

Ibadan Distance Learning Centre Series

PHI 302

PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH AND WRITING

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Study Session1: The Nature of Philosophical Writing and Research

Introduction

Reading, writing and research are integral parts of the pursuit of knowledge in any field of study or inquiry since the knowledge claimed sought and defended in such fields of inquiry are fundamentally dependent on the manner in which you engage in these activities.

With particular reference to research and writing, the particular field of inquiry determines how research is carried out and how writing is done.

This accounts for the variations in the techniques and pattern of research and writing in the sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities.

In the present chapter, it is fitting to begin the series of lectures with understanding the nature of philosophical writing and research, its types and fundamental objectives. In achieving these objectives, attention is paid to the meaning of philosophy and how such meaning determines research and writing within the field of study.

In this study session, you will learn about meaning of philosophy, types of philosophical writing, some fundamental philosophical writing.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 1

After you have studied this study session, you should able to:

- 1.1 Explain the Meaning of Philosophy.
- 1.2 List and Discuss the Types of Philosophical Writing.
- 1.3 Examine Some Fundamental Philosophical Writing.

1.1The Meaning of Philosophical Writing

Philosophy is itself a difficult concept to define. Many introductory texts in philosophy affirm that there are no consensus among philosophers themselves on what exactly philosophy means. However, the history of thought shows that philosophers are always concerned with, or motivated by, life's fundamental questions, or what is sometimes referred to as the '**Big Questions**' such as:

- How should you live?

- Is there free will?
- How do you know anything?
- What is real? Or,
- What is truth?

While philosophers do not agree among themselves on either the range of proper philosophical questions or the proper methods of answering them, they do agree that merely expressing one's personal opinions on controversial topics like these is not doing philosophy.

Rather, philosophers insist on first attaining clarity about the exact question being asked, and then providing answers supported by clear and logically structured arguments. Such well-constructed and logically structured arguments are meant to primarily analyse and critique such fundamental questions and the ideas you live by in every facets of our existence.

Philosophy is thus a critical and rational activity concerned with the most fundamental questions of human existence and an analysis of usually taken-for-granted worldviews, beliefs, knowledge claims and ideas about human existence.

Hence core philosophical activity is summed up in three questions:

1. What is real (the metaphysical/ontological concern)?
2. How do you know (the epistemological concern)?
3. What is the moral life (the axiological/moral concern)

From the foregoing, an inquiry or research in philosophy is a form of questioning often revolving around the nature of reality, knowledge, and value. This notion of inquiry is the beginning of doing philosophy, that is, rational of inquiring into the nature of things.

Hence carrying out research or writing an essay in philosophy is quite an uneasy task as the questions dealt with by the philosopher is often difficult to answer, requiring a careful and rigorous analytical process for any answer to make sense. Even the most logically-structured answer are not full proof or without lapses.

It is thus important that an ideal philosophical write-up leads the reader in undeniable logical steps from obviously true premises to an unobvious conclusion. While arguing about these questions may appear silly or pointless to many, the satisfactions of philosophy are often derived from

Box 1.1: Satisfactions of Philosophy

Discovering and explicating how they are logically connected

Constructing and defending philosophical arguments to answer them in turn.

In short, good philosophy proceeds with modest, careful and clear steps. It is necessary to note here that the philosopher employs the skills of good writing to achieve the above, in most cases.

As such, research and writing in philosophy involves understanding the basic philosophical question(s) that drive(s) a particular research or write-up, applying the needed philosophical tools and methods of criticism and analysis and ensuring coherency, clarity and aptness in a philosophical essay.

Also philosophical writing involves making a claim and providing support or evidence for it. The strength of a write-up in philosophy depends largely on the strength of the evidence and the strength of the relationship of the evidence to any conclusion arrived at.

-proceeds with modest, careful and clear steps
- Philosophy.

The evidence that is used has to be more than just opinion or some other unsupported claim. Any claim not supported by good reason quickly stifles discussions in philosophy.

1.2 Types of Philosophical Writing

There are two major ways of classifying the forms or types of philosophical

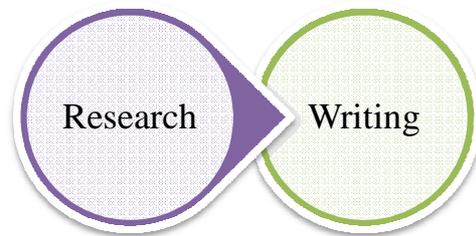


Figure 1.1: Forms of philosophical

Source: SchulPortals Inc. ©.

Philosophical writing and research can be categorised in specific or broad terms. In specific terms, philosophical writing and research include:

1. Researching and writing summaries or reviews,
2. Assertive essays.
3. Affirmative essays.
4. Refutations
5. Dialogues
6. Research essays

In broad terms, philosophical writing and research in any of these specific forms can be classified as either *analytic or argumentative*.

A summary is a short piece of writing about another piece of writing. Its purpose is to condense a long piece of writing into a concise summation of its meaning. A summary is a concise statement of the main points in a philosophical work.

It leaves out all the extraneous materials that do not advance the argument, organizes the information for clarity, and paraphrases the language used by the author. Where the original work may have been wandering, thick, or abstruse, the summary is clear and direct to the point.

■ The philosophical writing and research can be categorised as analytic or argumentative. TRUE/ FALSE

TRUE

It reports with or without critical assessment the claim advanced in the work and the reasons that back it up. A summary must therefore accurately represent the original work, clearly state the essential contents of the arguments, make the form of the argument clear, and omit all extraneous materials.

An assertion essay conveys an author's beliefs. It provides a format for expressing the writer's views and showing how such views are uniquely his or hers. The purpose of an assertion essay is to convey one's belief(s) in a way that shows how one's thinking extends from one's identity.

To effectively convey what a writer thinks to others, he or she must make an effort to help the reader understand the meaning of his or her belief statement. A belief statement does little to convey one's thought unless it is clearly stated.

This will involve analysis of the main words used to state the belief and, perhaps, also include the use of examples to show how the belief may be applied in reality. It is also important for the writer to provide the reasons for a belief in a coherent and logical manner.

Explaining the support and evidence for a belief statement shows readers that the statement fits into a system of beliefs and that it is not an arbitrary or isolated thought, but is connected with the writer's overall thinking. It is also important that in an assertive essay, the writer is able to draw out some of the consequences of his or her views.

Box 1.2: Definition of Affirmative Essay

An affirmative essay is a format for writing about another author's ideas. Philosophy is often pictured as a process of disagreement and refutation.

Yet in some cases, philosophizing involves agreeing with the views of a particular author. Your points of agreement with an author can make an excellent basis for developing an essay either to further such points or provide practical examples that reiterates the views.

The purpose of an affirmative essay is therefore for a person to work with another author's point or idea that you have some agreement with, explain that idea, explain the author's reasoning, provide your reasons for agreement, and describe the significance of this point to human thought and existence.

It is very difficult to write about another person's work as a whole, especially with the complex works of great philosophers. It helps to start with a distinct point (or idea) taken from the author's work.

The point chosen might be directly stated by the author or it might be unstated but implied. Either way, the primary task is to provide an interpretation of what the author says in order to show how one get that point (idea) from it.

Box 1.3: Definition of Essay of Refutation

Essays of refutations are the direct opposite of affirmative essays. It is simply a process of discrediting an author's viewpoint by employing coherent and logical counterarguments, evidences and proofs. The primary aim of refutations is to show that a position is false, implausible or not logically coherent.

Dialogue has been one of the great genres of philosophical writing since the classical Greeks. In fact, **Plato's** dialogues (in which, for the most part, Socrates is the chief interlocutor) are still the most sophisticated representatives of the genre.

Still, dialogues by **Berkeley**, **Hume** and other philosophers (as well as scientists such as Galileo) are of considerable philosophical interest and literary value. Because they require a clear grasp of the philosophical positions involved:

- Excellent reasoning skills,
- Psychological insight,
- Literary ability,

Dialogues are one of the most difficult writing genres in philosophy.

1. A dialogue is usually a conversation between two or more persons holding different philosophical views mostly on a subject matter.
2. A dialogue allows a dramatic representation of the strengths and weakness of a philosophical position to be revealed in the course of a conversation between persons holding those views.

In **Plato's** dialogues there is often an attempt to show someone that they do not know what they think they know. Such dialogues often end in *aporia* or puzzlement. Other Platonic dialogues have the function of stating positive philosophical theses in the face of opposition.

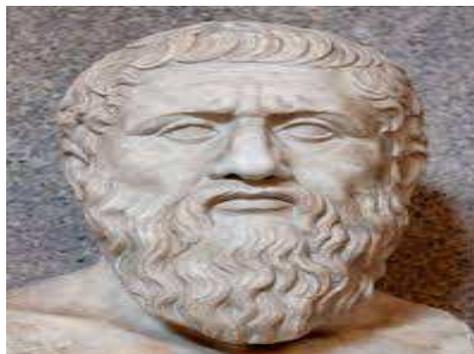


Figure 1.2: Plato

Source: <http://www.zentrader.ca/blog/?p=10673>

For example, in the *Gorgias*, **Plato** defends the radical moral thesis that “it is better to suffer injustice than to do it” against the sophists and politicians who utterly reject this doctrine.

Occasionally philosophers will write dialogues between abstractions, say, a dialogue between Faith, Reason and Truth; but this is much less frequent than dialogues between people

A research paper is often the most extensive and important project in a philosophy class. It will often involve the use and effective synthesis of many of the skills. A research essay typically requires that you locate and examine information from many sources, almost always involving library research, and at times the use of the World Wide Web or conversations with reliable authorities.

Typically a paper of this kind will require that you find a problem and thesis, give an exposition of materials relevant to stating and resolving the problem, and make a statement of the resolution of the problem or the conclusion.

- is often the most extensive and significant project in a philosophy class.
- Research paper.

This may require giving and analysing arguments, explanations and so forth as well as providing criteria for evaluating the adequacy of competing positions. It will almost always require that the research be documented in an appropriate way.

These forms of philosophical writing discussed above can be categorised under too broad headings:

- Analytic essays.
- Argumentative essays.

1.2.1 Analytic Essays

An analytic essay is one in which the writer restate in his or her own words the argument the line of reasoning from premises to conclusion of a work, passage or essay of philosophy. In so doing, the writer shows that he or she understands the structure of the argument.

Analytic essays include reviews, summaries and, in some cases, affirmative essays.

1.2.2 Argumentative Essays

An argumentative essay on the other hand is one in which the writer aims to convince the reader of the truth of an opinion or position. Usually, this will require analysing arguments for other, competing opinions or positions, and demonstrating that they are weaker than the arguments for one's position.

Thus argumentative essays include (indeed depend on) philosophical analysis, whereas analytic essays are not necessarily argumentative (unless one is called upon to evaluate critically the argument one is explicating). Refutations dialogues and affirmative essays can be classified under argumentative essays.

■ _____ on the other hand is one in which the writer aims to convince the reader of the truth of an opinion or position.

- (a) Refutations Dialogue
- (b) Analytic Essays
- (c) Argumentative Essays
- (d) Research Paper

□ (c) Argumentative Essays

In fact, both broad categorizations are interwoven to the extent that one cannot always be separated from the other. For instance, research essays essentially involve both analysis and argumentation.

1.3 Some Fundamental Objectives of Philosophical Writing

The fundamental objectives of Philosophical Writing include:

- Analysis
- Clarity
- Criticism
- Coherence

- Conciseness

1.3.1 Analysis

By analysis is implied the reduction of complex ideas or explication of human situations into understandable, relational concepts. Through analysis, essential concepts are extracted from experience so that they may be more easily understood and debated.

According to **A. P. Martinich**, analysis is analogous to definition. Definitions are explicitly about giving the meanings of words; analyses are explicitly about giving the necessary and sufficient conditions for concepts.

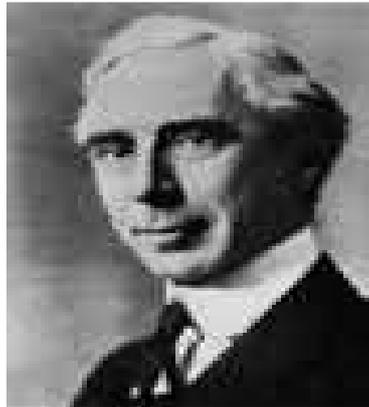


Figure 1.4: A. P. Martinich

Source: www.goodreads.com/author/similar/219613.A_P_Martinich

Since words express concepts, definitions are the linguistic counterparts to analyses. Every analysis, like every definition, consists of two parts, an analysandum and an analysans.

- The analysandum is the notion that needs to be explained and clarified, because there is something about it that is not understood.
- The analysans is the part of the analysis that explains and clarifies the analysandum, either by breaking it down into parts or by specifying its relations to other notions.

An analysis tries to specify in its analysans *necessary and sufficient conditions* for the concept expressed in the analysandum. Necessary conditions are those that the analysans must contain in order to avoid being too weak. While sufficient conditions are those that are enough to guarantee that the concept in the analysans is satisfied.

Analysis can be defective for three reasons: if it is circular, too strong, or too weak. An analysis is circular if the analysandum, or its key term, occurs in the analysans.

It is too strong just in case it is possible to give an example of the notion being analyzed that does not satisfy all the conditions specified in the analysans; conversely, an analysis is too weak just in case it is possible to describe something that satisfies all the conditions set down in the analysans, but is not an instance of the analysandum.

- How many reasons could analysis be defective?
- Three reasons.

Generally, analysis must fulfil its primary goal of understanding. As such, the idea of analysis presupposes that the object of philosophical analysis is the attainment of the understanding through a simplification of the text in question. When analysis is done without understanding and simplicity, the goal has been defeated.

1.3.2. Clarity

All too often, you simply take for granted or assume that humans have common experiences that lead to commonly held understandings of what you communicate to each other. You are, after all, thrown into the same world with many already established, taken for granted ideas of what is entailed in human experience.

One responsibility philosophers have is to challenge and ultimately clarify those constructs you use to make sense of the world; constructs often taken for granted rather than clarified and truly understood. But 'clarity' is itself a complex concept with many dimensions.

However, in philosophy, the dimension that stands out most of all is precision, which involves avoiding ambiguity, vagueness and indeterminacy. A work in philosophy should not be ambiguous vague or indeterminate if it must be clear.

For a philosophical write-up not to be ambiguous, the specific or particular sense in which words and concepts are used must stand out. A writer should not assume that the audience already knows the meaning or the sense in which he or she uses a concept.

Rather, it is his or her duty to make the sense of a word or concept stand out in the work. To avoid vagueness, an author must express his or her thought clearly and coherently. A poorly expressed thought or one that is not coherent in meaning only blurs clarity.

