

GUIDELINES FOR READING AND WRITING PHILOSOPHICALLY

Reading

Reading philosophically can be characterized most generally as a tri-part process:

- (1) Identifying the **thesis** (main claim or idea) the author wants to defend,
- (2) Identifying the **arguments** the author gives that (positively and/or negatively) support that thesis, and
- (3) **Your evaluation** of the merits or demerits of the author's view, particularly in contrast with another *more plausible* view.

Writing

For *writing* philosophically, just put yourself in the position of author and proceed with roughly the same process as above:

- (1) Formulate a **thesis** (the main claim or idea) you want to defend;
- (2) Provide a clear and concise **argument** that *positively* supports that thesis; and
- (3) **Your evaluation** of the merits of your position over another view that is not *as plausible* as yours.
 - (a) This *negative* argument is a criticism of an "opposing" view that includes an explanation of why that view is less plausible than the one being supported.

THIS TRI-PART PROCESS IN MORE DETAIL...

(1) THESIS

- (a) What is the fundamental question being addressed?
 - (1) This may be stated in question form or not.
- (b) If stated in question form, the question should be definitively answered.

Note: (a) & (b) taken together form a *thesis* or claim that will be defended in the body of the work.

(2) SUPPORTING ARGUMENTS

- (a) What is the main (*positive*) *argument* used to defend the thesis?
 - (1) This should include at least one good example that demonstrates the relevancy of the thesis in some context. Therefore, an explanation of why the example does the work that it does should be included -- for this is what shows that the example has *philosophical* significance.
- (b) What is the main (*negative*) *critical argument* against a differing view?
 - (1) This should include at least one good example that demonstrates how the opponent's view is irrelevant, or fails to do the philosophical work that it purports to do.

(3) YOUR EVALUATION

- (a) If you are *reading*, what are your main reasons to accept or refute the author's view?
 - (1) Remember that a refutation is a critical argument against another view that is credible, but less preferable in some respect to the one being supported.
- (b) If you are *writing*, formulate a critical argument that *explains why* your view is preferable over a differing view, by giving reasons for why the rejected view lacks justification.