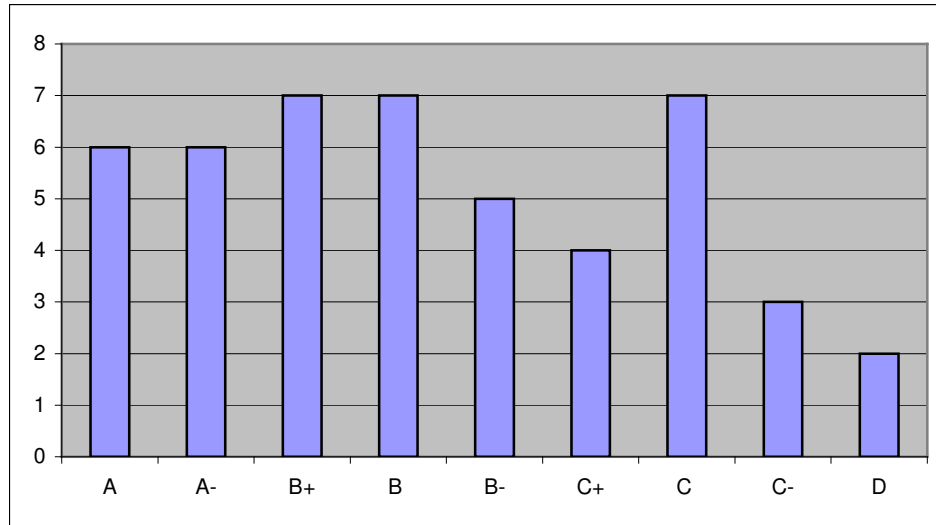


General Comments for Essay Assignment 1:

Understanding the Grading Rubric

Your overall grade on the essay is given in letter format. Here is the how the grades were distributed:



I was a more generous with grades than I will be on future assignments, curving the grades upward somewhat. In part I did this because this was the first assignment. But be aware: for most of you, if your next essay is of the same quality, it will receive a lower letter grade.

In addition to your overall letter grade, I gave numeric feedback for each of the four main parts of the essay. Here is how to understand the numbers:

5: excellent, clear

4: nearly there, perhaps some minor mistakes, or lack of detail

3: basic idea is correct, but some clear errors, omissions, or unclarity

2: significant errors, omissions, or confusion

1: basic idea completely wrong, major errors, or this issue not dealt with

If you'd like a rough idea about what letter grade an essay like yours would receive for the next essay assignment, add up the four numbers on your rubric and divide by 4. This number approximates the letter grade according to a scale where 5 = A, 4 = B, etc.

Under each of the four main sections, I gave more specific information about what you did or didn't do in your essay. Here's how to understand those marks:

- ✓ indicates that this aspect of the essay was adequately addressed
- ✓- indicates that this aspect of the essay was somewhat addressed
- indicates that this aspect of the essay was not addressed or incorrect

Finally, for the "Overall Assessment" part of the rubric, most of you will see nothing written. Some of you may see one or more boxes checked. This indicates that that general area particularly stood out to me as needing work.

IMPORTANT: Your final grade was based on a combination of factors, including how you did in each section, how you addressed each point, the clarity of your writing, and the difficulty of the question. As should be clear, the numbers do not *determine* your overall letter grade for this assignment. There is no formula which takes those numbers as input and yields a letter grade as output. The numbers are there solely as a way of giving you more informative feedback.

General Comments

• Explaining versus stating

By *far*, the most common comment I wrote was “explain”. It is really important that you do not simply state the consequences of theories, or objections to theories but that you explain these things. For instance, it is not enough to say:

“If option 1 of the Euthyphro dilemma is true, then all of morality is contingent. So, option 1 must be rejected.”

