

Information Literacy Changes to Course Syllabus/Final Assignment for PAR 115

Why does the *Scholarship as Conversation* frame particularly suit my PAR115 course and its final paper assignment?

- My PAR115 *Introduction to Ethics* class involves a writing component: students are assigned a final research paper.
- The process of developing their papers is broken down by me into several stages (most of them graded separately): choosing a paper topic, developing the main thesis of the paper, selecting academic texts that will go into the bibliography and be cited in the paper, creating a literature review and a commentary of one's position within it, planning and outlining the main sections and arguments of the paper, drafting the paper, and revising the paper into its final version.
- This process helps the students understand the multi-tiered process of creating information, including choosing a suitably narrow paper focus, understanding the scholarly and topical limitations of this project, situating one's paper against the background of existing scholarship, evaluating secondary sources used in one's paper, and inserting oneself within an existing scholarly debate.

Implementing the *Scholarship as Conversation* frame into the PAR115 final paper assignment:

- Students participate in classroom discussions, extending these discussions to informal venues, and reading texts already makes the students participate in the scholarship conversation.
- Students see themselves as taking active part in the scholarly conversation – they see themselves as contributors to scholarship rather than only consumers of it.
- Students understand their point of entrance: what do they already know/have experienced?
- Students understand that they are not only summarizing the literature and existing perspectives on the topic, but are adding their own point of view too.
- Students are required to make use of a number of academic sources, not just one or two – thereby taking note of the ongoing conversation and existing disagreements. They seek out, and understand, many different perspectives on the issue at question.
- Students learn to be open to being wrong: in scholarly discourse, participants must suspend judgment on the value of a particular piece of scholarship until the larger context and other points of view is better understood.
- Students recognize that the scholarly conversation will not be completed with their paper and their perspective, but will keep going.
- Students recognize that they will only make a modest, limited contribution. These constraints reflect their relatively introductory knowledge level and the assignment structure.

Assignment stages that reflect the *Scholarship as Conversation* idea:

- Selection of paper prompt.
- Submission of an outline, thesis statement, and scholarly sources/“references” – graded.
- Submission of a literature review, including the student's explanation how they will situate themselves within the existing scholarship – graded.
- Submission of a paper draft (optional) and the final version of the paper – graded.

PAR115 Introduction to Ethics – Final Paper Assignment

Assignment goal:

The **goal** of this assignment is to experience and understand the multi-tiered process of creating information and participating in a scholarly conversation, including choosing a suitably narrow paper focus, understanding the scholarly and topical limitations of this project, situating one's paper against the background of existing scholarship, evaluating secondary sources used in one's paper, and inserting oneself within an existing scholarly debate.

Assignment description and stages:

Write a philosophical paper approximately 1,600 words in length. Your work on this paper is a process and should involve the following stages (involving multiple grades):

1. Selection of **paper prompt** (not graded; see below for prompt ideas);
2. Submission of an **outline, thesis statement, and scholarly sources**/"references" (graded);
3. Submission of a **literature review**, including your explanation how you will **situate yourself** within the existing scholarship (graded);
4. *Optional*: Submission of a paper draft (not graded);
5. Submission of the **final version** of the paper (graded);

To begin working on your paper, choose an essay **prompt** from the four options listed below OR devise your own topic (which I'll need to approve). After selecting your topic, make a list of **resources** that you will be drawing on and engaging with.

- (1) Consider the following scenario:

The local government of Wilmington decides to implement a reparations scheme: each adult descendant of the victims of the 1898 coup and massacre will receive a monthly payment of \$500 for the next 20 years. In order to gather funds for this reparations scheme, taxes will be slightly increased for all non-Black residents of Wilmington who work full-time.

A woman called Anna, who recently moved to Wilmington from Utah (where she grew up), attends a forum and complains about this scheme, saying that neither she nor her ancestors were responsible for the 1898 coup – in fact, they didn't even live in NC when the coup took place. So why should she be taxed more to fund the reparations?

The local government of Wilmington issues a formal reply to Anna's complaint, in which they say that the only way the city can afford the reparations is if every non-Black resident of Wilmington who works full-time contributes to it, even if they are relatively new to the area.

In your essay, present some compelling philosophical (normative) reasons in support of both sides of this debate: the Wilmington government and Anna. Then, conclude by defending the view which you think is correct.

- (2) A common objection to implementing the Basic Income policy is that even people who aren't employed will receive money. But giving money to those who aren't employed, the objection continues, violates a principle many people in our society believe in: reciprocity. According to the principle of reciprocity, you only deserve benefits from the state if you give something in return (such as your labor).

How would feminist philosophy defend Basic Income from this objection? Present an argument for Basic Income from the perspective of gender justice (feminism) which directly addresses the objection described above.

Then, conclude by discussing which view you agree with, and why (the reciprocity objection to Basic Income or the feminist defense of Basic Income against this objection).

- (3) Summarize Mill's argument for freedom of expression and his thoughts on the importance of giving a platform to diverse, conflicting views (*On Liberty*, chapter 2).

Do you agree with Mill that every person's point of view deserves to be heard and acknowledged? Or is censorship of certain views justified?

If you are arguing that every point of view deserves to be heard and acknowledged, include your response to a potential objection that some points of view may be harmful to others. If, on the contrary, you're arguing that censorship of certain views is justified, include an account of which kinds of views should be censored/silenced, and *why*.

- (4) Summarize the core principles of Utilitarian Ethics and Kantian Ethics. How do these theories assess the morality of an action? What are the main differences between these two ethical theories?