Also points must be established very firmly without wavering to avoid indeterminateness in writing. The ability to do these allows for clarity.

1.3.3 Criticism

Criticism means making judgments as to value. Philosophers judge the instrumental/practical value of ideas, concepts, theories, precepts and perspectives; and in this critical, interpretive mode, they build new and better conceptual understandings.

They ask questions such as do they work, and if not, how can you improve them? Criticism allows a researcher or writer in philosophy to investigate and then “mediate” experience and thereby formulate solutions to problems; problems of a specific type. It is also clear that in “extracting” conceptual constructs that drive actual practice (rather than from some imagined practice), philosophy is a very qualitative, experiential method.

Criticism can be destructive or constructive as evident in the history of philosophy.

Box 1.4: Destructive criticisms

Destructive criticisms are primarily aimed at rubbishing or rendering irrational and untenable a particular theory, idea, belief, thought or knowledge claim.

For instance the positivists' attack on metaphysics is more often than not destructive. Constructive criticism on the other hand seeks to identify problems in a particular theory, idea, belief, thought or knowledge claim with the primary goal of reconstructing it or making it better. Constructive criticism is encouraged for better scholarly sportsmanship as no idea is full proof.

1.3.4 Coherence

A philosophical essay is coherent if its parts are logically and orderly consistent and related. An integral part of coherence is continuity, that is, the way an essay moves from one part to another toward its goal.

An essay that meanders, seemingly not directed to any particular destination, is defective even if each sentence is charged with great rhetorical energy. There are many ways in which coherence is achieved in essays.

Sometimes one part of an essay coheres with another because they share a subject matter. In addition to sharing a specific subject matter, sentences hang together in other ways. One of these ways is through stock phrases that mark the boundaries of large parts of the essay: the beginning, the middle, and the end.

Whichever pattern one uses, a writer must strive to avoid incoherency because it can become the most defective factor/aspect of any essay.

1.3.4 Conciseness

Conciseness combines brevity and content. Being concise means conveying a lot of information in a brief space. Brevity, perhaps, does not call for much comment. It is desirable because it typically makes fewer demands on the reader's attention and understanding.

An author should realize that she is costing her audience the time it takes to read her writing. Although brevity is a good policy, it admits of exceptions. Sometimes the rhythm of language recommends a wordier sentence.

Also, sometimes brevity approaches turgidity. That is, it is sometimes necessary to use more, rather than fewer, words in order to stretch out the content of a sentence and thereby make it more intelligible to your reader.

■ _____ means conveying a lot of information in a brief space

- (a) Concise
 - (b) Brevity
 - (c) Rhythm
 - (d) Language
- (a) Concise

Further, brevity does not guarantee efficiency; it concerns only *how* something is said and not at all what is said. In determining the efficiency or economy of a sentence or essay, one must consider content in addition to brevity.

A brief but vacuous sentence does not communicate more efficiently than a prolix but informative one. Thus, it is not in itself desirable to sacrifice content for the sake of brevity, although this might be desirable for some other reason: to vary sentence length or to prepare the reader for some complicated explanation.

Thus, brevity and content must be balanced. That is the force of the admonition to be concise.

Summary for Study Session 1

In this Study Session 1, you have learnt that:

1. In this Lecturer, you have examined the meaning of philosophical writing and research, its types and primary objectives. Summarily, research and writing in philosophy involves understanding the basic philosophical question(s) that drive(s) a particular research or write-up, applying the needed philosophical tools and methods of criticism and analysis and ensuring coherency, clarity and aptness in a philosophical essay.

2. Also philosophical writing involves making a claim and providing support or evidence for it. You have also examined the different types of philosophical writing as well as the need to aim at coherence, conciseness, criticism, and analysis in philosophical writing and research.
3. In summary, research and writing in philosophy must focus on not descriptive or narrative orientations, but basic, fundamental, and very importantly, critical approach, following the rules of logic and argumentation. All these are summarized in the attitude of analyticity.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 1

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Study Session.

SAQ 1.1 (Tests learning outcome 1.1)

Define philosophy.

SAQ 1.2 (Tests learning outcome 1.2)

What makes a writing or research philosophical?

SAQ 1.3 (Tests learning outcome 1.3)

Distinguish between analytic and argumentative essays in philosophy

SAQ 1.4 (Tests learning outcomes 1.4)

List and explain some primary objectives in writing and research in philosophy.

SAQ 1.5 (Tests learning outcomes 1.5)

What is the difference between analysandum and an analysans?

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Study Session 2: Philosophical Writing vs. Scientific Writing

Introduction

In this lecture, an attempt shall be made to elaborate more clearly on what it means to research and write within the sphere of philosophy as distinct from scientific research and writing. It is important to draw such a distinction in order to avoid slipping from one into the other while researching and writing.

Science has no doubt gained a strong popularity in the last two centuries and continues to do so to the extent that scientific research and writing is given priority in school curricula, academic sponsorship, scholarship, journal and book publishing and the like.

The elevation of science has often been done without regards for other modes of inquiry that do not employ the method of science such as inquiries in the humanities and in philosophy in particular.

However, although the scientific community has laboured earnestly to enthrone the scientific method as the only valid method of inquiry, other modes of inquiry continue to thrive. It is thus essential to draw a clear-cut distinction, at this point, between philosophical and scientific inquiry and research.

In this study session, you will learn about science as descriptive and philosophy as normative, object of studying scientific and philosophical research and writing, method of study

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 2

After you have studied this study session, you should be able to:

- 2.1 Discuss Science as Descriptive and Philosophy as Normative
- 2.2 Explain Object of Study in Scientific and Philosophical Research
- 2.3 Examine the Method of Study.

2.1 Science as Descriptive and Philosophy as Normative

Science as an academic discipline studies natural objects and events in the universe in order to discover regularities and laws governing them. Scientific research or writing does not create the

natural world. Rather, it observes by experimentation and records what has been observed by description.

Box 2.1: Science as a descriptive discipline

Science is thus primarily a descriptive discipline although every now and then theoretical constructs in science bears elements of normativity that quickly turns them to philosophical issues particularly in epistemology and the philosophy of science. Science is thought to describe the natural objects and events in the universe as it is.

It does not focus on painting a normative picture of the world or providing a normative understanding of the universe. Its approach to the universe is ideally experimental and descriptive.

Philosophical inquiry, research or writing, on the other hand, is primarily normative or prescriptive; it is concerned with how things ought to be viewed rather than how they are viewed or understood.

Its inquiry into the nature of reality, knowledge and values does not require the observation of particular things or events or the gathering of particular data but a prescriptive interpretation and analysis of already available data, generalizations and information about the universe.

Put differently, questions such as:

- ❖ What is real?
- ❖ Is there an ultimate reality?
- ❖ How do you know what you claim to know?
- ❖ What makes an action moral?
- ❖ What is the best form of human society and the state?, cannot be resolved by merely describing things and events in the universe. Rather they are best resolved through a rational prescriptive inquiry into the nature of things.

This does not in any way imply that philosophical inquiry does not need the services of science or vice versa. While philosophers may, from time to time, make use of scientific generalizations

or results, they generally avoid the scientist's specialized business of collecting and arguing about empirical data, and confine their investigations to their armchairs.

Sometimes empirical evidence from psychology, physics or other fields of inquiry can be put to good use in philosophical arguments. But using such evidence from elsewhere does not solve any philosophical question. A writer in philosophy must be ready to explain exactly why such empirical evidence is relevant and exactly what normative principles one can conclude from it.

Apart from this, philosophers still find a lot to argue about even when they put empirical questions aside. For one thing, the question of what sort of empirical evidence would be needed to decide the answer to a question might itself be a non-empirical question that philosophers discuss.

For another, philosophers spend a lot of time discussing how different claims (which may be empirical) relate logically to each other. For example, a common philosophical project is to show how two or more views cannot be held consistently with each other, or to show that although two views are consistent with one another, they together entail an implausible third claim.

■ Empirical evidence from psychology, physics or other fields of inquiry can be put to good use in philosophical arguments. TRUE/ FALSE

TRUE

Therefore, an important distinction between writing and research in science and philosophy is the famous is/ought distinction or the descriptive/prescriptive distinction. While science provides us with a description of the world, philosophy offers a normative analysis of the world and of human existence.

2.2 Object of Study in Scientific and Philosophical Research

Flowing from the descriptive/prescriptive distinction, the object of study in scientific and philosophical research and writing varies. When you research or write, it is always about something or someone.

Research always has an object in focus. But the kind of object varies based on the nature of the discipline. Science as basically a descriptive discipline describes objects and events in the physical universe.

Its sub-disciplines in the natural, social and applied sciences are specialised in the study of a particular object or sphere of the material universe.

- Biology studies and describes the nature and contents of biological components and organisms of the universe.
- Chemistry has the chemical constituents of the material universe as its object of study.
- Psychology is the scientific study of human brain processes and mental states. Hence, every specialised scientific discipline has a specialised and identifiable object of study.

But it is difficult to identify or specify the subject-matter or object of study of philosophy the way you can specify the concerns of scientific disciplines such as

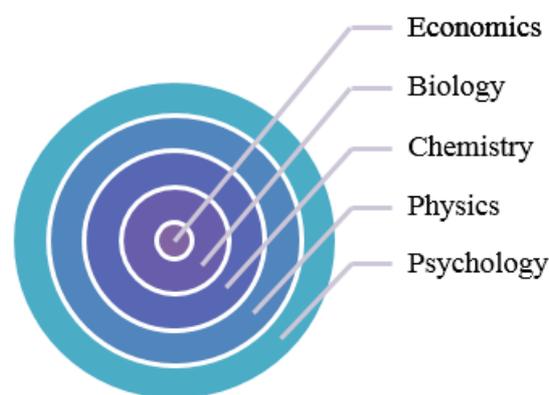


Figure 2.1: Subjects related to philosophy

Source: SchulPortals Inc. ©.

It is thus not surprising for new students in philosophy to ask their tutor after some lectures what exactly are they studying. The difficulty of identifying the object of study of philosophy does not imply that philosophical inquiry, research or writing is not intended toward something.

It is however the case that unlike scientific disciplines which studies specific objects in the universe, reveal specific information about them by gathering particular individuated facts or data about their objects of study, the subject-matter of philosophy are general in nature.

■ _____ is basically a descriptive discipline describes objects and events in the physical universe.

□ Science

Philosophical questions are not intended toward a specific object in the universe nor are they meant to reveal specific information about their nature through the individual data collected. Rather philosophical questions are general in nature.

This is because dealing with such research questions in philosophy does not require the gathering of specific data or the accumulation of particular facts. It rather involves how best to explain and analyse the already available facts to make sense of them in the search for answers for the ultimate questions of reality, knowledge and value.

Philosophical research and writing are identified not only by the general nature of the subject-matter they address but also by their fundamental nature. Not every scientific research interests each one of us in our everyday lives.

The study of planetary bodies and how life can survive there, or the accumulation of information of the psychology of a lion may not immediately interest us even if there are reasons to believe that at the long run, such information may be useful for mankind.

However, every philosophical question that drives research and writing in philosophy should interest any rational human being because the questions are essentially concerned with human existence and survival and the answers given them and the answers you accept about them directly affect how you behave.

Thus questions about:

- Reality,
- Knowledge,
- Morality,
- The ideal state is not trivial but fundamental.

Thus, while scientific research has specific subject-matter, philosophical inquiry deals with general and fundamental questions about reality, knowledge and value.

1. To engage in scientific inquiry is to describe.
2. To experiment.
3. To draw conclusions.
4. To engage in philosophical inquiry is to theorise
5. To analyse.
6. To critique to raise questions.
7. To pose as problematic that which you investigate.

2.3 Method of Study

Science has a popular method of studying the natural universe, so popular and infamous that it has been, and continues to be imposed on other disciplines or forms of life as ‘the’ model rather than ‘a’ model of research. This method is referred to as the **scientific method**.

The scientific method is generally regarded as the procedure employed in carrying out research in the sciences or, put differently, it is concerned with principles of evaluation of statements in the empirical sciences.

As **R. S. Rudner** explains, “...the methodology of a scientific discipline is not a matter of its transient techniques but of its logic of justification. The method of science is indeed, the rationale on which it bases its acceptance or rejection of hypothesis or theories.

Thus, when people talk of the scientific method, they are simply referring to the general properties and consideration that are used in the confirmation or refutation of a hypothesis in the various sciences, that is, the common way in which hypotheses are assessed or researches are carried out in the sciences.

As a method of research, the scientific method is said to be identified with a number of procedural stages, phases or steps. Scholars are generally not unanimous about the exact number of the research stages in the scientific method.

■..... explains the methodology of a scientific discipline is not a matter of its transient techniques but of its logic of justification.

□ R. S. Rudner

According to **Siegel**, that there is no consensus on the exact number of stages in the method does not imply that the scientific method cannot be characterized generally as consisting in, for example, a concern for explanatory adequacy, however that adequacy is conceived, an insistence on testing, however testing is thought to be best done, and a commitment to inductive support.



Figure 2.2: Kwasi Wiredu

Source: <http://philosophy.usf.edu/faculty/kwiredu/>

Kwasi Wiredu gives an opposite characterization of the scientific method. According to him, the method of science involves hypothesis, experiment and observation. Scientific method has in practice attained a high degree of complexity, but, in bare essentials, it is characterized as follows:

The mind is challenged by a problem about for a solution; such that, however plausible the solution may be, it is not immediately asserted as true. It is merely entertained as a hypothesis, a tentative proposal, to be put to the test. But before that, its significance has to be explored, that is, its logical implications have to be unraveled in conjunction with other known facts.

■ Kwasi Wiredu is not African philosopher True/False

□ False

This is the stage of the elaboration of the hypothesis, which often requires techniques of deduction available only in quite advanced mathematics. The result, however, is always of the logical form of an implication: “if the hypothesis is true, then, such and such other things should be the case.

The stage is then set for:

- Empirical confirmation
- Disconfirmation.

Straightforward observation or very technical experimentation may be called for in this stage of confirmation or disconfirmation. If results turns out not to be in agreement with the implications of the hypothesis, it is said to be falsified.

It is, accordingly, either abandoned or modified. On the other hand, if results prove to conform to the elaborated hypothesis, it is said to be confirmed. It is the confirmed hypotheses that are regarded as laws and constitute the main corpus of scientific knowledge.

According to **Siegel**, what is striking about the method of science is its commitment to evidence and to the form of reasoning as described above which is what ensures the objectivity and rationality of science.

In other words, science is rational to the extent that it proceeds in accordance with such a commitment to evidence or form of reasoning. This is what gives the scientific method its popularity.

