

Advice & marking for midterm exam

PHIL 102, Spring 2018

Advice for preparing for and writing the in-class essay

Structure of the essay

Be sure to have a thesis statement, and provide it at the beginning of the essay. Then use the rest of the essay to support that thesis statement. You don't need to have a long introduction; in fact, you could avoid having an introductory paragraph at all and just start with your thesis statement, then start into the first body paragraph that supports that thesis statement. You don't need to have a concluding paragraph to the essay at all.

Explaining the views of the philosophers; audience you should write for

Be sure to discuss the philosophers' views in enough depth to support the claims you make about them and any criticisms you might give. You do not need to give a summary of all parts of the texts—only those relevant to the argument you are making in the essay. Consider that we can only recognize how much you understand of the works by what you write, so explaining what terms and concepts mean as much as you have space to do, and insofar as this is relevant to your argument, shows better what you have grasped from the course (and can thus earn more marks than not doing so).

To help you do this, **imagine that you are writing your essays for someone who is not in the class, who has not read the texts or attended lecture.** Give as much explanation as would be needed to make the views and your claims about them clear to that person.

Depth vs breadth

It's better to pick a smaller number of things to discuss in the essay, and discuss them in more depth, than to talk about a large number of things and only touch the surface of each. This is a short essay, and you won't be able to talk about everything! Pick a couple of things that you think are important similarities/differences, or a couple of things you would like to emphasize in evaluating an argument, and go into as much depth on those as you can in the time allotted.

Memorize an outline

You can't bring any notes or texts into class, so it can be helpful to memorize an outline of what you would like to say for the topics you have prepared. This would be the basic ideas for your thesis statement and the main points you'd like to cover to support it. Then, when you arrive at the exam, write that down in the booklet right away so you don't forget. We won't mark your outline, but it's fine to have it in there the booklet.

Breakdown of marks on exam

Argument outline: 40 marks out of 100

- Outline of argument: 30 marks

- Stating which philosopher this comes from and explaining how it fits within some other part of their views: 10 marks

Essay: 60 marks out of 100

- See below for what we will be looking for in the essay.

Marking rubric for essay question

The essay will be marked on the same categories we use for the out-of-class essays you've done, with some alterations. Below is what we will be looking for in an excellent in-class essay.

Strength of argument

- The points in the body of the essay support the thesis well; they work together to give good reasons why one ought to accept the thesis as true; there are no gaping holes in what would be needed to support the thesis.
- Arguments in the body paragraphs are also supported well. You don't have to have quotes from the texts, but you should provide specific ideas from them where relevant.
- There are no inaccuracies in your claims about what the philosophers say in their works.
- There are no significant objections that could be raised to your arguments (beyond inaccuracies about what philosophers say).

Organization

- There is a thesis statement stated clearly at the beginning of the essay, and the essay sticks to supporting that (rather than going off on other tangents).
- We won't expect the same level of organizational clarity beyond the thesis statement in these essays because you're doing them under time pressure, but if we can't follow your argument in the body paragraphs because it is too disorganized then this can affect your mark (because we will have trouble understanding your argument). Just do your best to make the organization clear!

Insight

- Because the essay topics all ask you to go beyond simply repeating what was in lectures (to do a comparison/contrast, or critique an argument), we will consider whether the essays show some original thought beyond those lectures. Often, the more in-depth you can go in discussing the philosophers' views and how they compare/contrast with others, or whether their arguments are strong or not, the more originality and insight you can show.

Mechanics: grammar, spelling, etc.

- Because these are in-class essays, we won't be looking very carefully at this—time pressure and lack of ability to look things up means this aspect of writing can be harder! But if your grammar or spelling are so problematic that we can't understand what you're writing, then this can affect your mark (not based on the grammar itself, but based on the fact that we can't grasp what you're saying so we can't evaluate it well).