Then, present a detailed scenario that includes an ethical problem/dilemma, and explain how Utilitarian Ethics and Kantian Ethics would approach solving this ethical problem. The scenario should be such that Utilitarian Ethics and Kantian Ethics provide different answers to the ethical problem.

Next, present a compelling philosophical argument for the solution (Kantian or Utilitarian) that you find more compelling (=correct). Why do you find this solution more compelling?

Submission deadlines:

The first deadline, XXX, is to submit the outline of your paper, which should include the thesis statement and the list of sources you'll be using. This outline should be approx. 250-300 words in length.

The second deadline, XXX, is to submit the literature review and a commentary of how you'll situate yourself within it. This should be approx. 600 words in length.

The third and final deadline, XXX, is to submit the final version of your paper, which addresses my comments on your draft. This paper should be approx. 1,600 words in length.

Final paper assignment – learning outcomes:

- Students participate in classroom discussions, extending these discussions to informal venues, and reading texts already makes the students participate in the scholarship conversation.
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Writing a Paper in Philosophy: Guidelines

Note: Different disciplines have different norms for writing; these just happen to be the ones for philosophy and therefore for this class.

1. How to begin working on your paper. Don't try to write a philosophy paper from scratch, from beginning to end: you must leave plenty of time to plan things out first. Think about the assigned topic for a while, read about what others have to say about it, and figure out a possible thesis and a rough argument for it. If you're finding this hard, start writing rough sketches of relevant ideas. When you're ready, begin to develop a master outline on paper. Your outline should show your thesis and your argument in abbreviated form but with maximal clarity. Make sure it includes potential objections and replies, using just a couple of lines for each.

2. Know your audience. Even though you are writing for me, you shouldn't write with me in mind. Write for your friends, siblings, friends, parents, 'an ordinary person on the street,' and so on. The explanatory burden is on you.

3. Definitions. Whenever you use an academic or technical term, such as "Utilitarianism," "normative claim," "hypothetical imperative," etc., take the time to define what they mean – assume your reader does not know these terms.

4. Clarity. Read your sentence out loud. Does it sound like something you'd actually say out loud? Can you read it without tripping up over your own words? If you can, you're probably in good shape; if not, chances are good that it's a bad sentence.

5. Citations. All quotations/citations/*paraphrases* of an author should be cited. A citation can look like this: (Shelby, *Dark Ghettos*, p. 78) or (Mill, "Utilitarianism", p. 67).

- When you present someone else's view, you should distinguish someone's view/her presentation of the view/your presentation of their presentation. When you quote something by someone – whether it is one sentence or one block paragraph – it must be followed by your commentary on what you take that quote to mean in relation to the point you're making.

6. Paper flow. Make sure that each paragraph of your paper fits nicely with the whole paper. Link the paragraph with words that suggest a "flow."

- For example: "In the preceding paragraph, I presented a possible argument for the view that X. I will now move to a critique of this argument and show why it is weak."

7. Paper structure:

The specific structure your paper will have depends on the paper prompt. Look at your prompt and identify what it asks you to do before you start writing the paper.

Introduction. The introduction is a paragraph-or-two-long promissory note: a certain problem is introduced to give a 'so-what' goal for the reader.

In the introduction, you must include:

- A formulation of your precise thesis – what you'll be arguing for in the paper.

State your thesis clearly and concisely in your introduction so that your reader understands what your paper sets out to achieve. Get to the point quickly and without digression. This need not be the very first sentence, but it should almost always come in the first paragraph or two.

- A summary/plan how your paper will be structured – make sure you include everything the essay prompt asks you to do.

For example, “In this paper, I will begin by summarizing A’s argument for X. I will then present two counter-arguments (objections) to A’s argument. My first objection will concern.... My second objection will be about... These objections show that... I will conclude the paper by summarizing what I have argued for.”

- Suggested length: 100 words.

Presentation/summary of the problem at hand or the view the essay prompt asks you to discuss.

- A brief presentation of the topic you’ll be discussing in the paper. What is this topic about? Why does it matter?
- Here, you can summarize/paraphrase what the prompt asks you to do in the paper.
- Suggested length: 100 words.

Presentation of an argument for a specific view.

- **If** the prompt asks you to present arguments for two opposing views, do that before taking a stance on which one is the correct/stronger view.
- Spend one-or-two paragraphs presenting a possible argument for a view.
- You can motivate this view with real-life examples or concepts/theories we learned in class, etc.
- Suggested length: 200 words.

Presentation of an argument against that view (or argument for an opposite view).

- Again: **If** the prompt asks you to present arguments for two opposing views, do that before taking a stance on which one is the correct/stronger view.
- Spend one-or-two paragraphs presenting a possible argument for the opposite view.
- You can motivate this view with real-life examples or concepts/theories we learned in class, etc.
- Suggested length: 200 words.

A defense of the view you agree with – why is it stronger than the opposite view? Here you go back to your thesis from the introduction, and defend it.

- This is a very important part of the paper and should be longer than C and D, or at least as long (2-3 paragraphs).
- Here, make an argument to support your thesis. This is the main focus of your paper. To make the strongest possible argument, do not skip any steps. It will almost always be more effective to use a single argument and make it as compelling as you can than to use more than one argument supported less comprehensively, so avoid taking a “shotgun” approach by using multiple weaker arguments. In presenting your argument, be straightforward in your language, and say precisely what you mean.
- Suggested length: 300 words.

Conclusion.

- At the end of the paper, spend one paragraph summarizing what you did and achieved in the paper. This can be similar to the introduction, but don’t simply copy-paste the same sentences.
- Suggested length: 50-100 words.