But philosophical inquiry cannot be associated with any such particular method of study due to the general nature of its inquiry. Thus, although philosophy is a rational inquiry, there is no clearly stated method of carrying out its inquiry as is the scientific method. Rather there are varieties of methods based on the philosophical camp or epoch.

To be sure, every rational inquiry, such as philosophy, begins with doubt and ends with the establishment of belief which also becomes a source of further inquiries. However, in philosophy, there is no singular and generally accepted process of arriving at established beliefs or theories as you may find in science. There are varying methods.

The history of philosophical inquiry brings to our attention such philosophical methods as

1. Socratic Method
2. Dialectical method
3. Cartesian method
4. Phenomenological method
5. Speculative method
6. Method of abstraction.

For instance, the Socratic Method consists of a number stage.

- First, he presents his philosophical views in an everyday conversation, casually mentioning them to his companion and engaging their interest.
- Second, he would point out a certain philosophical concept that needed to be analyzed.
- Third, he would profess ignorance and ask his companion his opinion on the matter.

When given the other person's answer, Socrates would analyze their definition by asking questions that expose its weakness or wrongness. Once again, the person would provide another

definition, revised more clearly this time, and again Socrates would repeat the process of questioning, exposing weakness of revised definition.

They continue in this way until the clearest definition of the question is reached. In this manner, Socrates would also cause the other person to realize his own ignorance, which is the first step, according to Socrates, to wisdom.

Socrates also employed in his method the use of the reduction ad absurdum form of argument, which means "reducing to an absurdity." He would begin by assuming that his companion's offered definition is true but then show that it logically implied either an absurdity or a conclusion that contradicted other conclusions previously drawn by his companion.

- Socratic methods consist_____ stages.
- Three Stages

By exposing a false statement from the proposition, he skillfully proved that the assumption, rationally, must be false. Although sometimes quite frustrating to the one Socrates conversed with, the method combined with the reduction ad absurdum argument proved effective and eye opening.

Thus, it is essential that students and researchers are familiar with the multiple methods of philosophy and apply them in the best possible research cases since the particular issue being researched or written on may determine the method adopted.

Summary for Study Session 2

In this Study Session 2, you have learnt that:

1. Philosophical inquiry is different from scientific inquiry mainly due to its normative character, and the vagueness of subject-matter and method. Philosophy does not have an identifiable, partial domain as its subject matter.
2. It attempts to think about the widest context, that which is not differentiated as one part from other parts. If it were a discipline focused only with an aspect of reality, it could at

least be vaguely comprehended as being something other than, say, mathematics or sociology; that is, something that studies this domain as opposed to that.

3. Philosophy leaves nothing out, and hence leaves us without the contrasting foil that would allow us to say what it is. People who are unfriendly to philosophy suspect that it is inflated, presumptuous, and non-rigorous; this feeling is an inadequate but understandable way of recognizing the fact that philosophy is not defined by being a discipline that is concerned with only aspect of existence or reality.
4. Again, the method of philosophical thinking is not obvious; you think you have some idea of the manner in which, say, physicists or linguists proceed in their inquiries, but how do philosophers proceed in theirs? It is hard to say; philosophy appears to be an arcane intellectual discipline, a form of thinking whose ways are esoteric and obscure.
5. However, when carefully studied, you can become familiar with its methods and subject-matter no matter how general they may be.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 2

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Study Session.

SAQ 2.1 (Tests learning outcome 2.1)

What do you understand by the scientific method?

SAQ 2.2 (Tests learning outcome 2.2)

List four types of methods in philosophy

SAQ 2.3 (Tests learning outcome 2.3)

Why is philosophical inquiry described as general and fundamental in nature?

SAQ 2.4 (Tests learning outcomes 2.4)

What is the subject-matter of philosophy?

SAQ 2.5 (Tests learning outcomes 2.5)

Explain the normative character of philosophy.

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Study Session 3: Tools for Philosophical Writing

Introduction

To effectively perform a task, one must have the right tools and use them in the right manner. Research and writing in philosophy is surely not an easy task and it can become much harder or impossible if the researcher is not well equipped for the difficult task.

Thus, a work on philosophical writing and research is never complete without examining the tools for accomplishing the task. In this lecture, you shall examine some of the basic tools of any worthwhile philosophical inquiry.

They are: the principles of logical reasoning and argument, a good mastery of the language of discourse, and a good mastery of the methods of philosophizing.

In this study session, you will learn about logic and argument, mastery of writing Language, methods of philosophizing

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 3

After you have studied this study session, you should be able to:

- 3.1 Discuss Science as Descriptive and Philosophy as Normative
- 3.2 Explain Object of Study in Scientific and Philosophical Research
- 3.3 Examine the Method of Study.

3.1 Logic and Argument

Logic, in this traditional sense, is the study of correct inference. It studies formal structures and non-formal relations which hold between evidence and hypothesis, reasons and belief, or premises and conclusion.

It is the study of both conclusive and inconclusive inferences or, as it is also commonly described, the study of both entailments and inductions. Specifically, logic involves the detailed study of formal systems designed to exhibit such entailments and inductions. More generally, though, it is the study of those conditions under which evidence rightly can be said to

- Justify
- Entail
- Imply
- Support
- Corroborate
- Confirm or falsify a conclusion.

Logic is thus the science of reason involved in the business of evaluating arguments by sorting out good ones from bad ones using sound principles or techniques of good reasoning.

Arguments, as understood in logic, consist of arguing for a position by means of conclusive or highly probable evidence. Hence, in an argument, there is a conclusion (the position being held or argued for) and premise(s) (the evidence(s) or reason(s) for holding the position).

Some premises provide conclusive or undeniable grounds for accepting the conclusion and this is referred to as a deductive argument, whereby it will be a contradiction to accept the premises and deny the conclusion.

■ _____ is the science of reason involved in the business of evaluating arguments by sorting out good ones from bad ones using sound principles or techniques of good reasoning.

□ Logic

In other cases, the premises provide only sufficient but not a conclusive or necessary basis for accepting the conclusion; thus, making the conclusion only highly probable. In this case, the argument is an inductive one where one does not fall into a contradiction by accepting the premise and denying the conclusion.

The importance of logic as the principles and techniques for good reasoning and well-constructed arguments for philosophical research and writing is at once obvious.

Research and writing in philosophy is all about making sound arguments and analysis, providing good reasons for holding a position or supporting one, and engaging in a logical and coherent assessment of arguments. Logic, as the science of reasoning, provides the needed training for the philosopher.

This is why Logic is a core discipline in any philosophy curriculum. That logic is very essential for good reasoning, in general, accounts for the reason why every student in a tertiary institution is made to be trained, at least, in the elementary aspects of logical tools and techniques particularly at the first year of study.

This is because the formations of the institution's curricula are well aware that every student needs logic for good reasoning and assessment of arguments in any field of study. Philosophy's case is not exceptional. In fact, philosophy students are privileged to excavate deeper into the rich soil of logic over and over again before graduation.

The obvious preferential treatment accorded philosophy students in the study of logic stems from the fact that logic is the philosophy student's most effective tool in carrying out his or her assignment. In fact, logic is ingrained in the study of philosophy and can never be left out of it at any point in time.

■ Logic is a core discipline in any philosophy curriculum TRUE OR FALSE

TRUE

For example, the student is trained on the laws of thought namely the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction, and the law of excluded middle, and how/where they can be applied. The student is also taught the fallacies that should be avoided when arguing for a position, such as the fallacies of relevance and fallacies of ambiguity.

The student is also trained in the techniques and rules of formal logic and how breaking such principles can weaken an argument. For instance in a syllogistic argument, one those not use a particular term in two sense.

The term 'ruler' could mean a measuring tool or, a leader of a people. When the term is used in a syllogistic argument, it must be used in just one of the senses to avoid ambiguity or vagueness. If this rule is broken, the writer commits the fallacy of *Quantatio Terminorum*, or the multiplication of terms. Consider the following example:

A ruler straightens things

David is a Ruler

Therefore, David should straighten things

In the argument, the term 'ruler' is used in different senses and can be misleading. This makes the argument unsound. The philosopher is also trained by the use of brain tasking calculations and exercises in formal logic involving the application of valid rules to arguments such as the rules of inference, the rules of replacement, conditional proof rule and the rule of indirect proof.

The application of these rules exercises the brain and makes the student to think faster and sharply about issues. Therefore, the importance of logic and argument in philosophical writing and research cannot be overlooked.

3.2 Mastery of Writing Language

You communicate through language. In fact, communication is not possible if the speaker and the hearer or the writer and his or her audience do not understand each other's language of communication.

All you have to say, the points you are making, the analysis you do, or the arguments you put forward are only possible through the tool of language. Hence a strong mastery of the language by which you communicate with and which our audience understand is very essential in researching and writing in philosophy.

Language is thus an essential tool of philosophy. **Olusegun Oladipo** identifies two major reasons for this.

- ❖ First is the obvious reason that philosophical ideas and theories are expressed in language, which is why a philosopher ought to have a good mastery of the language he communicates

When he has such mastery, he or she is able to express himself or herself with clarity and precision of thought and without vagueness and ambiguity of red objective in philosophical writing. This also accounts for the pursuit of meaning in philosophy which involves the clarification of concepts and terms employed in a philosophical essay to express our ideas and viewpoints.

- ❖ Second, mastery of language places the philosopher in an advantageous position over professionals in other disciplines. The philosopher uses language to sort out human experiences, reveal the connection that exist between thing and events, create and construct concepts to represent multiplicity of events and experiences and generally become more enlightened about the nature of the world and the place of humankind in it.

John Stuart Mill is thus compelled to compare the role of language in philosophical inquiry to the role of telescopes in astronomical inquiry. He says therefore that:



Figure 3.1: John Stuart Mill

Source: www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/john-stuart-mill-150.php

Language is evidently and by the admission of all philosophers one of the principal instruments or helps of thought, and any imperfection in the instrument, or in the mode of employing it, is confessedly liable...

- Communication is not possible if the speaker and the hearer or the writer and his or her audience do not understand each other's language of communication. TRUE/FALSE
- TRUE

For a mind not previously versed in the meaning and right use of the various kinds of words to attempt the study of methods of philosophizing would be as if someone should attempt to become an astronomical observer having never learnt to adjust the focal distance of his optical instrument, so as to see distinctly.”

3.3 Methods of Philosophizing

In the preceding lecture, you examined the nature of the method of philosophy as distinct from that of science. An attempt will be made here to elaborate on the highlighted methods of philosophizing in the preceding lecture.

The reason for this is that a writer or researcher in philosophy must be conversant with the various methods of philosophizing. This is because if he or she is familiar with the different methods that will be used in the different essays he will come across while researching, he will

be able to grasp faster the nature of argument in an essay he or she is reading and the direction the argument is headed.

He or she can also choose a suitable method when carrying out a particular research.

There are a number of methods that have been used by philosophers down the history of philosophy in engaging in philosophical inquiry. They include but are surely not limited to

1. The Socratic Method.
2. The speculative method or the method of abstraction.
3. The Cartesian method or method of doubt.
4. The dialectical method,
5. The phenomenological method.

3.1.1 Socratic Method consists of number stages.

First, he presents his philosophical views in an everyday conversation, casually mentioning them to his companion and engaging their interest.

Second, he would point out a certain philosophical concept that needed to be analyzed.

Third, he would profess ignorance and ask his companion his opinion on the matter. When given the other person's answer.

Socrates would analyze their definition by asking questions that expose its weakness or wrongness. Once again, the person would provide another definition, revised more clearly this time, and again Socrates would repeat the process of questioning, exposing weakness of revised definition.

They continue in this way until the clearest definition of the question is reached. In this manner, Socrates would also cause the other person to realize his own ignorance, which is the first step, according to Socrates, to wisdom.

Socrates also employed in his method the use of the reduction ad absurdum form of argument, which means "reducing to an absurdity." He would begin by assuming that his companion's

offered definition is true but then show that it logically implied either an absurdity or a conclusion that contradicted other conclusions previously drawn by his companion.

By exposing a false statement from the proposition, he skilfully proved that the assumption, rationally, must be false. Although sometimes quite frustrating to the one Socrates conversed with, the method combined with the reduction ad absurdum argument proved effective and eye opening.

3.1.2 Speculative Method

The speculative method or the method of abstraction involves the researcher's ability to explore imagination as a vast territory of enchanted possibilities. When philosophers are faced with questions that transcends what sense experience can answer, they tend to speculate within the ambit of reason.

To be sure, what may give rise to such questions are always within the realm of experience but in trying to answer them, philosophers usually apply the method of speculation and abstraction in a logical and rational manner.

Plato's speculation about the world of forms and the robust description of such a world as if it were real and tangible is a clear case of abstraction resulting from a philosopher's dilemma on why certain things change and other do not, on what could be real as different from what appear to be real.

3.1.3 Cartesian Method

The Cartesian method of philosophy is associated with the philosopher Rene Descartes, in who's thought the method is pronouncedly used. It is a process of finding solutions to philosophical problems on a presupposition less basis.

It involves rejecting anything one may have known about the issue at hand and approaching the issue on a "clean slate". Descartes' philosophy was deeply rooted in his desire to ascertain pure and certain knowledge.

In order to accomplish this, he felt that he could not rely on what he had been taught, or what he thought he knew as he could not be absolutely assured that this was pure and uncorrupted information. Thus, he set out to formulate clear and rational principles that could be organized into a system of truths from which accurate information could be deduced.

The principle that he came up with as a starting point for his philosophy was that of methodic doubt, that is, to doubt everything. Descartes believed that you should not rely on our observations of the world around us, as these perceptions could be deceiving.

Consequently, **Descartes** believed that only those truths which he derived using reasoning, that is, reason and intuition alone, were reliable. This method is also referred to as Descartes' methodic doubt

3.1.4 Dialectical Method

The Dialectical method is a method of argument or exposition that systematically weighs contradictory facts or ideas with a view to the resolution of their real or apparent contradictions. In other words, it involves disputation or debate particularly intended to resolve differences between two views rather than to establish one of them as true.

It is thus the process of reconciliation of contradiction either of beliefs or in historical processes. Socrates also employed the dialectical method. You find it also in the writings of **Kant**). It is however more pronounced in the works of **Hegel** and **Marx**.

Hegel applied the method in arriving at truth by stating a thesis, developing a contradictory antithesis, and combining and resolving them into a coherent synthesis.

It is also seen in the Marxian process of change through the conflict of opposing forces, whereby a given contradiction is characterized by a primary and a secondary aspect, the secondary succumbing to the primary, which is then transformed into an aspect of a new contradiction.

3.1.5 Phenomenological Method

The phenomenological method is one of the most prominent philosophical methods of the twentieth century popularised by **Edmund Husserl**. It aims to describe, understand and interpret the meanings of experiences of human life.

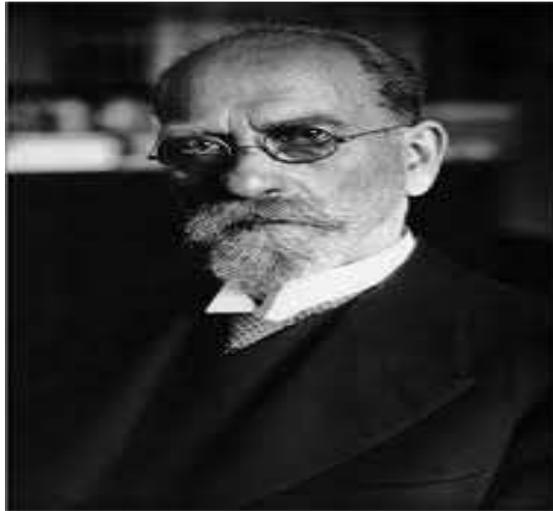


Figure 3.2: Edmund Husserl

Source:<http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140673612610071/images?imageI>

It focuses on research questions such as what it is like to experience a particular situation. Husserl emphasized the centrality of the human context in understanding life; that is, researchers and readers of research can understand human experience because they are participants in the human condition.

Thus the task of understanding is to retain continuity with what is already experientially evident and familiar to us as humans. As a method of inquiry, it is based on the premise that reality consists of objects and events as they are perceived or understood in human consciousness and not of anything independent of human consciousness.

The method is not intended to be a collection of particular facts about consciousness, but is rather supposed to furnish us with facts about the essential natures of phenomena and their modes of givenness.

Borrowing from Descartes methodic doubt, the method employs phenomenological reduction is carrying out its research, that is, the bracketing of all you know about a phenomenon and approaching it presuppositionlessly in order for the thing to open itself to our consciousness just as it is.

Summary for Study Session 3

In this Study Session 3, you have learnt that:

To effectively research and write in philosophy, it is clear from the above that you must not only be aware of the tools needed for philosophical inquiry but master these tools. You must master the principles and techniques of good reasoning in order to detect fallacious arguments in the essays you read and while drafting our own essays.

You necessarily should be in full control of our language of communication and be willing to clarify the concepts you use in our discourse. It is also essential that you are familiar with the methods of research in philosophy and apply the appropriate method in particular research cases.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 3

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Study Session.

SAQ 3.1 (Tests learning outcome 3.1)

What is logic?

SAQ 3.2 (Tests learning outcome 3.2)

Why is logic essential for research and writing in philosophy?

SAQ 3.3 (Tests learning outcome 3.3)

Highlight two ways in which language is a tool of philosophy?

SAQ 3.4 (Tests learning outcomes 3.4)

Explain the dialectical method of research and writing?

SAQ 3.5 (Tests learning outcomes 3.5)

What is phenomenological reduction?

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Study Session4: Structuring of a Philosophical Write-Up

Introduction

The task of writing an essay in philosophy begins with research. Hence, before thinking of how to structure a philosophical essay, one must have done serious research and thoroughly studied related materials on the topic of interest, understood them and drafted some rough notes that will be useful once the main write-up begins.

While reading through materials and carrying out research, it is important for the researcher to clearly identify what his or her intentions are with the topic of interest. Does it sound logical, meaningful and worth defending? Or, are the main arguments inconsistent, which need to be pointed out, revised or abandoned?

This is necessary as it is not enough for a researcher in philosophy to simply describe in a series of statements the philosophical positions found in the materials he has read without any attempt to present sound and constructive analysis, argumentation or criticism for or against the position held.

To simply describe the philosophical positions one has read will be merely descriptive and expository which are no gems of philosophical writing. However, a researcher or writer in philosophy must be willing to provide logical reasons, arguments and analysis for or against any philosophical position.

To do this effectively, there is a structure, pattern or format an essay in philosophy should take. Although there is no consensus among philosophers on the specifics of such a structure, you can attempt to present a general picture of it in this lecture. What will become obvious are certain ingredients that must be present in an essay for it to be termed philosophical.

4.1 Introduction: Stating the Problem and Thesis Clearly

The introductory section to an essay in philosophy states thesis in the form of a concise statement of the critical stance or position you take on the topic of interest. This should be in the first paragraph. The first few sentences can briefly define the topic of the essay. The rest of the paragraph should state the thesis.

The thesis will be a proposition (or a number of related propositions) that the writer attempts to defend with reasoned arguments. But the thesis inevitably implies that there is a problem that prompted the essay, a problem that will then be stated.

It could be that the a particular approach or perspective has been ignored in previous attempts to analyse the topic of interest, or a particular conventional approach to, or perspective on, the topic of interest has some flaws that has not been taken cognizance of and which the thesis is meant to remedy; or that arguments against a particular perspective on the topic of interest does not hold in the face of new analysis and evidence as presented in the thesis.

Thus, philosophy is rightly regarded as a problem solving enterprise. Part of what one learns in becoming a philosopher is to find problems and then to use all the skills at one's disposal to solve them. A philosophy paper without a problem is very much like a body without a head. Interestingly, problems are pretty easy to come by in philosophy.

Whenever philosophers hold opposing positions, you are likely to have the problem of determining who has the strongest position. What if you find that all of the positions have serious weaknesses? That represents a problem on a new level. Now you have to try to determine if there are insoluble difficulties as opposed to solvable difficulties. You need to start modifying positions to make them stronger.

One important benefit of acquiring a problem for a philosophical essay is that it will largely determine the thesis and dictate what the parts of the paper are going to be. If one is trying to decide which of two commentators has the right interpretation of an argument, then he or she is going to have to explain each of their views, in what way(s) they disagree, what the crucial

point(s) is for resolving the disagreement, and the philosophical moral to be drawn from the resolution.

This is where philosophical and reasoning skills as well as creativity come into play. Thus, the introductory section to a philosophical essay must contain a clearly identified problem and clearly stated thesis that are connected in context.

This also implies that the scope of study in the essay must be made explicitly clear to avoid ambiguity and vagueness. A well written introduction will inject the needed anticipation into the reader to continue reading to get the main gist of the writer's arguments.

4.2 Analysis, Argumentation and Discussion

The body of an essay in philosophy could contain a number of segments and subheadings intended to develop more fully the reasoned arguments a researcher offers in support of his or her thesis.

It contains the details and examples or evidences that build toward the essay's conclusion and justify the thesis. The development of the arguments is best done when the writer writes in such a way as if he was trying to convince a sceptical reader.

It is also important to know that one does not argue in a vacuum. Developing ones arguments means that one is able show how they respond to other arguments that oppose them and how they fit within a particular aspect of the history of philosophy.

A researcher must attempt to show that the arguments he or she develops in support of his or her thesis are better than the counter-arguments that object to it.

Thus, in the body of the essay, three things must stand out: the argument(s) for the thesis, reasons to show that the argument is valid, and evidences that the premise(s) are true. Concerning the first point, it is good practice to get out all of one's premises as soon as possible.

This gives the reader the opportunity to see the general structure of the argument. The reader has a chance to see the overall picture of how the writer is going to get to the thesis. The next step is to show that the argument is valid, that is, that the premises set out will in fact lead to the conclusion.

Since a valid argument guarantees a true conclusion only if all the premises are true, the next step is to prove that the premises are true. First, state the evidence for the premises. This is the most direct and straightforward way of pressing ones case.

4.3 Anticipating and Clarifying Potential Objections

Possible objections to the point of view which have been argued for should be considered. The writer should show why these objections are not fatal to his or her position. If a writer thinks of an objection to his or her own position but then fail to include it, it might be the case that the reader will immediately recognize the objection and think that the paper has not adequately addressed competing views (a serious flaw of any philosophical essay).

It is better to deal with the objection in just a few lines than not dealing with it at all. One thing that is dreaded in philosophy is the objection that refutes our position. However, in philosophical essays, this is not nearly as fatal as it may seem at first.

If one finds a knock-down objection to ones argument, then one can do one of two things: conclude that the original argument did not hold up to the criticism, and state this very clearly in the conclusion, or swap arguments and take the knock-down objection as a better argument. Either one of these approaches is much better than trying to disguise or ignore an argument.

If an objection is actually fatal to ones position to the extent that one cannot offer a counter objection, it is better to rework the essay and start arguing for the other position and use the initial position as your objection.

The initial position will probably now make an excellent objection, but definitely not a fatal one. This will only make the paper stronger. This is one of the advantages of self-critiquing one's argument.

4.3.1. Conclusion

This part of the essay mainly summarizes the thesis and analysis developed in the introduction and body of the essay. It also makes a final effort to convince the reader that the thesis has been established as a reliable conclusion with effective supporting arguments.

However, the writer must be careful to ensure that the substance of the conclusion does not go beyond what has been argued for. Another way to end an essay is to explain what further implication it has, or what the next step of research might be.

This last conclusion is ill-advised if one is submitting a final essay for a course. Still another way to end an essay is to explain why the results or positions taken are important, if their importance could not be appreciated by stating them earlier in the essay.

Typically, one should explain why the results are important near the beginning of the essay in order to spice up the reader's interest. Sometimes, however, the importance cannot be appreciated before one goes through the argument, or the relation between the results and the importance is implausible without the argument. In these cases it is both justified and advisable to explain the importance of the results at the end.

4.3.2 Using Examples

Simply put, examples drive the point home. They make arguments more explicit to the reader. Hence, a good writer should endeavour to make use of examples. An example, as a specific instance of a general principle or abstract concept, is often drawn from the researcher's own experience.

An example provides an accessible, understandable instance of a general idea that may be hard to understand in the abstract. It can be used to clarify a principle, to answer a question, to give

substance to an abstract concept. In addition, examples can demonstrate understanding such that the example one gives show the extent to which he or she understands a concept.

Thus, examples are a way that researchers can link abstract notions of philosophy to their own experiences and this helps to show that philosophical concepts are not merely abstract but have bearing in human experiences. In using examples, however, one should ensure that the examples are on point, instructive and that they demonstrate understanding of the concept being exemplified.

4.3.3 Conceptual Clarification

For an essay to achieve its primary goal of the expression of truth in a clear and vivid manner, the researcher must attempt to state clearly the sense and meaning of the basic concepts he or she is employing in the essay and how they relate to one another.

This can either be done within the introduction or under a separate section at the beginning of the body of the essay. However, it is not often easy to define or analyse a concept in an essay and show its relationship to other concepts in the essay. This type of clarification of concept is what is often referred to as analytical definitions.

Analytical definitions are usually offered with a specific purpose in mind. They attempt to reform ordinary usage of a term. Such reforms can be precise or expansive. An example of a *précising* definition is Kant's definition of experience as a combination of sense perceptions and certain operations of the mind.

In this sense, his use of the term is more specific than the usual sense of "sense perceptions." An example of an expansive definition is when "rights" is used to cover "animal rights." This is expansive because, on traditional theories, only humans were thought to have rights.

An analytical definition can tell us what features are common to all things of a particular class, and it can tell us what features are unique to that class of things. Sometimes, an analytical definition can do both at the same time.

In this way, a definition provides a precise description. Once an essay has a precise definition of a term as a working definition or the sense in which that term will be used through the essay, the writer has succeeded in removing much of the vagueness and ambiguity that would have haunted the essay.

4.3.4 The Role of the Ockham's razor

Ockham's razor or Occam's razor attributed to the 14th century logician, William of Ockham, is a principle of research and writing that simply states that "entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily." It is simply referred to as the principle of parsimony or succinctness.

It upholds the view that among competing hypotheses, theories or viewpoints, the one with the fewer and simpler assumptions should be taken. Its aim is to shift the burden of proof in an argument and attain simplicity.

In writing and research, the principle encourages simple and clear presentation of argument rather than a rhetoric or complex form of writing. This is very important for students of philosophy who think that they can impress their teacher by the use of complex words and concepts.

For a tutor who has hundreds of essays to read through, the best way to impress him or her is by writing in a simple and straight forward manner and by clearly stating the senses in which concepts have been used. Unfortunately, in most professional philosophical essays, complexity and rhetoric seem to reign.

Philosophers often write their books and articles as if in a competition for the most sophisticated writer. But such form of writing often defeats the primary aim of understanding and clarity, which is what the Ockham's razor advocates for.

Summary for Study Session 4

In this Study Session 4, you have learnt that:

The value of an essay in philosophy is to be found in the manner in which the arguments are laid out. The way an essay is structured goes a long way to determine if the argument(s) being pushed forward will be accepted or rejected.

It also tells a lot about the writer's competence in philosophical writing and research. Although the structuring of an essay in philosophy may vary from one scholar to the other, the above analysis clearly indicates certain features that must be present in any such structuring or layout: an introduction that clearly presents the problem and thesis of the essay and summarises the main arguments that the essay seeks to present; a body that develops the thesis in a coherent manner, taking note of possible objections to the argument and responding to them; and a conclusion that summarises the essay and points toward the implication of the thesis and/or areas of further research. It is also important for an essay in philosophy to make use of practical examples that the reader can relate with and also endeavour to fulfil the Ockham's razor principle.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 4

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Study Session.

SAQ 4.1 (Tests learning outcome 4.1)

Differentiate between the thesis and problem of a philosophical essay

SAQ 4.2 (Tests learning outcome 4.2)

Attempt to highlight the essential stages of a philosophical essay

SAQ 4.3 (Tests learning outcome 4.3)

Why are examples important when writing an essay?

SAQ 4.4 (Tests learning outcomes 4.4)

What should the body of an essay contain?

SAQ 4.5 (Tests learning outcomes 4.5)

What is the Ockham's razor and why is it important for philosophical writing?

References

Writing Philosophy Papers: A Student Guide (Department of Philosophy, Oregon State University, 1997).

Martinich, A. P. 2005 *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*, 3rd Edition, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Study Session 5: Referencing and Citations

Introduction

Much of the evidence a philosopher presents in support of his arguments is gotten from related literatures. This is why an essay in philosophy is more or less a literature review.

Hence, the requirement in the sciences for a specific section for literature review in a scientific writing as different from the section on method of data collection and findings, may not apply to philosophical writing as different authors and literatures are cited virtually through the entire essay.

It therefore becomes important to have rules and principles guiding the writer's use of other persons' works and essays to avoid plagiarism and to give due credit to the original owners of the words used, or the idea.

