

Writing Philosophy Essays, PHIL2075, 29 September.

Three Main Aspects

- i) Formal. Your essay should be on time, proofread, with a bibliography. It should contain an introduction, saying what you'll do, a section where you describe some relevant material, a section where you evaluate what you presented, and a conclusion.

These are easy marks! Just follow the rules and you've already gotten off to a good start.

Note: **make sure you answer the question.** I recommend putting in the intro or conclusion 'The question asks []. I will answer | answered it by doing x, y, z'

- ii) Description. These are less easy marks, but you can still do well hopefully with relative ease.
- iii) Evaluation. In actual philosophy papers that get published, this is the completely crucial part: showing your perspective, adding something to the discussion. See below.

A good intro (maybe two short paragraphs)

A good intro (brief gesture at topic; presentation of argument; structure):

"Language and language users seem to obey certain rules. Different disciplines study different types of these rules. For example []. In this essay, I will be concerned with semantics | pragmatics. I aim to argue that the idea of [] ... is [].

I will do this in the following way. In section 1, I []. In section 2, [],...I will end with recapping what we have seen."

A less good intro ("since the dawn of time"): "Since the dawn of time, humankind has wondered about the notion of meaning..."

A less good intro (no intro!): "The principle of compositionality states []

The principle of compositionality is used...."

A very bad intro (irrelevant dinosaurs): "The Jurassic Park films are famous for their dinosaurs...."

Description (two-thirds or so)

Some points:

- Show that you have done some reading:

“[Description of function-theoretic semantics] But what then does a sentence stand for? Following Frege, we can note

‘A statement contains no empty place, and therefore we must take its Bedeutung as an object. But this Bedeutung is a truth-value. Thus the two truth-values are objects.’ (Frege, 1951: p140)”

“...According to Wayne Davis, “‘Implicature’ denotes either (i) the act of meaning or implying one thing by saying something else, or (ii) the object of that act.” (Davis, 2019, introduction)”

- But also show that you understand the concepts in your own words. Your own words are better than lengthy quotations.

“What Frege is saying here, as far as I can see, is that because sentences have no empty place, like ‘conquered Gaul’ does, they must mean an object.[.] For Frege, then, there are truth values that are objects just like Caesar.”

“Perhaps we can illustrate Davis’s comment with an example. If I say ‘I ate three cakes’”

- As is perhaps evident, I love examples. Displaying points with interesting or unique examples is also good.
- Do not discuss everything you know about a thinker or concept. Do not describe Grice’s theory of intention in communications, even if you know it and have interesting things to say—it’s unfortunately not relevant. Do not write the essay you want to write that isn’t asked—do not write about the pragmatics of slurs even if you think it’s more interesting than the questions I asked.

- It is good to repeat yourself, and ‘signpost’ the essay. It is okay to say, at the end or the beginning of a paragraph or section ‘In this section I have | will [] in order to []’. Ask yourself: is this paragraph contributing to my argument? Am I doing what I said I’d do?
- Many of your marks will come from just showing that you understand the material as presented in the lectures and have attempted, a bit, to look beyond it to other readings. I am confident you can do well.

Evaluation (one third)

- Here, we want you to present your view, **backed by arguments**. Here are some typical things one will read in contemporary philosophy papers (think of them as styles of argument):
 - i) **Ambiguity**. Is a term used in different ways in a given thinker’s argument?
 - ii) **Vagueness**. Is, for example, the notion of ‘relevance’ too vague to really be helpful?
 - iii) **Bad or weird predictions or consequences**. As noted, it’s a weird prediction of the possible worlds semantics that all necessary truths have the same meaning. It’s a weird prediction of Davis’s view that ‘Magnus, an Irishman, plays chess’ comes out as not false. Again, this is a case where attention to examples pays off!
- Consider counterarguments to your argument. If you’re making the hyperintensionality argument (“ $1+2=3$ ” and $3+4=7$ ” mean the same because are true in all possible worlds), consider what a defender of the view would say. Would they accept the conclusion (‘bite the bullet’) and say that despite the bad prediction the theory is worth keeping?
- Really try to make the best argument you can, then the best response, then respond!
- **It’s not necessary that your argument be completely original to you**. If you can’t think of anything we haven’t covered, you could use something discussed in class (Say ‘As discussed in class’ or ‘As discussed on the reading |handout|in supplementary reading). You could use ‘raining cats and dogs’ as a counterexample in an argument against compositionality. But try to add **something**. Maybe you want to bite the bullet—you accept that compositionality can’t capture the truth of ‘raining cats and dogs’, but you still want to keep it. Okay, why? Or maybe you think the counterexample is decisive. Okay—what next? Do we give up with compositionality? Then how do we explain the fact that it seems really often true that meanings of complexes depend on parts?
- **Your own idea>Something in the further reading>Something discussed in class>something in the lecture notes**
- What we really want to see is that you’ve thought about the topic on your own terms, and have something, even if small, to add.

If you find yourself forced to choose between description and evaluation when cutting words, evaluation is likely to get more very high grades, but it can't be at the expense of adequately introducing the topic you're evaluating!

Conclusion (two-three sentences)

Repeat yourself again. Say what you did ('In section 1, in section 2 ...'). Recap your main positive contribution.

Bibliography Format

Cappelen, Herman, and Dever, Josh. *Context and Communication*. Oxford: OUP.

Davis, Wayne. "Implicature", in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <url>

And once again: answer the question!