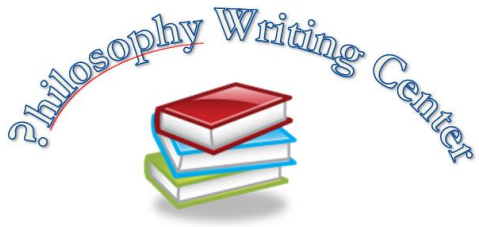

Introduction

In most academic situations, such as English, your introduction will talk generally about the topic that you are looking to explore. This isn't the case for Philosophy, which can often be a shock for new philosophy students. But fear not! Philosophy introductions are quite simple and can be considered "road maps" to your paper; tell the reader "where you're going" with this paper. The aim of an introductory paragraph is to make it clear what this paper is about and what you're arguing. Philosophy papers shouldn't read like your favorite murder mystery but instead like a spoiler: we want to know exactly what happens before it happens.

In your introduction, you'll often begin with **one or two sentences** where you talk about the conversation that you're entering into and potentially including a hook (i.e., an explanation of why this matters):

> E.g. "In the field of metaphysics, laws of nature have often been considered…"
>
> "At some point or another, most of us have wondered about our duties to animals."

Now you're ready to start describing what is going to happen in your paper! What are you going to say and how are you going to do it? What argument are you engaging with? When you're starting out, it can often be a good idea to try and **devote one sentence or so to each part** of your paper.

> E.g. The sentence for your exegesis could look something like: "First I will present Peter Singer's account of…"
>
> For your own argument: "Then I will present my response to Singer, arguing that…"
>
> For the objection: "However, I note that one could always respond to such an argument by claiming…"
>
> For your response: "Yet I demonstrate how this objection can easily be responded to on the grounds that…"
>
> Now you're ready for your thesis! It's probably (definitely) the most important part of your introductory paragraph and is typically the last sentence: "Ultimately, I conclude/arrive at the point that…"

> To put it all together, an entire thesis might read something like this: “Given that UNICEF estimates that approximately 2,000 children die from preventable causes every minute, it behooves us to determine what our obligations to aid are. This paper concerns itself with Peter Singer’s account of our duties to the alleviation of dire need. I present two interpretations of an ambiguous premise, demonstrating how, on one of these readings, his argument is too demanding. Although one could always object to this reading by claiming that we ought to adopt the other interpretation of the premise, I demonstrate that this is also subject to the overdemandingness objection. I ultimately arrive at the point that if we want to give an account of the limits of our duties towards the alleviation of dire need, it needs to be different from the argument that Singer puts forth.”

This may seem very formulaic and even a little blunt, which is completely normal; philosophical writing is very straightforward in a way that other disciplines often aren’t. The last thing you want to do is make your paper read like a mystery novel. Spoilers are a good thing in philosophy papers! Tell your reader exactly where this paper is going in order to avoid confusion or misinterpretation.

As a last point, it can also be a good idea to write your introduction after you’ve finished your paper, so you already know exactly what you’ve argued.