasoning at hand. Explain the philosophical significance of the lack of clarity.

Consider this argument. The premises are listed first with the conclusion following:

1. Drugs cause long term health problems.
2. Drugs cause people to be a threat to themselves and others.
3. Drugs impair people's judgment.
4. Therefore, it is wrong to take drugs.

In this argument it would be legitimate to claim that the term 'drug' is not clear enough for the

argument to be successful. Caffeine, for example, is a drug and it is also addictive, but it is not clear whether the author believes it is wrong to drink caffeinated beverages.

B. An argument can be criticized if the reasons given in support of the conclusion are false.

The argument for a conclusion succeeds or fails on the basis of the premises that support it. So if one or more of the premises are false, the conclusion will not follow. However, if you call the truth of the reasons into question, then you must provide your own reasons for doubting them. Simply expressing earnest doubts or your own heartfelt beliefs to the contrary without substantiation are of no real interest.

It is very important to notice that when reasoning is given for a conclusion, then there is rarely any need to focus on the truth of the conclusion directly. The truth of the conclusion is a function of the truth of the reasons, and the degree of support the reasons give to the conclusion.

Hence, whenever you call the truth of the conclusion into question, it should be either because you are questioning the truth of the reasons, or the degree of support the reasons give to the conclusion (see next section).

Another important basis for calling the truth of the reasons into question is logical consistency. Reasoning is logically inconsistent when it is committed to both the truth and the falsity of a certain statement. It is a basic law of logic that no statement can be both true and false, so anytime you find a contradiction you know that one of the things being claimed has to be false. As an example consider this reasoning:

1. Addictive drugs take away a person's freedom
2. Therefore, addictive drugs should not be legal.

As it stands, the argument seems to be committed to the truth of the general principle that it is wrong to take away a person's freedom. The problem is that making drugs illegal also takes away a person's freedom, specifically, the freedom to take drugs. Hence, the author is committed to a logical contradiction, viz., that the statement "It is wrong to take away a person's freedom" is both true and false.

C. An argument can be criticized because the reasons given don't support the conclusion.

In some cases, the reasons offered in support for a conclusion may be true, but they still don't give us adequate grounds for accepting the conclusion. The simplest way to address this issue is to think in terms of producing counterexamples. A counterexample is an example that undermines the reasoning by showing that even if the reasons are true, they don't necessarily support the conclusion. For example, reconsider this argument:

1. Drugs are addictive.

2. Drugs cause long term health problems.
3. Drugs cause people to be a threat to themselves and others.
4. Drugs impair people's judgment.
5. Therefore, it is wrong to take drugs.

Now, consider the drug morphine. Morphine is a drug that satisfies all the reasons given. It is addictive; it can cause long term health problems; and it can impair a person's judgment. Nevertheless it is widely used by doctors to relieve extreme pain and few would claim that it is wrong to do so.

It is important to understand what makes this a counterexample. Notice we have not called the truth of the reasons into question. That would have been done in the previous section. Rather, we have assumed the truth of the reasons, and shown that the conclusion still does not necessarily follow.

Criticisms of this sort are not necessarily devastating to the reasoning. Sometimes they simply require the author to formulate the conclusion more carefully. In this case, for example, the author might simply make an explicit exception for legitimate medical purposes. The value of the criticism, then, is very often just to achieve clarity about the author's meaning rather than to provide an absolute refutation the author's reasoning.

D. An argument may also be criticized because of unstated implications of the reasoning.

All reasoning rests on unstated presuppositions and implies conclusions other than the ones that are explicitly formulated. In many cases, objections can be made to these presuppositions.

Consider the following:

Currently illegal drugs should not be legalized because legalization will cause more people to become addicted to drugs.

This statement rests on some important presuppositions. One of these is that there are people who are now currently dissuaded from taking some drugs only because the drugs are illegal.

This is a very important assumption that might reasonably be called into question.

Another important presupposition of the above claim is that the negative result (increased drug addiction) would not be counterbalanced or outweighed by any positive results (e.g., a decrease in drug-related crime).

Here are some other considerations for writing good argument evaluations:

E. Even if you agree with the conclusion of an argument and you believe that the reasoning is sound, a good philosophy paper will address potential objections and defend against them.

Rather than simply agreeing with the author, present some possible objections and either explain how the author would respond to them, or what potential responses are available to her.

F. You might disagree with the conclusion and the premises given to support it.

Your critical evaluation will be similar to the previous case, but you will also explain which conclusion you think is true and why.

G. Often, a philosophy instructor is not looking for you to arrive at a specific criticism of an argument, although there are, in many cases, standard and obvious objections to be made.

You are not being indoctrinated into a dogma. Rather, you are being evaluated on your critical thinking and writing abilities. What you conclude is often not as important as explaining how you arrived at those conclusions. What is important in your critical evaluation is that you raise some plausible and well-defended objections to the position that you presented earlier in the paper. Explain and defend the criticism you are presenting.

H. Do not present open, unanswered, or rhetorical questions.

"Who's to say what a just society is?" or "How does Hume know that there is no physical substance?" or "How many heroin addicts have to die before the legalization advocates learn their lesson?" are examples of the worst kind of anti-intellectual and discussion-thwarting comments. State the objection that is behind these questions.

14. What not to do in a philosophical evaluation:

A. Disagreeing with an argument's or author's conclusion, but accepting the reasons for believing the conclusion is not an option in your critical evaluation.

If you disagree with a conclusion, then you must say so and explain why with evaluations of the argument that allegedly supports it. Simply rejecting their position is not acceptable, nor are responses like, "Socrates can believe x because he is entitled to his opinion, but I disagree," or "I choose not to believe Russell," without any further explanation why.

B. Evaluations of the author's historical, personal, or psychological background are not acceptable philosophical criticisms.

"Anselm was biased because everyone in his time believed in God," or "Descartes believed what he was brought up to believe by the Jesuits," or "Aristotle was merely defending the interests of his privileged class," are not sufficient philosophical criticisms. In fact, these are fallacious **ad hominem** attacks on the person that ignore the merits of the arguments.

C. Furthermore, stylistic evaluations of the author's work are not appropriate for philosophy papers. The purpose of a philosophical evaluation is not to comment on how clear or well-expressed the author's work is, nor is it to address whether or not the author has given enough

examples. So comments like, "Sartre's argument is well put together," "There are not enough examples," or "The argument is clearly stated and well-written," are not appropriate for a philosophy paper.

D. Do not misrepresent an author's reasoning.

If you are reconstructing someone else's argument, your evaluations will be stronger if you give the most charitable and accurate argument on their behalf that you can.

E. Avoid exaggeration.

If you overstate your position or the position you are analyzing, you obscure the facts and impede philosophical progress.

15. Avoid the use of "man," "mankind," "he," "him," and "his," when you mean to include all humans.

A great deal of evidence suggests that this kind of language has a significant and harmful effect on people. Women and girls are excluded when all examples are male or about mankind. Studies have shown that girls, for instance, are less likely to think of themselves in a wide variety of occupations when exposed to such language. Studies have also shown that discussions about "mankind" are much less likely to invoke considerations of both women and men, than discussions of "humankind." The repeated use of men in important examples has led many of us to have unfortunate expectations, either conscious or unconscious, about what women can do and what men can do. Imagine an example in a paper of a brain surgeon operating on a patient. If the author then said, "she stimulated the motor skill centers in the patient's brain," you would probably be surprised to hear the surgeon is a woman. Our surprise reflects expectations we have about who is in these roles or even who is capable of performing such roles. Varying our examples and avoiding "man" and "mankind" will benefit men and women alike.