I assume that you can already write an acceptable essay in English. If this is not the case, you may find assistance with the fundamentals of essay writing at the Writing Center (TLC 1-201; (770) 836-6513; http://www.westga.edu/~writing/; writing ‘at’ westga.edu)

I. What is a Philosophy Paper?

II. Writing the Paper

III. Online Resources

IV. Bibliographic Formatting

V. Plagiarism and Citation

I. What is a Philosophy Paper?

Essentially, a philosophy paper is an original, extended argument for some claim.

- The point of the paper is to make a philosophical claim and then support that claim with original reasons, evidence, arguments. You must attempt to convince your reader to believe your claim by presenting the best reasons you can muster for thinking that the claim is true.

- A philosophy paper contains original thoughts and insights. It is not a research paper in the sense of a paper that simply records what other people have already said. It is a research paper in the sense of an original attempt by you to answer some philosophical question. The point of this paper is not simply for you to read what other people have written about a subject and then report on what you have read. Rather, the point is for you to take a position on some philosophical issue and to give your own reasons for thinking that your position is correct.

- This is not to say that you are not responsible for reading what other people have said before or during the writing of your paper. You are responsible for doing all of the reading assigned for the course for which you are writing the paper.

- And if your argument depends on some factual claim (e.g., that very few abortions are performed in the third trimester of pregnancy; that polygamy is common in some-or-other part of the world), then you must cite the source of this information.

Before beginning work on your paper, you MUST read James Pryor’s “What Does One Do in a Philosophy Paper?”:
http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html#PhilPaper

This is part of his ‘Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper’:
http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html
II. Writing the Paper

Begin by deciding on a general topic. As you are reviewing your lecture notes and your assigned reading, look for something—a claim, an argument, a theory, an example—that genuinely interests you. Make a note of anything that you find truly exciting or troubling. This is the best way to choose a paper topic: the question about which you are writing should be something that you want to think more deeply about.

Think about what you want to say. Try to articulate why you find the issue or question interesting, exciting, or troubling. What is it about this topic that draws you to it, that makes you want to spend more time thinking about it?

• Do you disagree with what some philosopher has said? If so, you have the beginnings of a paper topic: ‘I will argue that Philosopher X is wrong when she says that...’ This is typically the easiest sort of philosophy paper to write, especially for beginners. It is much easier to say something original when you are criticizing something that someone has already said. I strongly recommend this approach to students who do not have a lot of experience writing philosophy papers.
• Do you agree with what some philosopher has said and think that you can extend his or her claim in some original way? If so, your paper topic might be: “I agree with X’s claim that ..., and I believe that this claim can be applied in a way that X doesn’t consider...”
• Do you agree with a conclusion for which some philosopher has argued, but think you can give a better, or at least a different, argument for that conclusion? If so, your topic might be: “X is right for thinking that ..., but the argument she gives is unsound. I will first show that her argument is unsound and then give a sound argument to support this claim.”
• For a list of other general approaches to writing a philosophy paper, see the document by James Pryor, referred to above.

Keep notes on your topic. Before you begin to actually write the paper, you should make notes for yourself that articulate any original thoughts you have about the subject you’ve chosen. Any time you are studying lecture notes or doing assigned reading, you should be prepared to jot down anything you come across, or anything you think of, that might be relevant to your paper. As this collection of notes grows, you should start to get a better idea of the specific point you want to argue in your paper.

As you are writing the paper...
• Do not think of it as an assignment that you will write from beginning to end at one sitting.
• Instead, think of the paper as containing a central idea, one central argument, that you will construct from the raw materials of your assigned readings and your own original notes.
• This means that the first thing you get down on paper may be something (a sentence, or paragraph, or page) that ends up occurring in the middle or at the very end of your final draft, or that does not end up in your final draft at all.

• Return to the draft of your essay again and again, with an eye to expanding it, strengthening its reasoning, polishing it, and just generally improving it each time you work on it.