In this study session, you shall examine how referencing and citation are done, what to consider in choosing relevant literatures for one's work and how best you can use them without overly doing so.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 5

At the end of this study session, you should be able to:

- 5.1 Discuss how to choose materials in Referencing and Citation
- 5.2 Explain Paraphrasing and Summarising
- 5.3 Discuss how to Reference in Philosophy

5.1 Choosing Essential Materials

The importance of using the relevant materials or citing relevant sources and authority in philosophical writing cannot be overlooked nor overemphasised. It is the basis on which arguments are firmly established. It, also gives the reader the conviction that the essay is not written in vacuum but rather within an established tradition of philosophizing about a particular issue.

Again, it convinces the reader that the writer has done considerable research before writing and that he or she is conversant with the various perspectives on the particular issue or problem. Furthermore, it provides the reader with information on related materials that he or she may consult to get more information since an essay cannot contain all the points. These facts give the reader the conviction that the information provided in the research is reliable and trustworthy.

But the important question that must be answered by every researcher or writer in order to reap these benefits of consulting other materials while writing is: what criteria must a material fulfil for it to be considered essential or relevant for my project or essay? In other words, what yardstick can be used to select materials for an essay in philosophy?

Box 5.1: Primary and Secondary Sources

In philosophical writing, one either writes on a philosopher or a scholar's view on a particular issue, or simply on an issue without restricting it to a particular philosopher. In either case, there are both primary and secondary sources or materials that are relevant for the research. If the essay is on a philosopher's perspective on an issue, the primary sources would include the philosopher's own works on the said issue while the secondary sources will include already published commentaries on the primary sources.

If a writer depends solely on already published commentaries on the philosopher without endeavouring to get the primary sources, the materials he or she has consulted are not relevant enough.

If I were to write a paper on Plato's conception of state and I only consult materials commenting on the same topic without reading through Plato's original works such as *The Republic*, I have

failed in using the relevant materials for the paper. I would have also failed if I am writing on Heidegger's ontology without having seen his *Being and Time*.

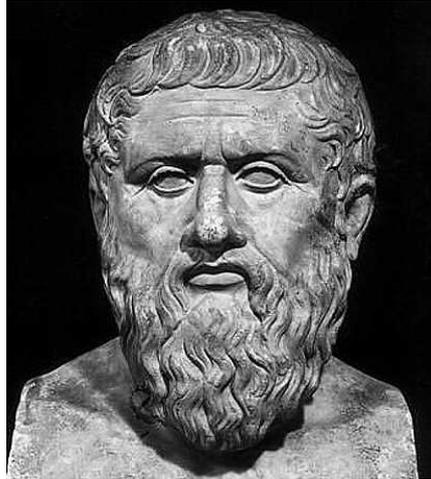


Figure 5.1: Portrait of Plato

Source: <http://www.ourcivilisation.com/smartboard/shop/warnerr/plato.htm>

The same applies to writing an essay on a particular issue in philosophy. There are no doubts that on such an issue, there is a tradition of authors on that issue who have held one viewpoint or the other. If the writer's viewpoint is different, he or she will have to show how they are different from such traditional perspectives on the issue by consulting the relevant materials.

For example, discussing "dread" as an existentialist issue will not be complete without examining and citing the views of core existentialist thinkers such as Sartre, Heidegger, Camus and Kierkegaard. When you choose the relevant primary and secondary sources, our views on the issue being discussed become clearer and you can establish more firmly our personal viewpoints on the issue.

As a guide, when you have a topic at hand, it is good to have a rough outline or sketch of how the structure would look like, including relevant sections and subheadings. Once you figure this out, you can use such an outline and topic title to search for the relevant materials in our bookshelves, encyclopaedias of philosophy, the library and online.

To be sure, as you read the materials you have gotten, you may modify our outline, or even do away with some but the primary focus will guide us through.

- What are primary sources?
- Primary sources are the philosopher's own works on the said issue

5.2 Paraphrasing and Summarizing the Needed Literatures

As he or she reads through the relevant materials for an essay, the writer has the tedious task of isolating and summarising the main points and relevant aspects needed for his or her work. When the writing begins in earnest, the writer is saddled with the responsibility of clearly showing where his ideas, citations and quotations are gotten from. This is the basis of scholarship.

As Martinich says, "Scholarship refers to the practice of letting your readers know

1. Where they can find more information about your topic and
2. Giving credit where credit is due to those people from whom you have learned and to those who first made the point that you are making.



Figure 5.2: Matt Martinich

Source: <https://www.dialoguejournal.com/podcasts/>

Point 1 is a matter of courtesy and cooperativeness. It is rare that an author can say everything that a reader may want to know about a topic. So giving references to other works shows

consideration for the reader. Point 2 is a matter of honesty. Not to give credit where credit is due is a kind of theft.” And it is such theft that is referred to as plagiarism, which is morally and legally wrong.

Thus, a writer may freely use the arguments of other philosophers in his or her essay as long as they are properly credited. It is, however, essential that the write does his or her philosophical thinking. Again, if one needs to explain someone else’s argument, he or she must do so in his or her own words and according to his or her own clear understanding of the logical steps involved in it.

It is also extremely important that when one explain the arguments of other philosophers, he or she interprets them *fairly enough*. This does not mean that one is barred from criticizing them, but rather that one must interpret each author as holding the strongest possible argument consistent with what they have written.

If a philosopher’s argument seems obviously wrong, then one probably does not understand it properly. Even if a philosopher’s argument seems right, one must take great care to avoid confusing their argument with any other argument that sounds similar to it.

A writer can avoid these difficulties by training himself or herself to read philosophy articles extremely slowly and carefully in order to understand the precise steps of the author’s argument. It is not unusual to have to read a philosophy article several times in order to grasp its details.

Philosophy is difficult by nature; to avoid making things even harder, one must make sure that the argument presented in his or her essay is absolutely as clear and easy to understand as possible.

Another important point concerns quotations. Academic honesty requires the proper citation of sources. Citations indicate that the words and ideas are not your own. When quoting directly from an author’s work, quotation marks are used to reproduce the exact words of an author within the quotation marks. It is better to keep them short and to the point.

A direct quotation of eight lines or more should be set off from the main text of the essay, single-spaced, and indented, with no quotation marks at the beginning or end. Indirect quotations paraphrase an author’s words and are not placed within quotation marks but are also cited to show that the idea is not the writer’s; failing to do so results in plagiarism, or the use of another person’s ideas as your own.

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. In short, it is important to avoid frequent and lengthy quotations; as well as explaining how the quotations one uses bear upon either the immediate point or the overall argument.



Figure 5.3: Avoid Plagiarism

Source: <http://www2.webster.edu/~barrettb/materials/plagiarism.htm>

5.3 How to Reference

Referencing involves documenting the sources used while writing an essay. How does one go about referencing the materials he or she has cited or quoted in an essay? There are two major ways of referencing in an essay

- ❖ The use of notes
- ❖ In-text referencing

In the first instance – the use of notes – there are two ways of documenting the sources used. One could either use footnotes or endnotes. In either case, the use of notes involve the use of superscript numeric characters arranged serially from the beginning to the end of the essay (a paper or chapter in a book) each representing a material that has been consulted in the course of writing the essay starting from the first to the last.

Box 5.2: Differences between Footnote and Endnote

The difference between the footnote and the endnote has to do with the position where the cited materials represented by each serially arranged superscript are placed. In using the footnote referencing style, the references for the materials consulted in each page appears at the bottom or the foot of the page till the end of the entire essay. While typing with Microsoft word application, this can easily be done using the Ctrl+Alt+F keys.

The same method has been employed through the pages of this study series. But for the endnotes, the references for the materials consulted are collated at the end of the entire document, under the heading “Endnotes”, serially arranged with each serial number corresponding to the superscript serially arranged in the document. When typing with Microsoft word application, one can simply create an “Endnote in a document by using the Ctrl+Alt+D keys.

While creating the references either at the bottom of the page or at the end of the document, some rules are followed. There is no generally accepted method of doing this. It varies among, institutions, academic association, and journals. Each of these bodies tries to find a way to add a unique touch to the referencing style to make theirs different from others. However, it generally follows the formats below:

❖ Referencing a book:

Author’s first and last name, *Book Title* (Publishing Place: Publisher, Year), page(s) cited

❖ Referencing a chapter in an edited book (or an entry in an edited Encyclopaedia):

Chapter author’s first and last names, Chapter Title. In Book Editors first and last names (Ed., or Eds. If more than one editor), *Book Title* (Publishing Place: Publisher, Year), page(s) cited

❖ Referencing a journal article:

Article author’s name, Article Title. *Journal Title*, Volume-Number (Year): page(s) cited

❖ Referencing an internet source:

Article/Book author’s name, Article/Book Title. Retrieved on (write the date from Site) Name. Available at: Webpage address

When an already cited material is been cited again in the same documents, essay or chapter, there is no need repeating the entire details of the material. What is needed at that point is simply the

author's name, the title of the material followed by the page(s) cited. The page cited is always represented with a "p." for a single page and "pp." for citations that cuts across pages.

On the other hand, in-text referencing style involves the direct placement of the cited material at the beginning or the end of the part of the essay being referenced. This is done by simply stating the author's name, year of publication and/or page(s) cited of the material referenced. There is no fixed way of doing this. The in-text referencing style can appear in any of the following manner in the example below:

- ❖ Quine (1992, p. 20), in his naturalised epistemology goes beyond traditional accounts of epistemic justification.
- ❖ Quine (1992: 20), in his naturalised epistemology goes beyond traditional accounts of epistemic justification.
- ❖ Quine (1992), in his naturalised epistemology goes beyond traditional accounts of epistemic justification.
- ❖ Quine, in his naturalised epistemology goes beyond traditional accounts of epistemic justification (Quine, 1992, p. 20).
- ❖ Quine, in his naturalised epistemology goes beyond traditional accounts of epistemic justification (Quine, 1992: 20).
- ❖ Quine, in his naturalised epistemology goes beyond traditional accounts of epistemic justification (Quine, 1992).

The variations in the use of in-text referencing style depend on institutional, journal or associational requirements. At the end of the entire essay, the writer is then expected to provide the details for all the references used in the essay under the heading "References" or "Bibliographical References".

All the referenced materials should appear in this section arranged alphabetically. The manner in which this documentation is done also varies among academic bodies, institutions and journals. However, it generally tallies with the format below:

- ❖ Referencing a book:

Author's last name, first name or Initials, Publication Year, *Book Title*, Publishing Place: Publisher.

❖ Referencing a chapter in an edited book (or an entry in an edited Encyclopaedia):

Chapter author's last name, first name or Initials, Publication Year, Chapter Title. In Book Editors first and last names (Ed. or Eds. If more than one editor), *Book Title*, Publishing Place: Publisher, page range.

❖ Referencing a journal article:

Article author's last name, first name or Initials, Publication Year, Article Title. *Journal Title*, Volume-Number: page range

❖ Referencing an internet source:

Article/Book author's last name, first name, Publication Year (or ND meaning No Date if publication year is not available), Article/Book Title. Retrieved on (write the date from Site Name. Available at: Webpage address

It is also important to note that notes referencing style can also be used side-by-side with the in-text referencing style. When writing an essay, there could be information that the writer may feel is useful for the reader to grasp the thoughts better but cannot readily fit within the essay itself to avoid clumsiness and prevent the primary line of thought from being distorted.

Such points or information can be brought to the bottom of the page as footnotes or at the end of the document as endnotes using superscript numbering. In this way the information is preserved in the essay but not in a way that will distort the basic argument and line of thought. Once a researcher is familiar with these basic referencing tips, he or she can present his ideas and their evidences clearly and neatly.

■ What are the two ways of using notes?

Footnote and endnote

Summary of Study Session 5

In Study Session 5, you have learnt that:

1. References and citations take in any well-written philosophical essay. For an essay in philosophy to be worthwhile, essential and relevant materials both as primary and secondary sources must be consulted and employed. However, to avoid plagiarism, they must be properly documented. This is where the importance of the different styles of referencing comes in. A writer must endeavor to understand the style of referencing he is expected to use in a context and adapt quickly to it.
2. A student in a philosophy department should approach his course adviser or consult the departmental, faculty or university brochure for the style accepted within the institution. A professional philosopher seeking to publish an article in a journal ought to consult the submission guidelines of the journal to familiarize himself or herself with the journal's style of referencing. In any case, referencing could either take the in-text format or the notes format. What may vary are only minor adjustments to these formats.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 5

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next! Support meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 5.1

Distinguish between primary and secondary sources.

SAQ 5.2

When should a quotation be indented?

SAQ 5.3

Highlight some of the differences between in-text and notes references

References

Martinich, A. P. 2005 *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*, 3rd Edition, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Rippon, S. 2008. *A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper*, Harvard: Harvard College Writing Centre Brief Guide Series.

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Study session 6: Major Challenges to Philosophical Writing

Introduction

In Plato's words, "nothing worthwhile was ever accomplished without great difficulty."¹ Writing an essay in philosophy is not such an easy task and it requires a persistent effort to master the skills, most of which you have discussed in the preceding lectures.

However, there is the need to examine a number of challenges that can arise when writing a philosophical essay. A writer can face the difficulty of identifying and stating a philosophical problem as different from a practical problem. He or she can also be confronted with the problem of stating the thesis in clear terms, using the appropriate authority, and bearing the burden of proof in an argument.

More so, some scholars often end up writing a descriptive essay rather than a philosophical, analytic essay. These challenges, if not addressed could easily flaw a philosophical essay and make it clumsy.

Thus, in this study session, you shall pay attention to how to identify philosophical problem, differences between description and analysis. You will also learn about the burden of proof.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 6

At the end of this study session, you should be able to:

- 6.1 Discuss how to identify a research/philosophical problem
- 6.2 Explain the thin line between Description and Analysis
- 6.3 Discuss the Burden of Proof

¹ Plato, as quoted by, Louis P. Pojman, *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong* 6th Edition (Australia: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), p.224.

6.1 Identifying a Research/Philosophical Problem

The first step to take in writing an essay in philosophy is to identify a research problem one wishes to shed light on. Identifying a philosophical problem invariably result in stating a thesis one wishes to defend. Thus, identifying the philosophical problem one wishes to analyse is very vital for a philosophical write-up. But what does a philosophical problem consist of?

The major challenge faced by students and researchers in philosophy is the belief that philosophical problems are merely everyday practical problems such as, the problem of infrastructural development, the problem of good governance, and the problem of insecurity.

To be sure, philosophical problems arise from practical issues of everyday life. But if philosophers engage these problems merely as they are, they do nothing different from what natural scientists or social scientists do. But philosophical problems are more theoretical than practical. They are meant to identify issues with theories postulated for practical everyday problems, or theories that interpret other theories of everyday practical problems.

Concerning the issue of good governance, for instance, there are theories of justice and fairness postulated to resolve such a problem. A philosopher engages a particular theory or theories of justice, identifies a problem, and defends a thesis.

