

Philosophy of Attention: Guidelines for final papers

Main goal (keep in mind as you write)

In your final paper, you will engage with one of the problems, questions or arguments discussed in class. The main goal of this paper is to show that you have **comprehended** and **critically reflected** on the topic of your choice. That is, you will do more than just present the views and arguments of other philosophers. You will also offer your own reasoned and argued perspectives on these views.

As you write, imagine that I know nothing about the topic/problem you will discuss. You must give me sufficient and clear information for me to understand your views in this context. You must also explain why should I accept your view. To support you in this, you will find a guide with different forms of argumentation below.

Before submitting

Before submitting your paper, you must send me an **outline (deadline: July 31st)**. In this outline, you will:

1. State the question, problem or topic that you will discuss in your paper.

Example 1: Free will

"I will argue that the capacity to direct our attention is all we need to have free will"

Example 2: Metaphysics of attention

"I will assess Sebastian Watzl's argument to deny that attention is a mechanism in the brain."

Example 3: Normativity of attention

"I will propose that N is a prudential/moral norm of attention"

(where N can be any pattern of attention that contributes to well-being/virtue)

2. State your preliminary views and thoughts on the topic. These need not be your *final* views; they can change as you write. This is just to give me a sense of where you are standing, so I can give you appropriate recommendations. This part can be as brief (2-3 sentences) or as elaborate as you want (1-3 paragraphs).

Example 1:

"What we really care about regarding free will, is the capacity to direct our own thoughts according to our goals. And attention gives us this."

Example 2:

"I think Watzl's argument is flawed, but I cannot pinpoint exactly why. I think that just because we have not been able to find a single brain mechanism for all cases of attention, that does not mean that such mechanism does not exist. However, I do think that attention is probably not a mechanism in the brain, so Watzl is on the right track."

Example 3:

“A pattern of attention is prudentially good, i.e., contributes to our well-being, when it consistently selects pleasant thoughts and emotions, and consistently de-selects unpleasant thoughts and emotions.

To defend this view, I will consider some counterexamples: a case when selecting pleasant emotions is rather detrimental, and a case when selecting unpleasant thoughts is prudentially good.

I will then revise the view in appropriate ways, i.e., by specifying kinds of pleasant/unpleasant thoughts and emotions.”

Optional:

3. If you already have a sense of what your main argument will be, include it.
 4. Mention any additional bibliography or materials you plan to consider.
 5. Feel free to include any specific questions for me, and/or mention any points where you would like feedback.
- Outline length: **1 page (max.)**.
 - NOTE: The outline is not graded. However, failure to submit it entails missing your points for responding to feedback (see Grading section below).

The paper

You are free to structure your paper as you see fit; however, make sure it includes the following four components:

- Introduction**
- ⇒ Should tell the reader the important information about the paper: topic, the position you will defend, and some initial context/background information (no need to get into too much detail here: you will develop the relevant points in the body of your paper).
 - ⇒ Include also one motivation paragraph: Why is this problem/topic important? Why should we care?
 - ⇒ **Suggestion:** Try to use a concrete example to make your paper more engaging from the start.
- Exposition**
- ⇒ This part need not be neatly separated from the argumentation part. Often the two are intertwined. You can decide how to distribute them, just make sure you include both components.
 - ⇒ This part will mostly reflect your comprehension of the materials. It is the ground for the argumentative portion.

⇒ **Goal:** To give the reader sufficient information to understand what the problem is about, and to differentiate your views from previous views (even if the difference is just a small conceptual point – as is often the case in philosophy)

Argumentation and perspective-taking

⇒ This part need not be neatly separated from the exposition part. Often the two are intertwined. You can decide how to distribute them, just make sure you include both components.

⇒ This part will mostly reflect your own take on the materials.

⇒ **Goal:** To give the reader compelling reasons to accept your position. This can be done in several ways (see the links below for some more detailed hints).

Concluding remarks

⇒ Briefly summarize what you did in the paper (no more than one paragraph).

⇒ Mention possible implications of your arguments, alternative lines that you didn't explore, and/or any general considerations about the debate.

Your grade

The grade for your paper will be assigned as follows:

		<u>Points</u>	<u>Grade</u>
		100-96	1,0 (very good)
1. Clarity of writing	15% (15pts)	95-93	1,3 (still very good)
2. Comprehension of the problems and positions	35% (35pts)	92-90	1,7 ("fully" good)
3. Critical stance and original thought	35% (35pts)	89-85	2,0 (good)
4. Response to feedback	15% (15pts)	84-81	2,3 (still good)
		83-80	2,7 ("fully" satisfactory)
		79-74	3,0 (satisfactory)
TOTAL	100pts	73-70	3,3 (still satisfactory)
		69-65	3,7 ("fully" fair/pass)
		64-60	4,0 (fair/pass)
		0-59	5,0 (failed)

Online resources for philosophical writing:

- <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>
- https://philosophy.fas.harvard.edu/files/phildept/files/brief_guide_to_writing_philosophy_paper.pdf

Questions?

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