

HOW TO COMMENT ON A DRAFT

PHILO 364: Philosophy of Language | Fall 2016 | Daniel W. Harris

The goal of providing your fellow students with comments is to improve their papers through collaboration. (I don't grade on a curve, so you can't harm your own grade by improving someone else's.) Good writing is almost always a collaborative endeavor, and most good philosophy papers will have been read, and commented-on, by many of the author's colleagues and acquaintances before it is published. (Look at the preface or acknowledgements to any philosophy book, or the opening footnote of many journal articles, to see what I mean.) This assignment is our attempt to reproduce that process, if only in miniature. In addition to making all of the term papers better, it should also help you to get better at providing good feedback.

Each comment should begin with a 200-word summary of the essay's argument. What is the essay's main point? How does the author try to prove this point? After summarizing the paper, spend at least 300 words offering constructive criticism. Which parts were hard to follow? Which aspects of the argument were unconvincing? Could you think of any counterexamples to the author's conclusions? Where would an extra example or two have been helpful? In general: what changes or additions would make this a better essay? It's okay to be critical in your comments; pointing out a flaw can help the author to fix it in the next draft. But you should always be respectful.

My main grading criterion will be helpfulness. Are your comments likely to help the author to improve their paper? You will lose points if you make an inadequate effort to understand the author's argument, if your suggestions are unhelpful, if you are disrespectful, or if you seem not to have put much effort into the whole thing.

Some important details:

- Each comment is worth 5% of your final grade.
- Both sets of comments should be emailed to Professor Harris by midnight on Friday, December 4th.
- Late comments will be docked one full letter grade per day. It's extremely important to get the comments in on time, because otherwise they won't be useful to the paper's author.