That may in fact be *true*, but you need to explain it. Here’s an idea of what I’m looking for:

“If option 1 of the Euthyphro dilemma is true, then all of morality is contingent on God’s will. To say that all of morality is contingent on God’s will, is to say that for any moral truth, it could have been false. In other words, any action that is actually wrong could have been right, and any state of affairs that is actually bad could have been good. This follows from option 1 because if God had approved of an action that is actually wrong, it would have been right. Similarly, if God had approved of a certain state of affairs that is actually bad, it would have been good. For example, consider a horrible act of torture perpetrated for no reason. According to option 1, nothing about this act itself makes it wrong. Rather, it could have been right had God approved of it. But this is strongly counterintuitive. It is not true that all of morality is contingent like this. However, according to option 1 morality *is* contingent like this. So option 1 must be rejected.”

As you can see, it takes quite a bit more *effort* to explain things in this way rather than just state them. But you’re all capable of it, and this is what you need to do.

• When a theory changes

It’ll help clarify your writing if you are sensitive to when a theory is the same theory and when it changes. For instance, if you think there is a successful argument against TAO, then you think that TAO is false. You may try to save the basic idea behind TAO by proposing an alternative, perhaps TAO*. But TAO* and TAO are different theories. So it’s not correct to say that TAO can be saved from a certain argument by moving to TAO*. By moving to TAO*, you are rejecting TAO. A similar point applies to DCT and attempts to save it. By being sensitive to when a theory changes like this, your writing will be clearer.

• Defining terms

If you use a term that isn’t a common term of English, then you need to define it. If you use a common term of English in a specialized, technical way, then you need to define it. For example: “state of affairs,” “metaphysical possibility,” “contingent.”

• Success versus non-success terms

It’ll help clarify your writing if you are sensitive to the difference between terms that imply success and those that do not. For instance, if you say that Aquinas *proved* TAO or that he *established* TAO, this implies that he argued for it **and was successful**. If all you mean is that he argued for TAO, or that he asserted TAO, then say that. If someone *argues for* a theory or *asserts* a theory, this does not imply that the theory is true. Sensitivity to this will make your writing clearer.

• 'Valid,' 'sound'

In philosophy, the terms 'valid' and 'sound' have specific, technical meanings. Validity is a property that arguments have. An argument is said to be *valid* if it is not possible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false. Thus, validity is about the logical form of an argument. Soundness is also a property that arguments have. An argument is said to be *sound* if it is valid **and in addition** its premises are true. Thus, soundness is about the logical form of an argument **and** about the truth of the premises. So, in philosophical writing you should only use the terms 'valid' and 'sound' to describe arguments in these ways. If you just want to say that you think a point someone makes (or a premise they assert) is correct, you can say that the point (or premise) is *true*, or *correct*, or anything similar. But don't say that a premise is sound or a point is valid. To use the terms 'valid' or 'sound' in this way will just cause confusion.

• Grammar notes

None of these are major errors, but they appeared often enough to be worth pointing out:

Incorrect: "I **can not** go to class today."

Correct: "I **cannot** go to class today."

Incorrect: "If I have a dollar, **than** I can get a Coke."

Correct: "If I have a dollar, **then** I can get a Coke."

Incorrect: "Shaq is taller **then** me."

Correct: "Shaq is taller **than** me."

Incorrect: "According to DCT, **god** is the source of morality."

Correct: "According to DCT, **God** is the source of morality."

Incorrect: "Zeus is a Greek **God**."

"A monotheist believes in a single **God**."

Correct: "Zeus is a Greek **god**."

"A monotheist believes in a single **god**."

*Note: We capitalize 'God' when it is being used as a proper name (for just the same reason that we capitalize 'Zeus'). When it is not being used as a proper name, then it is not capitalized. (Occasionally you will see someone capitalize pronouns that refer to God. For example: "God is all-powerful, there is nothing He cannot do." This is strictly optional.)

Incorrect: "The **bible** has been translated into many languages."

Correct: "The **Bible** has been translated into many languages."

*Note: We capitalize 'Bible' since it is used as a proper name for a book.

• Extra information

There is a really excellent resource about how to write philosophy papers, which was written by NYU philosopher Jim Pryor. It is available on his website here:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

I have also linked this from the main course page, under the title "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper."