

# Argumentative Essay Format

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An argumentative philosophy essay has the following structure:

1. *Thesis statement* (introduction). This is a short paragraph where you state your thesis, i.e. the claim that you will defend in the essay. Do not argue for the thesis here! At the most, briefly indicate the kind of argument you will give.
2. *Exposition*. (This section might fill up to half of your essay.) In this section you describe the view of another author (or authors) and (usually) present their arguments. It is important to be fair, or even charitable, to these authors. In other words, describe their views and argument accurately. If two or more interpretations are possible, choose the one that makes the author seem most reasonable. (This may be difficult to do in cases where you disagree strongly with the author, but you have to do it anyway!) Do not criticize the author until the next section.
3. *Criticism/Evaluation*. Now it's time to say what *you* think. Your thesis should be restated here, perhaps in more detail than in the introduction. The thesis must also be argued for. Give your best one or two arguments. No doubt you will also compare your thesis to that of the author(s) discussed in the exposition section, and you may also criticize their arguments.
4. *Conclusion*. This is basically the same as the introduction, but in the past tense. Restate your thesis once again.

Here are some further tips. You might also look at Peter Horban's "Writing a Philosophy Paper".

(i) *State clearly the purpose of your essay.*

Explain to your reader what topic or problem you are going to discuss, and why it's important or relevant. This may be done at the start of your paper, or partly at the start and partly at the end.

(ii) *Describe accurately the thesis you are going to defend.*

This not only involves clearly identifying your main thesis, but also explaining why the thesis is interesting or significant.

(iii) *Present clearly (but briefly) any views and arguments that you are criticizing.*

Only cover the minimum that is needed for your own thesis to make sense, for this section should comprise no more than 50% of your essay.

(iv) *Develop your main argument in defense of your thesis.*

In other words, explain why you think your thesis is correct and what evidence you are offering in support of your main claim.

(v) *Evaluate your argument critically.*

This usually involves raising one or more possible objections to your thesis or argument, and explaining why these objections fail.

(vi) *Summarize your conclusions.*

Be careful to do this accurately, so you don't either overstate or understate what you've achieved.

(vii) *Write your paper clearly, using good English.*

Do your best to eliminate all typos and spelling and grammatical errors. Also, try to make sure you have said what you wanted to say clearly, for example by defining any difficult or technical terms you are using.

(viii) *Fully reference all citations.*

Give a full and consistent statement of sources for all quotations as well as for any other components of the paper in which you have relied on another person's words or ideas.

(ix) *Be careful to answer exactly the question(s) asked of you.*

Essay assignments are often very specific. When they are, you will need to be careful to answer the given question or questions completely. If the question has several parts, this should be reflected in not only in your thesis statement, but also in your arguments and conclusions.