

RUBRIC FOR EVALUATING STUDENT PHILOSOPHY ESSAYS (APPLIED ETHICS/PHILOSOPHY OF ART AND CULTURE CONCENTRATIONS)

Explanation of the rubric: The rubric incorporates aspects of an already existing model for evaluating literary-critical essays.¹ Just as any literary-critical essay, a philosophy essays should have a *thesis*, display *complexity (sophistication)*, *coherence and organization*, *clear and precise style*, and rely upon *evidence* (primary and secondary sources). One might think of these aspects as roughly corresponding to learning outcomes 3.1 (conduct research...) and 3.2 (write well...) under GLOBAL GOAL # 3 (COMMUNICATION AND RESEARCH SKILLS). The rubric also includes sufficiently general learning outcomes within the discipline of philosophy [indicated with a “*” in the rubric], e.g. *basic competence in constructing and evaluating arguments* (roughly revised objective 1.3), *the ability to develop a reasonable interpretation of a written philosophical passage* (objective 1.14), and *the ability to identify a philosophical position (principle) in ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, etc. and articulate objection(s) to it* (there is no such learning outcome in our matrix, but formulating an outcome in this broad way will help accommodate many of our content objectives). One might reformulate the latter objective as “mastery *or* informed and competent treatment of the particular philosophical domain, problem, issue or question addressed by the assignment.”

5	4	3	2	1
Thesis The paper has a clearly articulated and complex thesis. It is original, i.e. it does not merely state the obvious or exactly repeat others’ viewpoints, but thoughtfully and imaginatively addresses the work.	The thesis is both clear and sufficiently developed. The thesis is not distinctively original.	The thesis is clear but not sufficiently developed and distinctively original. It addresses a debatable issue but is largely based on class handouts.	The thesis is barely discernible and insufficiently developed.	The paper lacks a clear and well-developed thesis.
Complexity The essay is <i>unusually</i> thoughtful, deep, creative, and far-reaching in its analysis. The writer	The essay is thoughtful and extensive in its analysis. It shows a	Writer moves somewhat beyond merely paraphrasing someone else’s point of view or	Writer moves only marginally beyond merely paraphrasing someone else’s point of view or	The paper is a mere paraphrase. It is based primarily on class

¹ The literary analysis rubric is based on Barbara E. Walvoord, “Reflecting on Your Assessment in Departments and General Education: How to be More Realistic, Effective, and Time-Efficient.”

explores the subject from various points of view and acknowledges alternative perspectives. The essay demonstrates a serious effort to engage the philosophical issue and think through the implications of the philosophical position. The author also uses and integrates a variety of sources ² in a flawless manner.	serious effort to engage the philosophical issue and think through the implications of the philosophical position. There is an effort to use and integrate more than one source.	repeats what was discussed in class or contained in the class lecture notes, handouts, etc.	repeats what was discussed in class or contained in the class lecture notes, handouts, etc.	notes/handouts. Does not demonstrate a thoughtful and diligent engagement with the topic/issue.
<u>Coherence/organization</u> The paper is organized in a logical and coherent manner. The parts of the paper are clearly identifiable. The paper creates the sense of a gradual and cumulative development. It guides the reader smoothly through each step (point and sub-point) in the reasoning process.	As for “5” but points and sub-points may not be fashioned to open up the topic in the most effective way.	The reader feels that the writer is in control of the direction and organization of the essay most of the time. The essay generally follows a logical line of reasoning to support its thesis.	The essay has some discernible main parts and points. The paper lacks an overall coherent structure or it is not organized in the most efficient manner.	The essay has no discernible plan of organization. It is a mere flow of scattered thoughts.
<u>Style</u> The language is clear, precise, and	The language is	The language is understandable	The language is sometimes	The language is very often

² It will be important to explain what is meant by “sources” here. My understanding is that the emphasis in critical literary analysis papers is on literature (other primary and/or secondary) in addition to the one the paper actually discusses. Oftentimes, however, philosophy writers engage a very specific philosophical issue/problem and attempt to think through that issue/problem without relying so much on anything other than their own critical reasoning abilities. A classic example of this kind of paper is Edmund L. Gettier’s “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” Some of our philosophy minors and applied ethics/philosophy of art concentrations majors do write in this way. In such cases, the most important thing would certainly be the depth of the conceptual analysis and/or the originality of the author’s account, etc.

