

A WRITING CHECKLIST FOR PHILOSOPHY PAPERS

This checklist is intended to help you make sure that your paper is well-structured, clearly written, and well-argued. I've indicated some of the abbreviations that you might see in the comments on your paper, if it could use improvement on particular points listed below.

I. Structure

Have you provided a clear, well-organized introduction?

- have you briefly explained the issue to be considered?
- have you explained how you will proceed in the paper—what is your game plan? (HP)
- have you provided a clear thesis statement that doesn't overpromise (T1, T2)
- have you kept your introduction to an appropriate length (roughly 1/2 page) (GP)

Does your paper follow the plan you described in your introduction?

- do you discuss ideas in the order you indicated? (OR)
- does the order make sense? Read the paper aloud to yourself (or have a classmate read it) to see if a different arrangement might make your line of argument easier to follow or give it a more logical progression. (OR)
- have you written your paper in a way that makes the structure clear and easy to follow—e.g. have you clearly indicated when you are moving to a new argument, objection, or reply?

Does your conclusion effectively sum up what you have shown?

- is the conclusion brief?
- are you careful not to say you have shown or proven something that your arguments do not show or prove?

II. Development

- does your paper directly and fully address all of the questions posed by the paper topic? Reread the topic to check. (NAQ)
- does your paper read like an *argumentative* essay or is the style too expository?
- have you developed your arguments fully and effectively, reasoning well and providing evidence for your claims? (AUTH, BQ, BRQ, EA, TBS, TNS, NS, TF, EXP, OS)
- have you used examples where doing so would be helpful to clarify your points? (EXN)
- have you anticipated and responded effectively to the most serious objections to your arguments?
- if you are raising objections to an argument or viewpoint, do your objections *directly target* the argument (e.g. some step of the argument, or some false assumption or unstated premise of the argument, or poor reasoning)?
- have you clearly defined any ambiguous or technical terms the meaning of which might be unclear to your reader? (UTT)
- have you identified and explained any important assumptions you are making? Are they fair assumptions to make? Why?
- have you depicted all views you discuss *fairly* and *accurately*? (CO, NC)
- have you explained ideas and views in your own words, avoiding paraphrase and excessive use of quotations? (UYOW)

III. Mechanics: Grammar, Vocabulary, Paragraphs, Proofreading

- do your paragraphs each focus on developing one main idea? E.g. no one sentence paragraphs; no run-on paragraphs; arguments and objections in separate paragraphs. (Note: Paragraphs that are too short often indicate underdevelopment of ideas; overly long paragraphs may indicate that too many different ideas are under discussion.)
- have you revised wordy, obscure, and run-on sentences so each sentence of your paper is clear? (WEM) If you notice problems with sentence clarity, check to see whether you are overusing passive constructions or misusing words.
- have you eliminated redundancies and irrelevant points? (RD, R?)
- have you checked for poor grammar? (E!) have you checked for un-referred pronouns or terms? (E.g. uses of 'it' or 'he' where the reader won't know what the it is or who the he is?) (URP)
- have you used words correctly? (WW)
- be sure to proofread! Don't rely on spell check—it misses misspellings and won't catch mistakes in word choice.

IV. Documentation

- have you used *quotation marks* properly to indicate all quoted material, and have you quoted the material *accurately*?
- have you given a reference with *exact page #* for every quotation and every fact or claim cited?
- have you given a complete, formal reference with exact page # for any outside materials you may have consulted?

V. Some Strategies for Checking Clarity, Organization, Focus and Development

- To see whether your paper reads clearly and smoothly, try reading it aloud to someone or have someone read it aloud to you, so that you can identify and revise unclear or awkward sentences.
- To check the organization of your paper, try making an outline of it. Write one sentence to summarize the central point of each paragraph, and see if the order of the sentences makes sense.
- To check whether your paper is well-focused and understandable, you might have someone read your paper and try to summarize your thesis and the evidence you offer for it.
- To make sure you are developing your argumentation effectively and anticipating important objections, discuss your paper with someone who might disagree with you, and see how he or she responds.