

A Checklist for Philosophical Writing

1. Be sure that your essay follows an explicit outline described at the beginning of the paper; the outline should include precise topic sentences for each paragraph.
2. Be sure each of your paragraphs has a three-part structure that includes a precise thesis sentence, an argument for the thesis, and examples of the thesis. The paragraph may also include commentary about the thesis, provided that the other three items are also included.
3. Be sure to write in paragraphs that are long enough to develop an argument.
4. Be sure there are transitions between all paragraphs and between all sentences.
5. Avoid claims that are too strong, and make your points as modestly as possible.
6. Be sure to cite any claim that is unusual, controversial, or has established literature that the reader should know. When in doubt, be sure to cite.
7. Whenever you give an argument, be sure to exemplify it with a real-world case.
8. Write in ordinary language, explain any technical terms, and assume the reader is an intelligent layperson.
9. Use different paragraphs when you discuss the views of different persons. In the same paragraph, be sure to use the same person and the same number in your grammatical constructions.
10. Be sure to identify each claim or statement either as yours, or as that of others, or as both.
11. Be sure to substantiate every claim that you make. Do not beg any questions, make no appeals to the people, and take nothing for granted.
12. After completing your essay, read it to check that you have avoided all redundancies.
13. Be sure to proofread your paper carefully before submitting it.
14. Use active voice.
15. Avoid repetition of the same word in successive lines or sentences.
16. Be sure to use short sentences, namely, sentences that are a maximum of three or four lines.
17. When constructing an individual sentence or listing items in a series, be sure to use parallel structure.
18. Avoid run-on sentences, avoid sentence fragments, and avoid beginning sentences in the same way.

19. Maintain subject-predicate agreement.
20. Use articles appropriately.
21. When you mean to use the word "because," do not use the word "for," or the word "as," or the words "due to."
22. Use a comma before the last item in a series.
23. Use commas neither between two items in a series nor between compound subjects/predicates.
24. Avoid use of it and this. These two words often have unclear referents.
25. Try to place adverbs before or after the verb and try not to break up verbs with adverbs.
26. Try to place references to time at/near the beginning of a sentence.
27. Avoid use of archaic or stilted language, e.g., "heretofore," "pursuant," "herein."
28. Express thoughts in ways that avoid excess words.
29. "People" is preferable to "persons" in most cases.
30. Begin and end your essays with short, interesting "hooks."