

# How to Write a Philosophy Essay

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## Part 1

# Essays 1 and 2

- Write *either* essay 1 or 2.
- Required labor for a “B” grade.
- Submitted on Canvas.
- Essays must be completed on time, i.e., within 72 hours of their due date.
  - Essays submitted more than 72 hours beyond their due date without a legitimate excuse (e.g., serious illness, family or personal emergency etc.) will be considered late.

## Your essays should:

- Be 1000 words in length.
- Have an informative title.
- Be typed and double-spaced with one-inch margins.
- Use 12-point, Times New Roman font.
- Refer to the readings (do NOT use outside sources).
- Include in-text citations and a works cited page using MLA format.

# Essay 1: Artificial Intelligence

What is the Computational Theory of Mind (CTM)? Explain how Searle uses the Chinese Room thought experiment to argue that machines cannot think.

- Due Thursday, February 13 at 11:59pm

## Essay 2: Consciousness

What is physicalism? Explain how Jackson uses the Mary's Room thought experiment to argue that physicalism is false.

- Due Thursday, February 27th at 11:59pm

# What we will cover today

- Summarizing
- Introductions
- Paragraphs
- Quotations
- Revising

# Summarizing

- Summarizing is presenting information asserted by others in your own words.
- To argue persuasively you need to be in dialogue with others.
- To be in dialogue with others, you need to be able to summarize their arguments effectively.

# Summarizing

- Good summaries balance what the original author is saying with the writer's own focus.
  - Writers sometimes summarize ideas that are not important to understanding their topic or argument.
  - Avoid “list summaries” that simply provide an exhaustive inventory of information.



# Summarizing

Good summaries should be accurate, neutral, and charitable.

- Ensure that you understand what the original author is saying.
- To write a good summary, you must be able to suspend your own beliefs and take up the perspective of someone else.
- Readers should not be able to tell whether or not you agree with the ideas that you are summarizing.
- Present the best interpretation of the original author's ideas.

# Introductions

Your introductory paragraph should clearly lay out what you are intend to achieve in your essay, and how you plan to achieve it.

Avoid generic introductions that could be used for almost any philosophy essay on this topic. For instance, don't make grand generalizations (e.g., "Since the dawn of time, philosophers have wondered what is the mind?") or use clichés.

[Here](#) is more information on how to write an effective introduction.

# Introductions

“Could a machine think? According to proponents of the Computational Theory of Mind (CTM), the answer to this questions is “yes.” These philosophers argue that the brain is a highly complex computer, albeit one made of meat rather than metal. However, John Searle (1980) disagrees. He argues that thinking is not computational, and that it’s not possible for non-biological machines to have mental states like understanding. In this essay, I will explain the CTM, and Searle’s argument against it.”

# Introductions

“How do minds and machines differ? The computational theory of mind (CTM) claims not at all. According to the CTM, brains are highly complex computers, and mental states and processes are computational in nature. Thus, CTM supports the view that it's possible for a computer to have a mind. However, I will present a thought experiment which shows that this is not the case.”

# Paragraphs

- A paragraph is a sentence or group of sentences that support one main idea.
- You should view paragraphs as ways of organizing information in a unified and coherent way.
- Every sentence should somehow be connected to what has come before, yet also move the reader forward with new information.

# Paragraphs

- Paragraphs help to indicate (sometimes subtle) shifts of focus.
- They help to ensure that the way in which you present information has a clear structure.
- Use transitional words or phrases (e.g., besides, furthermore, last, moreover, likewise, although, as a result, for example, as mentioned earlier, etc.) to establish relationships between ideas *within* paragraphs, and *between* paragraphs.

# Paragraphs

- One of the most common mistakes students make is writing *long* paragraphs that have more than one main idea.
- Another common problem is paragraphs that list information with no clear structure or direction.
- [Here](#) is more information on paragraph development.

# Paragraphs

Here are some examples of short essays with excellent strong introductory paragraphs and good paragraph structure:

1. [Free Will and Free Choice](#), by Jonah Nagashima
2. [Free Will and Moral Responsibility](#), by Chelsea Haramia
3. [Ignorance and Blame](#), by Daniel Miller
4. [Hope](#), by Michael Milona & Katie Stockdale



# Quotations

- Use direct quotations to communicate ideas that are stated in a particularly striking or unique way, or to provide evidence that the author in fact makes the claim you attribute to them.
- Before selecting a quotation, you need to know what you are going to do with it.
- Don't just pick a quotation for the sake of including one or to prove you've done the readings.

# Quotations

- Quotations do not speak for themselves. They need to be integrated so that their meaning and relevance is clear.
- In addition to introducing the quotation, follow it with an explanation of what the quotation means.
- Be careful not to use too many direct quotations. When you paraphrase or summarize a passage in your own words, you demonstrate your superior understanding of the material.

# Introducing Quotations

- X states, “quotation.”
- According to X, “quotation.”
- In her book, Title, X maintains that “quotation.”
- In X’s view, “quotation.”
- X agrees when she writes, “quotation.”
- X disagrees when she writes, “quotation.”
- X objects that, “quotation.”
- As X puts it, “quotation.”

# Explaining the Meaning of a Quotation

- Basically, what X is saying is that...
- In other words, X believes/argues...
- In saying this, X urges us to...
- X's point is that...
- The essence of X's argument is that...
- That is, X objects that...

# Revising Your Essay

- Revising is not the same as proofreading!
- Revising is not just fixing typos and grammatical errors.
- Revising involves refining your thesis, reconsidering your arguments, reorganizing your paragraphs, rewriting your sentences, etc.
- See [here](#) for more information on revising your essay.