

Argument Analysis Assignment

PHI 301/401 Philosophy Seminar

Fall 2008, Jared Bates

All students will write 8 weekly half-page papers on the reading assignments that are starred on the Reading Schedule from the Syllabus. The primary purpose of these papers is to cultivate skill in (i) recognizing the main thesis and supporting arguments in a piece of philosophical writing and (ii) analyzing (reconstructing) those arguments. Additionally, Juniors will write one argument analysis on the first reading assignment.

Due Dates

The papers are due at the beginning of class the week of the given reading assignment. Late papers will not be accepted for a grade.

Mechanics

The papers are to be approximately one-half page in length, using single spacing and normal font and margin sizes. The papers are to be polished for organization, spelling and grammar.

Content

Your papers should identify and reconstruct, in your own words and with as much precision as possible, the main arguments of the given reading assignment. This requires that you (i) identify the main thesis and supporting arguments of the reading assignment and (ii) give a concise analysis of those arguments, making sure that you identify all their key premises (stated and unstated) and conclusions. To satisfy the half-page limit, you will have to make important decisions what to exclude, and you will have to take great strides to balance detail and precision against conciseness. The following guidelines may also help to elucidate the expected content of these papers:

- Criticism. Critical comments (e.g., "I think Singer's argument fails because ...") should not be included in the papers. The goal is to get to a clear presentation of some argument or concept, not an assessment of the author's work.
- Quotation. Direct quotation from the assigned readings is discouraged. The papers are to represent your analysis of the assigned reading, and so should be in your own words. Use of the author's technical terms is perfectly fine, but extended quotes or close paraphrases are unnecessary.
- Organization. The arguments you reconstruct should be presented in a logical and intuitive order. This may or may not coincide with the author's presentation. Half-pagers which slavishly follow the author's order of presentation tend to include too much (e.g., going over unnecessary arguments), go too long, or skip over subtleties (e.g., unstated parts of arguments).

Assistance

You are strongly encouraged to seek assistance with your paper throughout the writing process. There are three main sources of assistance readily available to you:

- Me. Yes, me. I have office hours and can make appointments outside office hours to talk about the material for your paper, to talk about your writing ideas, or even to read an early draft of your paper. I'm happy to help any way I can.
- Each other. Sometimes it's midnight, and I'm not around. But you have peers inside and outside this class. Try your ideas out on them. Get them to read an early draft. Or a troublesome sentence. You can offer the same service to them in return. Of course, don't collaborate so much that you turn in a co-authored paper, but you can help each other out in plenty of other ways short of that.
- The Learning Center. <http://learningcenter.hanover.edu/> Last, but certainly not least, there is the Learning Center, which offers a variety of assistance for students in their coursework. They're open 7-11pm, Sun-Thurs, in (Old) Science Hall 120.

Grading Criteria

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| 23-25 | Excellent | Far exceeds standards of basic adequacy. A model. |
| 20-22 | Outstanding | Goes well beyond basic standards. |
| 17-19 | Satisfactory | Satisfies basic standards in all ways. |
| 14-16 | Deficient | Falls short of basic standards in some substantial way(s). |
| 0-15 | Unacceptable | Range of serious shortcomings. |

Performance relative to the basic standards of adequacy is determined by the following questions: Did you identify the central conclusion of the reading assignment? Did you state it correctly, clearly, and precisely? Did you identify the main supporting argument for that conclusion? Did you give a correct, thorough, and precise reconstruction of the argument, paying special attention to its premises? Did you give a clear and concise account of the most important points in the reading assignment? Did you avoid the pitfalls (e.g., critical comments, quotes, close paraphrases, poor organization)? Are there any errors in spelling, grammar or organization?