The problem could be that the main arguments tabled in support of a theory are not coherent or consistent, a theory does not fit with everyday experience or reality of the issue at hand, the criticism already levelled against a theory does not hold in the light of new evidences (defence of a theory), or that a theory has become anachronistic or outdated.

Thus, a philosophical problem identifies a gap or lacuna that has been left open or unfilled in theories or scholarship. Once a theoretical problem is identified, then, the writer postulates and defends a thesis that he or she is convinced can fill the obvious vacuum in scholarship.

- What is the major challenge faced by students and researchers in philosophy?

- The major challenge faced by students and researchers in philosophy is the belief that philosophical problems are merely everyday practical problems

6.1.1 Stating the Thesis

Besides identifying a philosophical problem, a philosophical paper is a defence of a thesis. In fact, the bulk of an essay in philosophy is dedicated to stating, explaining, analysing, arguing for and responding to anticipated objections to a thesis. But what exactly is a thesis and how is it stated in a philosophical essay? Simply put, a thesis is a statement of the position/conclusion of the argument of a writer.

It expresses the writer's position on an issue. Thus, a philosophical essay is not complete if the writer simply describes a philosophical position without analysing it in order to identify a philosophical problem and take a position.

Box 6.1: Thesis

A thesis is a statement that makes some clear, definite assertion about the subject under discussion. A philosophy paper is not a personal report of how one feels or what one believes or a description of what has been said about a topic. It is an argument for a thesis. To avoid mistaking a thesis for a description, personal feeling or belief, a writer must follow some definite steps in developing a thesis.

First, the writer must explain what he or she means by his thesis. If the thesis of an essay says that abortion is wrong in any circumstance as against a position which defends the rightness of abortion in a particular circumstance, the writer must explain what "in any circumstance" means.

The next step would be to provide clearly stated arguments for the thesis, or the position, one holds and show why they are better than, or how they reaffirm, other positions. Very importantly too, a strength of a thesis depends on the extent to which one is able to identify, examine and respond to anticipated or foreseen objections.

Once these steps are followed somewhat religiously, the writer's thesis will become evident and clear, rather than being difficult to pinpoint.

- What is a thesis?
- Thesis is a statement of the position/conclusion of the argument of a writer.

6.1.2 Citing the Appropriate Authority

People rely on authorities for many of the beliefs they have and the decisions they make; and it is legitimate to do so. But more often than not, such reliance on authority is done uncritically and the fallacy of argumentum ad vericodium – appeal to inappropriate authority – is often committed. In writing, particularly in philosophy, it is expected that one would also rely on authorities in making one's arguments and stating one's position.

If not for any reason, it is believed that such reliance is justified because the authority that has been depended upon by a writer has good reasons for his or her position. In fact, famous authorities in philosophy are relied upon because of the general belief that they have good evidence for their positions or arguments.

However, one must be careful not to mistake mere fame and authority for good evidence, since it is not always the case that an authority always has good evidence for his or her claims. A bad argument cannot become good simply because a popular or famous philosopher has used the same argument.

Students are especially susceptible to misusing authority because most of their essays require extensive use of authorities; usually some distinguished and very dead philosopher – Plato, Descartes, Hume, and Kant – and they do not know what it is about an authority that is important. What is important is not his fame, nor his admirable character, nor his possibly exciting life, but his arguments.

This is the role that philosophical authorities play in most philosophical essays, those of professional philosophers as much as those of students. To this extent, the arguments and positions of those considered as great philosophers should first be mastered, then criticized, revised, and extended.



Figure 6.1: Immanuel Kant

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanuel_Kant

In addition to the use of the works of great philosophers, students often have to research *secondary literatures*, that is, books and articles that have been written by scholars about those considered as great philosophers. Sometimes students are expected to report what these scholars have said, sometimes, they are expected to evaluate what they have said.

In either case, what is important is the evidence or reasons they give for their views. It is important to note that in making use of secondary literatures, they should be investigated in order to discover whether it throws any light on the primary topic.

- Which of this is important in a philosopher?
 - a. His fame
 - b. His admirable character

- c. His possibly exciting life
- d. His arguments
- d. His argument

6.2 The Thin Line between Description and Analysis

Another major challenge in philosophical writing, a problem mostly faced by students, is the inability to write an essay that is not merely descriptive but also analytic and argumentative. When an essay is purely descriptive, it generally lacks a clearly stated problem and thesis. It simply describes the issue at hand as well as the perspectives on the issue.

However, a philosophical essay does not simply describe; it analyses positions and arguments and takes a position. An essay on the concept of justice will not be philosophical if it only explains and describes the concept of justice as well as the arguments for or against its types. Rather it is philosophical if it can identify clearly what theoretical problem is wrong with a particular theory of justice, analyse the reasons for the problem, state and defend a thesis.

This is often the basis for the distinction between an excellent student and a good or fair student. It also explains why some articles sent to a philosophy journal for publishing are either rejected or accepted. If an article sent to a philosophy journal does not but describes existing positions without any painstaking analysis, there is no basis for publishing it.

- When an essay is purely descriptive, what does it lack?
- When an essay is purely descriptive, it generally lacks a clearly stated problem and thesis

6.3 The Burden of Proof

Connected to the issue of evidence and authority is the issue of who bears the burden of proof in an argument. Roughly, the person who asserts or otherwise relies upon the truth of a proposition for the cogency of his position bears the burden. Recall, however, that it is impossible to prove every proposition.

In every science, some propositions are taken as basic and ground-level or taken-for-granted assumptions. They are simply assumed without proof. In geometry, these principles are axioms, which traditionally were considered self-evident. Further, there are many propositions, which, although they are not self-evident, need not be proven every time they are used, since the evidence for them is very familiar.

For example, it needn't be proven that the world is round and very old, that humans use languages to communicate, and so on. On the other hand, in most contexts you should not simply assume that only one object exists or that nonhuman animals use languages to communicate. These are controversial views and need support.

Box 6.2: Propositions

There are some propositions, however, that are neither self-evident nor supported by evidence presented in the essay itself that might still be used. Sometimes propositions are used conditionally or as suppositions. That is, someone might try to prove that there is empirical knowledge on the assumption that there is mathematical knowledge.

In this case, the person would be proving the existence of empirical knowledge conditionally. He assumes *for the sake of the argument* that there is mathematical knowledge in order to draw an interesting consequence of that assumption. Such conditional use of a proposition is legitimate so long as the inferred proposition is not philosophically outrageous.

One implication of these facts is that an author should write in such a way that she can legitimately expect her audience to understand what she means. In particular, ordinary words should be used in their usual senses, and technical terms should be explained in terms that the audience can be expected to understand. Of course, an author always has to presuppose some knowledge on the part of the audience.

The trick is to be able to discriminate between what can be presupposed and what needs to be supported by proof or evidence. There is no rule of thumb about how to figure this out other than being familiar with philosophical discourses and forms of writing.

Summary of Study Session 6

In Study Session 6, you have learnt that:

1. If the necessary precaution and care is taken to ensure that the philosophical problem and thesis of a philosophical essay stand out, to use authority in the right way, to avoid a merely descriptive essay, and to bear the burden of proof and make the needed assumptions where necessary, we can be sure of producing a philosophically robust essay that readers can identify with. But as earlier mentioned this is not always the easiest of tasks.
2. A lot of effort is needed on our part to do the right thing at the right time. But mastering philosophical writing and providing evidence for what you write depends greatly on what you have read. The next session pays attention to the dos and don'ts of reading a philosophical essay.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 6

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next! Support meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 6.1

What steps are taken to establish the thesis of an essay?

SAQ 6.2

Distinguish between a practical and theoretical problem.

SAQ 6.3

What is the burden of proof?

References

Martinich, A. P. *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*, 3rd Edition, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Pojman, L. P. *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong* 6th Edition, Australia: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009.

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Study Session 7: Reading a Philosophical Write-up

Introduction

Reading is no doubt very important in philosophical research and writing. As a cognitive process of deciphering symbols in order to derive meaning, and as an interaction between what is read and the reader, strongly influenced by the reader's prior knowledge, experiences, attitude and language community (socially and culturally situated), reading provides the writer meanings, ideas and evidences on the basis of which he writes and evaluates what has been written.

In philosophical research and writing, much of the research done for the sake of writing is through reading bearing in mind that the philosopher goes to no lab nor carry out experiments (except thought experiments) while engaging in research. Much of what he/she gathers as evidence for his/her write-up is from what he/she reads and reviews. Philosophical writing is thus more or less literature review – the review of already written ideas and thoughts.

In this study session, you will pay attention to some general but essential principles that can aid a writer in philosophy to achieve the primary aims of reading a philosophical work: deciphering or deriving meanings and ideas, gaining understanding, and identifying flaws in arguments presented.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 7

At the end of this study session, you should be able to:

7.1 Discuss how to quickly take a Glance to get the Gist

7.2 Explain Things to Watch Out For in an Essay

7.1 A Quick Glance to get the Gist

The first time one reads through a text or an essay in philosophy, it is recommended that one does not pause and ponder over every single word or idea, trying to get everything point before moving on. Doing so will make reading the essay difficult and uninteresting. The first thing to do however is to let one's eyes pass over the page, reading every word, to get a general sense of the essay.

Perhaps, a reader can start by reading carefully through the introduction and conclusion because these are usually the places where one can get the gist and summary of what the argument is about.

- ❖ When this is done, the reader should ask himself or herself what the article is about.
- ❖ What aspect of philosophy does it deal with?
- ❖ Which topic, concept or theory does it investigate?
- ❖ What were some of the key words that the philosopher kept mentioning?
- ❖ In what sense does the author uses specific terms or concepts?

Such questions help to prepare the mind by stirring up prior knowledge of the issue at hand and such a mental state is very valuable for reading. Once this is done, the entire essay can be read through to get the general sense of the paper and the arguments it contains. It is very important to also get the sense in which key concepts are used in an essay, that is, how they are defined.

Once a reader gets these definitions, a big chunk of the work is done. Usually, a definition is the starting point in an argument and, for the most part, the rest of the argument builds on that definition. It is also important to pay attention to the way a philosopher presents his or her arguments in his write-up. Hence, a reader should pay attention to the signposts that signal important moves in a philosopher's argument.

Such signpost may include the use of words or phrases such as; 'because', 'since', 'given the argument', 'thus', 'therefore', 'hence', 'consequently', 'in the first instance', 'on the other hand', and 'flowing from the above'.

- Where does a reader start from to get the gist of the work?
- Introduction and Conclusion

7.1.1 A Careful Perusal for Analysis and Questioning

After reading through the essay for the first time and gotten a feel of the language, the key concepts and their usage, and the reader can begin to formulate the author's argument, it is time to go back to carefully re-read the article. Look more closely for those signpost words. They will probably indicate not only the overall argument, but how individual pieces such as definitions fit. Write down each of those definitions.

They will probably come in handy as you read, ask such questions as:

- ❖ Are there distinctions that the author makes (from other authors, between words, concepts and theories)?
- ❖ Are there distinctions that the philosopher fails to make?
- ❖ Are there assumptions or stereotypes the author is relying on?
- ❖ How do the thoughts connect with one another?

As a reader reads the essay for another time, it is time to start asking such important questions.

This puts one in a better position to evaluate the argument(s) put forward. In other words, once a reader understands the argument(s) put forward, he or she can start deciding whether or not he or she agrees or disagrees with the argument.

If a reader finds that he or she is disagreeing with the author because he or she is putting forward a position that makes no sense at all, then the reader might have missed a thing or two about the author's argument for it is very rare to find a philosophical essay devoid of any meaning. The reader needs to go through the essay again to get the main points down again before proceeding to analyse and evaluate them.

If the reader disagrees with the author, even though the author has a compelling argument, then he or she needs to state the specific reason(s) for disagreeing.

- ❖ Do the conclusions not follow from the argument?
- ❖ Are the definitions flawed or is something missing?

- ❖ Are there implicitly taken-for-granted assumptions that force the reader to question the soundness of the argument?

Often these arguments are webs of interconnected ideas and trying to understand everything the philosopher put forward would be a nearly impossible task. Even if the reader could understand everything, he or she wouldn't be able to put everything learnt in a single essay. Hence, a reader should not worry about trying to understand everything but should still be able to articulate the overall structure of the argument.

- Why will you look more closely for the signpost words?
 - Look more closely for those signpost words. They will probably indicate not only the overall argument, but how individual pieces such as definitions fit.

7.2 Things to Watch Out For in an Essay

Generally, the best approach is to continually ask questions when you are reading the paper. Doing this usually leads into identifying and clarifying the main points of the essay. While reading through an essay, a reader should look through for the following:

1. **The Logic of the argument:** This is definitely one of the more ambiguous and difficult areas to pin down. When you are looking for the logic of the argument, you are looking at the relationship between the claims (conclusion) and the evidence used to support those claims (premises). Often philosophers are taking us on a short journey.

They usually tell us the destination before getting there and they also point out features of the trip on the way there. A reader searches for the main claims and the arguments that support them. In this way, a longer paper can be summarized in just a few lines, a syllogism perhaps.

2. **Fallacies:** Fallacies are error in arguments where the conclusion does not logically follow from the premises. Writers commit fallacies when they use certain unreliable patterns of reasoning to argue for their conclusions.

If the claims made by a writer cannot be implied from the evidences provided, then a fallacy must have been committed. It is the duty of the reader to find out the exact fallacy or fallacies committed and on the basis of this, an argument can be criticised and improved on.

3. **Points of criticism:** They are a number of points that can make an essay susceptible to criticisms. It could be that the argument doesn't accomplish its aims. If an argument starts out with very clear intentions, but never actually achieves those results, then there is a solid basis for criticism.

It could be that the argument is internally contradictory. Sometimes an author will make a point in one section of the writing and then completely contradict himself in another section. A close reading of those sections will draw out this contradiction. It could also be that the argument's premises are false. It might be the case that a philosopher simply has certain facts wrong.

If those facts are wrong then it might be the case that the conclusion does not follow. A charitable reading would scrutinize those facts to ensure that their truthfulness is essential for the argument. Again, it could be that the argument has unjustified assumptions.

A very patient and careful reading of the text will nearly always reveal certain assumptions that the philosopher relies on. If this assumption is unjustified then it will create problems for the author. It is not enough for an author to identify some assumptions; he or she must clearly show the importance of the assumption. If not, he gives the reader an easy point for criticism.

Summary of Study Session 7

In Study Session 7, you have learnt that:

1. From the foregoing, it follows that reading an essay in philosophy involves first reading quickly through the essay to get the main gist, reading through it again thoroughly and more carefully in order to analyse the arguments and ask important questions that will reveal the strength and weakness of the essay. As the reader does this, he is able to identify the main arguments, the logic of the arguments and, if any, fallacies that may

have been committed and weak points of criticisms. If a reader takes the above guidelines to heart, he or she will be able to understand an essay and be able to develop his or her own viewpoints.