• Do not be afraid to write something down, even if you are not sure about it. The worst that can happen is that you read what you’ve written, decide you don’t want to keep it, and set it aside.

Your first draft (which you turn in to me for comments) AND your final draft should both...

• be written in first-person (e.g., say “I will argue that Socrates is wrong...” rather than “It will be argued that Socrates is wrong...”). Don’t hide yourself from the reader.

• be well-organized, so that a reader who knows nothing about your subject can follow you from beginning to end and never lose sight of what you are doing. You should assume that your reader knows nothing about your topic and that you need to guide him or her “by the hand” through your essay and the arguments it contains.

• be divided into sections, each of which does one specific job. Section breaks serve as useful signals to the reader (and to the author!) that one portion of the paper has ended and another one has begun. If a specific structure is required, it will be given in the instructions for your specific paper assignment.

• contain (in its introductory section) a thesis statement, a sentence in which you state exactly the point that you are arguing. For example, suppose that you have chosen to criticize James Rachels’ argument against ethical egoism. Your opening paragraph might read as follows:

   In The Elements of Moral Philosophy, James Rachels argues that ethical egoism, the view that the moral thing to do is always whatever is in your own best interest, is false. But I believe that Rachels’ argument is unsound. In particular, I think that his argument relies on a premise that is false. In this essay, I will show that Rachels’ argument is unsound by providing three distinct reasons for thinking that that premise is not true.

Notice that this paragraph does not start out with some generic statement about the general issue (“For years, society has debated the origins of morality.” or “Today people disagree about whether egoism is true or false”). You should leave out such vague material—it’s padding, filler, and completely unneeded. Your paper should begin by getting right to the point.

• conclude with one or more paragraphs summarizing what you did in the essay. E.g., “In this essay, I have provided reasons for thinking that an important assumption made by Rachels in his argument against ethical egoism is false...”

• use plain language and relatively short sentences. Philosophy is a difficult subject, but the best philosophy is written in the language that is only as complicated as it has to be in order to convey the writer’s ideas. If you have a choice between a complicated way of expressing an idea and a simpler way, always choose the simpler way. This includes choosing more familiar terms over more obscure terms when the familiar ones will work at least as well. It also includes avoiding convoluted sentences, or even sentences that are longer than necessary. (It is a good idea to have friends read
your paper at some point before you turn it in—they can tell you whether or not they have understood what you are trying to say and identify points that you need to clarify.)

- **avoid long quotations from the text.** You should quote directly from the work(s) to which you are responding only when necessary, and you should avoid lengthy quotations unless they are absolutely necessary. When possible, you should paraphrase the material with which you are dealing; this means that you should explain the material to your reader in your own words. E.g., instead of simply quoting a passage in which James Rachels argues against ethical egoism, you should explain the contents of that paragraph in your own words.

- **be free from errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.** DO NOT RELY ON WORD’S SPELL-CHECKING AND GRAMMAR-CHECKING FUNCTIONS! You will need to read carefully through your paper looking for spelling (etc.) mistakes and editing the paper accordingly. The best way proof-read is from a printed copy of the paper, reading aloud as you go. This will help you see errors that you would otherwise miss.

**A Note about Religious Assumptions**
- Remember that the point of your essay is to convince your reader of some conclusion, i.e., to present an argument. To do this well, you should strive to rely on premises that your audience will accept. If you only rely on controversial premises, you may as well not present an argument at all, since your readers will probably reject your premises and thus have no reason to believe your conclusion.
- Religious claims are necessarily controversial—not everyone believes any specific religious claim, not even the vague claim that God exists. So in general: your arguments should not rely on claims about God or on any other religious claims, and should not rely on passages from any religious texts.

**III. Resources: Print and Online**

Consult the instructions for your specific paper assignment to see whether
- you are limited to one or more assigned readings and may not refer to any outside resources;
- you are permitted but not required to refer to outside resources;
- you are required to refer to outside resources.

If you are permitted to use outside resources, you should use only scholarly books, scholarly journal articles, and legitimate news sources. You can find many books and journal articles related to philosophical subjects in Ingram Library.