elegant. It achieves a scholarly tone without sounding pompous. It is the authentic voice of a curious mind at work.	clear and precise.	overall with very few imprecise/unclear expressions.	confusing. Sentences do not track.	confusing. Sentences and entire paragraphs do not track.
Evidence The essay integrates primary and secondary sources smoothly. It quotes <i>amply, exactly</i> and <i>when important to do so</i> and <i>otherwise paraphrases</i> . It does not just string quotations together, but offers a rationale for the selected texts. Each source is identified in the text, with some statement about its author. Sources articulating and defending an alternative or opposite view point are also considered and treated fairly.	As for “5” but sources may be quoted with no contextual explanation and/or writer may use direct quotation and paraphrase in less than optimal ways.	The author uses sources in support of his/her own reasoning. Occasionally, quotations are used inadequately and without explanation. The author does not always identify the origin of the quoted texts and sometimes fails to provide complete and correct citations.	The author uses sources only sporadically and without apparent rationale. Incomplete and incorrect citation is the rule rather than the exception.	The author does not use primary and secondary sources at all. There is no source documentation of any sort – e.g. works cited page.
Grammar There are no discernible departures from Standard Edited Written English.	There are a few departures from Standard Edited Written English.	There is no more than an average of 2 departures from Standard Edited Written English per page in the critical areas listed below. ³	There are more than 2 departures from Standard Edited Written English per page in the specified critical areas.	Some portion(s) of the essay is impossible to read because of departures from Standard

³ **Critical Areas:**

- Spelling or typo
- Sentence boundary punctuation (run-ons, comma splices, fused sentences, fragments)
- Use of apostrophe, -s, and -es
- Pronoun forms
- Pronoun agreement, and providing antecedents for pronouns
- Verb forms and subject-verb agreement
- Use of gender-neutral language
- Capitalization of proper nouns and of first words in the sentence

				Edited Written English.
<p><u>Competence for argumentative writing</u>* The essay shows familiarity with different types and forms of argumentation; informal fallacies; the technique of counter-examples. <i>Above all</i>, the author has a clear sense of the difference between premises and conclusions and/or is capable of constructing and evaluating an argument. The author anticipates, articulates and answers objections to his/her own position/argument(s). The writing is overall devoid of contradictions and fallacious reasoning.</p>	<p>As for “5” but the author does not always make his/her reasoning and argumentation explicit or he/she does not always argue in the most effective way.</p>	<p>The author knows the difference between premises and conclusions and/or shows sufficient proficiency in constructing and evaluating an argument. The author sometimes fails to anticipate, articulate and answer objections to his/her own position/argument(s), and sometimes makes mistakes in reasoning.</p>	<p>The author is occasionally aware of the difference between premises and conclusions and the structure of arguments. Only rarely does he/she anticipate and answer objections to his/her own position/argument(s). Contradictions and mistakes in reasoning are the rule rather than the exception.</p>	<p>The essay shows no familiarity with different types and forms of argumentation; informal fallacies. The author does not attempt to offer any analysis or criticism of the discussed philosophical view, position, argument, etc. The author’s own writing is rife with contradictions and fallacies.</p>
<p><u>Quality of interpretation</u>* The offered interpretation of the philosophical passage is adequate, far-reaching and elegant. There is an <i>unusual</i> sense of what passages (also terms, words, expressions, etc.) deserve of careful interpretation.</p>	<p>Interpretation is adequate and far-reaching.</p>	<p>Interpretation is often adequate but somewhat superficial. The author sometimes omits important passages deserving of careful interpretation.</p>	<p>Interpretation is often inadequate and superficial. The author often omits important passages deserving of careful interpretation.</p>	<p>The author regularly quotes without attempting to offer an interpretation of the quoted passage. Even when present, the interpretation is superficial and/or forced</p>

				and inadequate.
<u>Mastery of the subject matter</u> * The author shows <i>unusual</i> familiarity with the subject matter (philosophical view, position, theory, concept(s), principle(s), etc.).	The author shows familiarity with the subject matter (philosophical view, position, theory, concept(s), principle(s), etc.).	As for “4” but with occasional mistakes – e.g. misidentifying an author’s view/position – and/or omissions – e.g. failing to mention an important aspect of an author’s view/position.	The author shows insufficient familiarity with the subject matter. There are often instances of mistakes, confusions and omissions.	The author’s grasp of the subject matter is very deficient and/or the account of the view/position under discussion is entirely off the mark.