2. It is also essential that when reading, a reader should read about the same issue from a number of essays in order to take into consideration various perspectives. This will give him or her richer basis to understand and approach the issue.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 7

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next! Support meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 7.1

1. Examine what you think is involved in quickly glancing through an essay?
2. Why is it important for a reader to read through an essay a second time?

SAQ 7.2

Highlight some common points of criticisms in an essay

References

Massecar, A. *How to Write a Philosophy Paper*, The Learning Commons, 2010.

Study session 8: Writing an Exam in Philosophy

Introduction

Every student loves to have the best grades when examined in the courses he or she takes in an exam, but not all students make the needed efforts to have such good grades. More so, many of those who are willing to have good grades do not know how best to go about it.

The Previous Study Session gives a detailed explanation needed by any student or researcher in philosophy to excel in philosophical writing and research. But for the sake of a philosophy student who aims at good grades as he or she writes a test, an exam, a term paper or seminar in a course, it is fitting that summary and emphasis some of the key points already discussed above.

This Study Session will focus on explaining to the philosophy students how to prepare for course tests, exam, term paper and seminars.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 8

At the end of this study session, you should be able to:

- 8.1 Explain how prepare for a test or exam in philosophy
- 8.2 Examine some general guidelines for writing a philosophy term paper or seminar
- 8.3 Explain what affects Grades

8.1 Preparing for a Test or Exam

Preparing for a test does not start just before the test or exam is written. The suggestions provided below can only work effectively for a philosophy student only if he or she has been studying responsibly in his or her course of study.

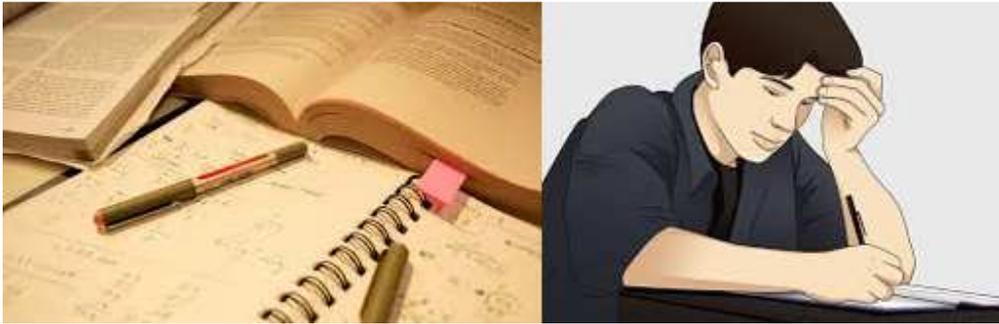


Figure 8.1: Preparing for Exam or Test

Source: <http://www.wikihow.com/Ace-a-Test>

Studying responsibly involves attending all Study Session for the particular course, taking notes, reading the texts and hand-outs for the course, asking questions, and discussing the topics with course mates. When these have been done, the following points will then be useful for preparing for a test or exam:

1. Re-read the course textbook(s). If there is too much material to re-read all of it, then read those parts that you marked as the most important, either in the text or in the notes you made while reading it the first or second time through.
2. Re-read your class notes and hand-outs. This will assist the student in identifying areas that the lecturer has emphasised in class and areas to concentrate on when reading through the textbooks.
3. Outline and organize the material to be tested, so that it forms some intelligible pattern that can be more easily remembered.
4. Write down specific questions that you think might plausibly be asked. Then actually write out answers to those questions. Write essays to answer essay questions. Do not merely think about answers. The best way to find out how much one knows is to see how much one can put down correctly and coherently on paper. You will be graded for what you put down on paper, not what is in your brain.

(G. F. W. Hegel wrote that every young man has a great novel in his head. Though he appeared being sarcastic, what he meant is that such novels, not being produced, are worthless.) Actually writing out an essay will force the student to organize the information.

5. Revise your essay answers. Reorganize and supplement your essays with detailed information and examples. Aside from the structure of an essay, the single most important difference between an A-grade and a C-grade is the amount of orderly detail and argumentation that the student provides.

Even if none of your essay questions is asked, it is very likely that parts of your prepared essays can be used in other essay questions.

- As student highlight how you can prepare for test or exam in philosophy?
- The following are some of the ways to prepare for test or exam in philosophy
 1. Re-read the course textbook
 2. Re-read your class notes and hand-outs
 3. Outline and organize the material to be tested
 4. Write down specific questions that you think might plausibly be asked
 5. Revise your essay answers

A good essay answer has the same features as any good essay: an introduction, a body and a conclusion. Be sure to state in general what your answer to the question is in the introduction; then support that answer with detailed information and argumentation in the body of the essay and then very briefly summarize what you have done.

It is quite possible that a student may not follow all of the suggestions just given. But the student should try his very best. Although the suggestions are presented in the order in which they should be done, they are also presented in inverse importance. That is, suggestion (5) is the most important and (1) the least. If a student begins his or her preparation with (5), then he or she will know what he or she must look for in taking the earlier suggestions.

8.2 Six fundamental Principles for Writing a Term Paper

As noted earlier, an essay written by a student, whether as an answer to an exam question, a seminar or a term paper, has or ought to have the same structure as any good essay written in scholarly philosophy books and peer-reviewed journals. Such structures, styles and forms have been examined in more details in previous Study Session.

Box 8.1: Six fundamental Principles for Writing a Term Paper

1. Get the Exegesis Right
2. Make Arguments
3. Think About Counter Examples
4. Do Self-Critical Work
5. Follow the Basic Format of any Philosophy Paper
6. Follow the Formatting Checklist

However, we shall attempt to highlight some of the major points here that a student must bear in mind while writing a term paper or seminar paper for a course in philosophy. Manuel Vargas identifies six fundamental principles that guide students as they write their seminar papers and term papers. They are:

1. **Get the Exegesis Right:** When a student is working on the part of his or her paper that involves exposition of what a philosopher allegedly says, he or she should make sure he or she gets the points right. Discussing with others, both students and tutors can help.

Nothing is affects for your grade more than getting an otherwise great paper that just misunderstands what the relevant philosopher(s) actually meant. One way of doing that is to be very clear on two things: understanding what any particular article or chapter is intending to do and being clear on what someone is claiming is absolutely essential.

2. **Make Arguments:** a student does not only expose a philosopher's views but analyse them to locate points that might be important but has been ignored by the philosopher. It

is, however, not enough to identify such points. The student must argue for them by providing reasons why they are true and why they should be accepted

3. **Think About Counter Examples:** This is one of the most important tools in philosophy. Criticizing a paper, by reference to counterexamples, allows a student to quickly show the implausibility of some claim. Of course, this cannot always be done; a student may not always come up with a counterexample in every paper he or she writes in the class. But it is an ideal to strive for.

Counterexamples are also important when defending one's own position since one of the most important things to do is to consider possible counterexamples to your claim.

4. **Do Self-Critical Work:** Something that every student should really try to do when finished with a write-up is to consider how someone would reply. This is really just a broadening of the point made above about considering counterexamples and it is repeated below in the comments about "the basic format of any philosophy paper."

A student should work on trying to figure out how someone might object to what he/she has said and whether his/her position can overcome the response. As suggested above, one way of doing this is considering possible counterexamples.

Doing this can make the difference between a good paper and a great paper. Of course, in papers of the size a student writes, this can be extremely difficult to do. Nevertheless, this is worth trying to work in, in any part of a paper topic where the student is given an opportunity to get critical.

5. **Follow The Basic Format Of Any Philosophy Paper:** there are basic format of writing philosophy papers these formats include

Box 1.1 Basic Format of Writing in Philosophy

1. Introduction
2. Presentation of Argument
3. Analysis of the Argument
4. Response on Analysis
5. Conclusion and Summary

- a) Introduction: short, to the point, and containing a clearly presented thesis;
- b) Presentation of the argument or claim you are going to analyse,
- c) Analysis of the argument. This is the part where reasons are given for thinking that the claim or argument being analysed is problematic or defensible. This section is typically the first place where one displays ingenuity;
- d) Consider a response to your analysis. This is your second opportunity for a student to display his or her creativity, knowledge, and philosophical power;
- (e) Conclude and summarise the main points showing the reader how it all pans out and ultimately supports your thesis claim.

Note however that if at the end of one's paper, he or she realizes that the argument got to some place he or she didn't expect, it is better to go back and change the thesis claim to reflect the new direction of the paper.

6. **Follow The Formatting Checklist:** The key here is to remember that the course lecturer or grader is going to have to do a ton of grading, so anything one can do to make his or her life easier is going to be well-received.

It is particularly important to follow the stipulated guidelines for preparing the final manuscript such as formatting styles while typing, the referencing style, the number of pages (if there are limited number of pages), and so on.

Louis Pojman summarises these points as follows:

- 1) Identify the problem you want to analyse. For example, you might want to show that utilitarianism is a tenable (or untenable) theory.
- 2) As clearly as possible, state the problem and what you intend to show. For example: ‘I intend to analyse the arguments for and against act-utilitarianism and show how utilitarianism can meet the main objections to it.’
- 3) Set forth your arguments in logical order, and support your premises with reasons. It helps to illustrate your points with examples or to point out counterexamples to opposing points of view.
- 4) Consider alternative points of view as well as objections to your own position. Try to meet these charges, and show why your position is more plausible.
- 5) Apply the principle of charity to your opponent’s reasoning – give his or her case the strongest interpretation possible – for unless you can meet the strongest objections to your own position, you cannot be confident that your position is the best. I should add that applying the principle of charity is one of the hardest practices in philosophical discussion. Even otherwise very good philosophers have an inclination to caricature or settle for a weak version of their opponent’s arguments.
- 6) End your paper with a summary and a conclusion. That is, succinctly review your arguments and state what you think you’ve demonstrated. In the conclusion, it is always helpful to show the implications of your conclusion for other issues. Answer the question, ‘Why does it matter?’
- 7) Be prepared to write at least two drafts before you have a working copy. It helps to have another philosophy student go over the preliminary draft before you write a final draft. Make sure that your arguments are well constructed and that your paper as a whole is coherent.

- 8) Regarding style: Write clearly and in an active voice. Avoid ambiguous expressions, double negatives, and jargon. Put other people's ideas in your own words as much as possible, and give credit in the text and in bibliographical notes whenever you have used someone else's idea or quoted someone.

Knowing just when to credit another person is an exercise in good judgment. While academics are rightly indignant with students who fail to refer to their sources, some students are fastidious to a fault, even documenting where they heard common knowledge. There is a middle way that common sense should be able to discover.

- 9) Include a bibliography at the end of your paper. In it, list all the sources you used in writing your paper.

- 10) Put the paper aside for a day or two, then read it afresh. Chances are you will find things to change.

Following these suggested guidelines can help the student prepare an excellent essay that will attract excellent marks when graded.

8.3 What affects your Grades

Students are graded on at least five different levels: excellent or very good, good, fair or average, poor or below average, very poor and bad. An excellent grade, often represented by an 'A', show that the student has done excellently well in his essay to the extent that no changes or modifications are needed in the structuring and arguments of the essay.

In some cases an excellent paper may need minor comments on style, organisation and substance. A good essay, often represented with a 'B', is well written but requires more comments about style, structure and organisation which, if incorporated, can raise the essay to an 'A' grade essay. An essay is graded fair or average (represented with a 'C') if it has some defects not only in organisation and style but also in its contents and arguments.

Some information and arguments may have missed the mark and fixing these is what makes the difference between an 'A' graded paper and a 'C' graded paper. A below average essay, often represented with a 'D' is not so much different from the average essay, only that the defects in the contents and arguments is more intense.

A poor essay represented with grade 'E' is much more defective in organisation, style, substance and contents. A lot needs to be done in refurbishing the paper to a good or very good essay. The point, however, is that with diligence and effort, even an 'E' graded paper can be refurbished. But a bad essay represented by an 'F' means that the student completely misses the mark.

Virtually everything about the paper is wrong. The essay misinforms rather than it informs. It is best for the student not to attempt repairing the paper. It is better to write a new one.

Thus, a student should realise that the grade he or she gets depends much on him or her. Having being guided by the points in the sections above, the student should endeavour to avoid discussing off-topic or paying too much attention to information that has no direct bearing on the topic at hand.

If he feels that he or she needs to input the information, he or she may do so as endnotes or footnotes. The student should also endeavour to fully complete the assignment, defend the claims made, and avoid ignoring structure, style and formatting requirements.

Summary of Study Session 8

In Study Session 8, you have learnt that:

1. Preparing for a test or an exam, or writing a philosophy seminar or term paper begins long before the student writes anything down.

2. Student must have been studying responsibly implying that the student must have been attending classes, taking notes, reading textbooks and hand-outs, asking questions, and discussing the topics with course mates. It is when this has been done that the guidelines highlighted above for writing a good test or exam, and for writing a philosophy essay can be useful.
3. Studying responsibly and applying the above guidelines results in the best grades for students.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 8

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next study Support Meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 8.1 (Tests Learning Outcome 8.1)

What does it mean to study responsibly?

SAQ 8.2 (Tests Learning Outcome 8.2)

Highlight some important principles required to prepare effectively for a test.

SAQ 8.3 (Tests Learning Outcome 8.3)

1. Explain how a philosophy essay can be written to attract the best grades.
2. Enumerate and explain the different grade types
3. What must a student avoid in order to attract good grades?

References

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Study Session 9 Internet and Philosophical Research

Introduction

There is no doubt that human live in a world dominated by end products of science and technology. One of such end product that has become part of the air most people breathe is the World Wide Web or the internet service, the basis of which the world is referred to as a global village because, although the world is vast and large it is intertwined in the internet network of the World Wide Web. Every aspect of human activities has been influenced by the internet.

There are online schools, journals books, discussion forums, encyclopaedias, dictionary and all sort of educational and research tools available online. In fact, for hard copy books and journals to reach a wider audience, they are sold and bought online; they are uploaded and downloaded online as well.

It is therefore important that a work on philosophical research and writing incorporates into its contents the influence of the internet on philosophical research and writing. A lot of information about philosophy is available on the internet. Much of this information is excellent and worth taking advantage of. Unfortunately, a reasonable amount of the material available online is unreliable, and some of it can be downright misleading.

