

My Philosophy guide and rubric

Here are some guidelines to help you complete your midterm and final exams well:

- As with your papers, the aim should be (i) clarity and (ii) strong arguments.
- You will not be evaluated on **what** your views are. You will be evaluated on how clearly you explain your views and how well you defend them.
- An excellent answer does not have to be long. Use as many words as needed to answer the question, and no more.
- Use simple, clear language whenever possible.
- As with your papers, your aim in defending your views should be to occasionally go beyond the material discussed in class. That does not mean that every answer must be original; but, ideally, some should go beyond class material. That can take the form of a new example which either supports or counts against a premise, or a new argument for or against some view.
- You should not use any outside sources. If you do get any ideas from outside sources, you must put together a bibliography containing every source used, and email that to your TA when you hand in your My Philosophy answers. Failure to do this is a violation of the Honor Code.
- Be sure to answer every question which is visible. You can see whether you have any unanswered questions by looking at the boxes next to the section names. If they all have checks, you have answered every question.
- Your aim is to develop a consistent view which you are able to defend. So, your view should not generate any contradictions. If you do not think that your view is contradictory but the web site thinks it is, send me an email! I am willing to be convinced, and I want to make room for everyone to develop their own views.
- Philosophy is hard. You may find two arguments individually plausible even though they support contradictory views, and it may be very hard to decide which argument you think is better. That is fine. In that kind of case, don't pretend to be more sure than you are. You can even say things like 'I am very unsure whether X or Y is true. I am tempted to

believe X because of consideration A. But in the end I think that Y is somewhat more likely to be true because of B.' That is a sign of someone who has understood both sides of an issue and tried to think it through to discover the truth!

- It is very likely that you will be faced with a situation in which you are asked a 'yes or no' question and are unsure about what the correct answer to the question is. That is perfectly normal; again, philosophy is hard, so some uncertainty is to be expected! In those cases you should decide what answer you think is most likely to be true, and go for that one. In general, the views you end up with on your My Philosophy page should be thought of as your best attempt to figure out the truth, not things that you are certain of or would stake your life on.
- If you find yourself changing your answers to prior questions, that is perfectly fine; that is a sign that you are thinking through the connections between these issues!

Your long answers will be evaluated by the following criteria:

- (i) It answers the question.
- (ii) It gives a defense of that answer.
- (iii) It is clear what the defense is, and how it supports the answer given.
- (iv) That defense is strong, in one of the following senses:
 - (a) If the defense given is one we have discussed in class: a reasonable person could think that, of the defenses of the answer we have discussed in class, this is the strongest.
 - (b) If the answer given is not a position we have discussed in class: the defense shows thought, a reasonable person could believe the premises of the defense, and the premises support the answer given.
- (v) The defense in some way, which need not be earth-shattering, goes beyond material discussed in class.

