

Philosophy of Cognitive Science

FINAL PAPER OUTLINE INSTRUCTIONS

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1 OUTLINE: DUE 17.06.2014

1.1 Overview

A philosophy paper is a reasoned defense of a claim. As such, your paper must offer an argument. There are a variety of guides to writing a philosophy paper online. The '[Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper](#)' from the Harvard College Writing Center is a good one.

A good philosophy paper identifies a thesis and then engages with that thesis in one or more of the following ways. Namely, it:

- Identifies an argument whose conclusion is the thesis and criticizes it, either by showing that the conclusion does not follow from the premises or that at least one of the premises is false, or both;
- Identifies an argument and defends it against someone else's criticism(s);
- Offers a new reason for a thesis;
- Offers a counterexample against a thesis;
- Discusses what would follow from the thesis, if it were true;
- Revises or repairs a thesis to avoid an objection; and/or
- Compares and contrasts the strengths and weaknesses of two opposing positions about the thesis.

1.2 Tips

KISS. *Keep it Simple.* A good philosophy paper is modest in ambitions: one should pick a manageably small point that can be argued clearly and cogently. A common mistake is to take on too big a topic to be dealt with in a paper. For example, a good paper topic might be a critical assessment of Putnam's response to the privacy argument, or a comparison Pylyshyn's and Churchland's positions on the role of folk psychological notions like 'belief' in cognitive science, or a comparison and contrast of Kahneman's and Gigerenzer's positions on human rationality, or a critical assessment of Clark and Chalmers' notion of 'Extended Cognition'.

Aim for an Easy Read. *Easy reading is hard writing.* Forget about this notion that being “deep” (whatever that means) entails being obscure. That is a lot of rubbish. You should instead aim to write a paper that is clear and straightforward. This is harder than it looks.

Charity. *Be charitable to your opponents.* If the objection you raise could be easily answered by an opponent, then don’t make it; Similarly, don’t start with assumptions that your opponent is sure to reject.

Discuss the issues with others. *Discuss your proposed paper topic with your colleagues.* The act of talking through a paper idea with someone is often extremely valuable. Can you give an elevator pitch about your paper? If I bumped into you on the street and asked how your paper was going, could you give me a sharp 90 second description of the core idea? This is another thing that is harder than it looks.

1.3 Outline Requirements

Your outline should be between 800-1000 words. The outline should answer the following questions: What is the thesis you will discuss? What needs to be explained to the reader to set up your discussion? Is there terminology or other stage-setting required? How will you engage with the thesis? (See above list for hints). In what order should you present your arguments? Do any of the arguments presuppose information that you haven’t yet covered? What are the strongest two or so objections you can think of to your position? How would you reply to those objections?

Your outline should have a clear answer to each of these questions (when relevant). I should know what your paper will be about, what your position is with respect to your thesis, the arguments you plan to make, the objections (if any) you plan to address, and how you will respond.

1.4 Submission Instructions

Please submit your assignment in .pdf format, formatted with sufficiently wide margins for comments, to gregory.wheeler@lrz.uni-muenchen.de. **The subject heading** of your email should read: "Phil CogSci Outline: *<Your Name>*". Be sure to include your name on your outline, too.

Questions? Email me, stop by my office, or schedule a meeting.