This Study Session will give you advice about how to tell the good stuff from the bad stuff, and point to some websites that can be relied on for excellent information. It will also highlight ways of referencing internet sources.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 9

At the end of this study session, you should be able to:

- 9.1 Examine the types of philosophical materials available on the web.
- 9.2 Highlight some ways to identify reliable philosophical materials on the internet.
- 9.3 Describe the reason for Referencing a book

9.1 Types of Philosophical Materials on the Web

There are many types of philosophical materials on the internet. They include the following:

Box 9.1: Types of Philosophical Materials on the Web

1. Books
2. Journals
3. Encyclopaedias
4. Discussion Forums and Blogs

1. **Books:** The philosophy books available on the internet include both hard copy books published as e-copy and electronic books (e-books). Thousands of reputable presses avail themselves of the great opportunity the internet offers.

When they publish hard copy books, they also make available soft copies or electronic copies (e-books) of such publications for a wider reach. To avoid the inconvenience of posting, individuals can order or download for free such e-copies and print at their convenience or read on their laptops, desktops, smartphone and i-pads.

However, there are books published solely as e-books for downloading either for free or by subscription or payment. Such books do not have hard copies but can be printed by the downloader at his or her own convenience.

2. **Journals:** Similarly, the philosophy journals available on-line include journals with hard copies and journals with only electronic copies. Some of the journals require subscriptions to download articles or the entire volumes. Others allow scholars and students to download their articles and volumes for free
3. **Encyclopaedias:** There are many electronic encyclopaedias of philosophy available on the internet. Most of them are reliable. For instance, we have the *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* and the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. They are both reliable sources of information for philosophers.

On the other hand, most hard copy encyclopaedias of philosophy are also available online and interestingly majority of them can be downloaded for free.

- 4. Discussion Forums and Blogs:** there are many philosophy blogs and discussion forums available online. They may not serve as appropriate sources of reference but they stir up philosophical discourses that participants could research more on.

These blogs and discussion forums also serve as a means of sharing ideas and informing other philosophers of ongoing projects, conferences and journal. For instance LinkedIn, as a global professional networking group, has many of such reputable discussion forums as Global Philosophy Group, Bioethics Connection, and Philosophy: Medieval Scholasticism, Computing and Philosophy, and Emergence Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technology.

All these serve as rich sources of information for philosophers as they carry out their research and writing.

9.2 Tips on getting the Right Materials

To be sure, there is so much information and materials on philosophy on the internet. There is therefore the need to distinguish reliable materials from non-reliable ones. The internet serves as a forum for anyone to publish anything. Thus, not everything on the internet can be reliable.

- 1. Peer Review:** To get the right philosophy materials, the first and perhaps the most important question to ask is whether the material, be it a book, a journal article, an encyclopaedia article, or a conference proceeding has been peer reviewed.

In other words, has the material been reviewed by one or more persons, and necessary corrections made by the author? The importance of peer reviewed materials cannot be over-emphasised.

- Mention one advantage of Peer Review
- Peer review guarantee quality of the material download or ordered from the internet which implies that one can trust the information contained therein.

Thus, whether we are buying or downloading a book, journal, article or conference proceedings, we should always scrutinise them to see if they are peer reviewed materials.

A lot of self-publishing is going on within the internet where materials are published as the author has drafted it without any scrutiny. Some of the information contained therein can be very misleading. The peer review process helps to eliminate such misleading information and arguments.

2. **Author Background** Another way of scrutinising philosophy materials online in order to know their worth is to quickly do a search on the author's background or publisher's history. When a philosophy material is published in a suspicious or untrusted site, the best way to know its worth is to do a quick research on the writer.

If the research online reveals that the writer is a professional in the field in which he or she has written and his or her curriculum vitae shows that he has done much more on that area, then the material can be trusted. Also, if the publisher of a particular material is known for excellent scholarship, then the material can be trusted as reliable.

3. **Format of Materials:** Another tip that is very useful in the search for reliable philosophy materials online is the understanding that a vast majority of such materials are uploaded on the internet in the Portable Document Format (PDF). Thus, when searching for materials on the internet for a particular topic in Google or other search engines, it pays to place PDF at the end of the search phrase.

For instance, when searching for "Plato's concept of Justice, it pays to write it on the search engine this way: "Plato's concept of justice PDF" or "Plato's concept of justice + pdf (PDF)".

When a search is performed in this manner, it leads one to finding reliable materials that can be very vital for philosophical research and writing.

9.3 Referencing Internet Sources

In the Study Session on referencing and citation, we already touched briefly on the methods of referencing internet sources. We shall attempt to emphasise them here. This is very important because all sources used in a philosophical essay must be referenced, whether they are online or not.

Although there is no agreement on how referencing of online materials can be done as the method varies from one referencing style to another, any referencing of an online source must contain the following information: the authors names, title of the work, title of the complete work or the site where it was published, the internet address of the work, the date it was made available, and the date the writer accessed the work.

It is important to note that some online materials can be sited in the form of their original hard copy format. In other words, some books and articles online are hardcopy books and articles only uploaded on the net for wider reach. Within their pages, they have their usual hard copy references which can be used to reference them. This is no doubt different from the usual e-materials that are available solely online.

Summary of Study Session 9

In Study Session 9, you have learnt that:

- 1 There are many types of philosophical materials on the internet. Books, Journals, Encyclopaedias
- 2 Discussion Forums and Blogs
- 3 The internet serves as a forum for anyone to publish anything

- 4 It is important to note that some online materials can be sited in the form of their original hard copy format

- 5 The internet is an integral part of philosophical research and writing.

- 6 one must be careful on how the material available at the World Wide Web are used in other not to rely on irrelevant materials which will no doubt be detrimental to philosophical research and writing.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 9

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next study Support Meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 9.1 (Tests Learning Outcome 9.1)

- 1 Why is the internet vital for philosophical research and writing?
- 2 List and explain the philosophy materials available on the internet.

SAQ 9.2 (Tests Learning Outcome 9.2)

Highlight some tips of getting the right materials on the internet.

SAQ 9.3 (Tests Learning Outcome 9.3)

- 1 How are internet sources referenced?
- 2 Distinguish between hard copy books and e-books on the internet.

References

Sinhababu, N, 2005. Appendix D: Philosophy Resource on the Internet. In A. P. Martinich, *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*, 3rd Edition, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Study Session10 Research Ethics and Philosophical Writing

Introduction

Ethics concerns human moral values. It consists of rules, principles, precepts and obligations guiding human actions. In philosophy, ethics is the normative study of such moral principles and the provision of rational basis on which they can be justified or proven inadequate.

Research ethics, however, concerns principles, obligations and rules that ought to guide a researcher's attitude and actions while carrying out his/her research or writing. Research ethics consist of obligations a researcher owes to himself or herself, his fellow researchers and his/her audience or the public at large.

Although various disciplines have particular guidelines that guides its research by ensuring the researcher fulfils some obligations to himself or herself and society, there are some generally accepted ethical principles of research that any researcher is expected to adhere to.

In this Study Session, you will examine some of such principles and guidelines particularly as it applies to philosophy. These include authorship, plagiarism, publishing, beneficence and criticism.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 10

At the end of this study session, you should be able to:

- 10.1 Defined Authorship
- 10.2 Explain Publishing as integral part of research and writing
- 10.3 Explain Research Ethics as it concerns Plagiarism
- 10.4 Describe Beneficence
- 10.5 Explain how criticism of ideas takes a focal point in philosophical research

10.1 Research Ethics as it concerns Authorship

Authorship is the process of deciding the names to include in a research paper as well as those to credit. In many cases, research evolves from collaboration and assistance between experts and colleagues. Some of this assistance will require acknowledgement and some will require joint authorship.

Authorship also concerns whose name comes first, that is, who should be the main author and co-author. This is not a point decided by seniority as is often done conventionally but unethically. Responsible authorship practices are an important part of research.

Despite its vital role, authorship can be a difficult area for many researchers who frequently run into difficulty when deciding which colleagues should be listed as authors or co-authors, and which colleagues should instead receive acknowledgement. Despite the challenges, researchers should familiarize themselves with proper authorship practices in order to protect their work and ideas, while also preventing research fraud

As an ethical principle guiding authorship, it is a matter of duty that each person listed as an author should have significantly contributed to both the research and writing. In addition, all listed authors must be prepared to accept full responsibility for the content of the research article. The issue of who serves as main author ought to be decided on the basis of the initiator of the research, the developer of the main idea and the amount of contribution made to the work.

10.2 Research Ethics as it concerns Publishing

Publishing is as integral part of research and writing. To make a research public, publishing is the means by which it is done. In fact, because publishing is an important part of research, it is also an important factor in the career of a scholar. Scholars use publications as one means of determining the capability and performance of a researcher.

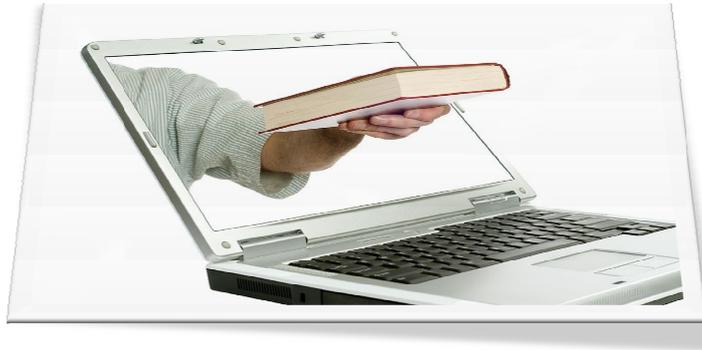


Figure 10.1 Publishing a Book

Source: <http://www.authormedia.com/become-a-book-blogger/>

Successful publication of research in a respected journal or book provides at least some evidence that the work has withstood review by the scientific community. Such evidence clearly enhances the researcher's employability, rank, and salary.

In fact, some universities will terminate the appointment of a Lecturer if they have not published a reasonable amount during the first few years of their employment. These realities of academic life place pressure on researchers to publish. Although the pressure is not undue, some tend to exaggerate the intensity of this pressure and ethical problems may result.

One of such issues concerns simultaneous submission. This concerns multiple publications of the same article. For example, ethical violations occur if you conduct a survey, write an article reporting the study, and then publish the same article in two different professional journals at the same time.

In fact, the rule of thumb that is usually employed does not even permit submitting the same article to two different journals at once. This view holds that you submit the article to one journal and, if it is rejected, you are then free to submit it for review by another journal. Many journals include this requirement in their editorial policies.

10.3 Research Ethics as it concerns Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of passing off somebody else's ideas, thoughts, pictures, theories, words, or stories as your own without due acknowledgements by means of references. If a researcher plagiarizes the work of others, they are bringing into question the integrity, ethics, and trustworthiness of the sum total of his or her research.



Figure 10.2: Plagiarism

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plagiarism#mediaviewer/File:Example-of-Article-Plagiarism-Diagram.png>

In addition, plagiarism, which is both an illegal act and is punishable, is considered to be on the same level as stealing from the author that which he or she originally created. Plagiarism takes many forms. On one end of the spectrum, are people who intentionally take a passage word-for-word, put it in their own work, and do not properly credit the original author.

The other end consists of unintentional (or simply lazy) paraphrased and fragmented texts a writer has pieced together from several works without properly citing the original sources. No parts of the spectrum of potential plagiaristic acts are tolerated by the research community, and research manuscripts will be rejected by publishers if they contain any form of plagiarism, including unintentional plagiarism.

To avoid plagiarism, a researcher ought to adhere to the following rules as enlisted in the Northwestern University website: Cite all ideas and information that is not your own and/or is not common knowledge; always use quotation marks if you are using someone else's words; at

the beginning of a paraphrased section, show that what comes next is someone else's original idea; at the end of a paraphrased section, place the proper citation.

10.4 Beneficence as a Research Ethics

Beneficence has to do with the ethical principle of consequentialism; that is, it has to do with ensuring that a research procures some good for others and prevents harm. Beneficence in some situations may be taken to the extreme as paternalism.

A paternalistic approach indicates the denial of autonomy and freedom of choice. For example, the researcher may want to study the problem of violence among elderly women but may decide not to include them because they may be too vulnerable. In this case, the researcher is not giving elderly women the opportunity to decide for themselves, as well as for their experiences to be heard.

Beneficence therefore implies that it is the duty of a researcher to present his or her research in a manner that, although truth seeking remains the goal, it does more good than harm to the audience, for what good is a research if it does no one any good. Every researcher is thus saddled with the responsibility of weighing the consequences of his or her research results

10.5 Research ethics as it concerns Criticism

Criticism of ideas takes a focal point in philosophical research; in fact, it is the crux of philosophy. However, in criticising ideas, beliefs, knowledge claims, and thought systems, one must take care not to cross the line of scholarship. It is very easy to quickly deviate from the object of criticism to the author or writer of the work being criticised without necessary care.

The moment one lives the idea being criticised and focuses on the writer of the idea, he or she is going against every value of research and writing. No wonder why it is even fallacious to do so.

AD HOMINEM

(argumentum ad hominem)

This fallacy says that the source of the argument is somehow bad, so the argument itself must be bad.

Figure 10.2: The fallacy of Argumentum ad Hominem

Source: <http://07090.blogspot.com/2011/08/as-last-resort-mayor-skibitsky-engages.html>

The fallacy of *Argumentum ad Hominem* (argument against the man) shows that it is unethical to prove an argument wrong by arguing against its author. If, for instance, a scholar criticises a Muslim scholar for arguing for the plausibility of the Islamic law by focussing on the faith and belief of the Muslim scholar rather than the incoherency or otherwise of the arguments, the argument is misplaced.

Admittedly, there are always some elements of bias in research. Besides, we all philosophise from a milieu. However, if ones subjectivity or influences affects the quality of his or her research, it is better to logically present such issues with the research rather than querying the author.

Summary of Study Session 10

In Study Session 10, you have learnt that:

1. The foregoing clearly shows that the value of a research depends on the ability of the author to adhere to some ethical principles guiding research.
2. A researcher must be able to adhere to the principles guiding authorship, plagiarism, publishing, beneficence, and criticism. This will ensure a level of objectivity, integrity, honesty, openness and fair play in research and writing. In this regard, a researcher owes a number of obligations to himself or herself, his or her colleagues and the general public.

3. Research ethics helps to achieve such obligations.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 10

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next study Support Meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 10.1 (Tests Learning Outcome 10.1)

How can a research be free from Authorship issues?

SAQ 10.2 (Tests Learning Outcome 10.2)

Explain Research Ethics as it concerns Publishing

SAQ 10.3 (Tests Learning Outcome 10.3)

What can help a researcher avoid plagiarism?

SAQ 10.4 (Tests Learning Outcome 10.4)

Explain what Beneficence has to do with Research Ethics

SAQ 10.5 (Tests Learning Outcome 10.5)

What is argumentum ad hominem? Why should it be avoided in research?