

PHIL 24810: A guide to writing essays

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The central aim of this course is to help you form your own views about philosophical theology, in response to some of the central arguments which have been given in that field. A secondary aim of the course is to improve your ability to write analytically and think clearly about arguments. The essays in the course are designed to contribute to both of these aims.

Your essays should consist of the following parts, which should be numbered and separated.

1. A statement of the view you aim to defend. This will typically be one sentence. Examples from the material we have covered so far might include: ‘An omnipotent perfectly good being does not exist’; ‘God existence is compatible with the existence of evil’; etc.
2. An explanation of the main reason why you hold the view in question. This should be an argument in favor of the view. It should make clear what the premises of the argument are, how they lead to the conclusion, and why you think that the premises of the argument are plausible. This will typically take between 1 and 3 paragraphs. If you prefer, you can also state the argument using numbered premises.
3. An explanation of what you take to be the strongest objection to the argument given in part 2, and an explanation of why you do not find that objection convincing in the end. This will typically take between 1 and 3 paragraphs.
4. An explanation of what you take to be the strongest objection the view stated in part 1, and an explanation of why you do not find that objection convincing in the end. This will typically take between 1 and 3 paragraphs.

That is all. There is no need for extra introductory or concluding paragraphs. I am happy to look at rough drafts, or answer questions about the papers.

Papers will be evaluated based on (i) clarity, (ii) persuasiveness of arguments, and (iii) originality.

There is no need to do research beyond the readings assigned for the course. Spend your time thinking, not googling. If, contrary to my advice, you do look at outside sources, every outside source you look at must be cited. If you have questions about what the honor code requires of you, please ask me.