A valuable bibliography tool for locating books and articles on a given topic is *Philosopher’s Index* (PI).
- You can access and search PI online at Ingram Library’s webpage:
- Go to: [http://www.galileo.usg.edu/scholar/westga/databases/p/](http://www.galileo.usg.edu/scholar/westga/databases/p/)
- Scroll down and click on “Philosopher’s Index”
- If you are using a computer not directly connected to the campus network, you will need the current off-campus log-in password, which you can get by logging into your Ingram Library account: [http://www.westga.edu/~library/password/](http://www.westga.edu/~library/password/)
If you are permitted to use outside resources, you may use online (web-based) resources, but only those in the following list:
(a) journals, magazines, encyclopedias, etc. in Galileo
(b) eLibrary books found in the UWG Library online catalog
(c) online government documents (publications of the U.S. government or American state governments)
(d) The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: http://plato.stanford.edu/
(e) The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: http://www.iep.utm.edu/

Do NOT use any other online resources in your paper unless you get specific permission from me first.

IV. Bibliographic Formatting

At the end of a paper, you must include a full bibliography of all materials that you used in the course of writing your paper. You must include a bibliography, even if the only source you are citing is from a textbook we have used in class. Failure to include a bibliography, or to include all of your sources in your bibliography, will result in a significant deduction of points from your grade.

Use the following formats:

Books
Author’s name and initials, title of book (in italics), name of publisher, place of publication, date of publication. Examples:


Articles in journals
Author’s name and initials, title of article in quotation marks, name of journal (in italics), volume number, date, page numbers. Example:


Articles in collections & anthologies
Author’s name and initials, title of paper in quotation marks, editor’s name and initials, name of book (in italics), name of publisher, place of publication, date of publication, page numbers. Examples:


**Notice that an entry for a reprinted article (like the Marquis example) contains the publication information for the reprint and the original publication.**

**Online materials**

If the material you are citing originated in print (e.g., a journal article, or an eLibrary book), then there is no need to cite information for the online version; simply give the information as indicated by the relevant example above.

If the material you are citing only appears online, then use the following format:


**Citations of more than one work by the same author published in the same year**

If you need to cite multiple works by the same author published in the same year, then add a lower-case letter, beginning with "a", after the year in the bibliographic citation of each. For example,


**V. Plagiarism and Citation**

When you quote from someone else’s work, including from your textbook(s), you must indicate that you are quoting, and you must cite the source, including the page number. Quoting without indicating that you are doing so constitutes presenting someone else’s words as your own. This is plagiarism, a violation of UWG’s Honor Code. It is grounds for an automatic course grade of F. All papers will be checked for plagiarism using TurnItIn.

Quoting from another work is not the only reason to cite that work. You must also cite another work whenever you use or refer to ideas from that work.

Unless otherwise instruction, you should include citations using footnotes as shown here:

DeGrazia considers the possibility that anti-essentialism is true, i.e., that “human persons are of many kinds without any one kind representing our essence.”

1 DeGrazia 2005, p.27.

Footnotes can be inserted easily using Word: Under the “References” tab, just click the “Insert Footnote” button.

If you are citing works published by the same author in the same year, then use the year-and-letter given in your bibliography as explained above, e.g., cite "Haack 2005a" or "Haack 2005b".

Any work you refer to in a citation must be included in your bibliography.
The following is excellent advice for avoiding plagiarism and citing materials used; I expect all students to follow it:

Students are expected to turn in only their own work. All quotes and uses of the ideas of others must be cited. If you have someone help you on your paper and they give you some ideas, you must cite them. (You do not have to cite them if they only give you grammar, spelling, punctuation, clarity or organizational help.) Remember, when it doubt, cite it. (G. Rainbolt, “Rainbolt’s Guide to Philosophy and Philosophy Papers,” URL= <http://www.public.iastate.edu/~jwcwolf/Papers/Rainbolt%27s%20Guide.htm>. Accessed July 19, 2013.)