

PHILOSOPHY 268 | HUNTER COLLEGE | FALL 2020

RESEARCH PAPER ASSIGNMENT

INSTRUCTIONS

For this assignment, you'll write a single essay, **approximately 1500-2000 words** in length, in which you will summarize and take a side on a live debate in contemporary cognitive science. A live debate is one that is unsettled—an issue about which at least some of the experts disagree. The debate you choose can be either one that we have discussed this semester, or a related debate that has not been one of our central topics. Your job is to make a convincing case for your side of the debate by making the best argument for it that you can in the space allotted.

You should try to choose a relatively narrow topic. It would be better to focus on a single argument for a position, rather than on the position as a whole, so that you can go into some detail without spreading yourself too thin. For example: "Why connectionism is false" is too broad; "Why connectionists can't explain systematicity" is better, since it would allow you to give a more comprehensive overview of your topic. In general, choose depth over breadth of topic.

RESEARCH REQUIREMENT

Part of your job on this paper is to do independent research that goes beyond what has been assigned in class. You needn't have a comprehensive grasp on all of the literature that is relevant to your topic, but you should demonstrate an understanding of the major relevant debates and arguments. For example: if you give an argument without taking note of and responding to a widely known and highly influential response to this argument, I will take that to be evidence that you have not done enough research.

Some good places to start this research would include the further readings and bibliographies listed in the books we've used, the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, and the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. But it's important that you don't merely rely on encyclopedia articles. Rather, you should treat them as a first step toward tracking down original research. Think of a Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article (for example) as a guide to what you should be reading, not as a source in its own right. You should also check out philpapers.com. And you can also ask me for recommendations.

DUE DATE

The essay is **due on Sunday, December 20th, 2020**. You should submit your assignment by sending it to me in a private message on slack (ideally as a PDF attachment). Please note that I have to turn my grades in just a couple of days after this due date, and so it is important that you are not late, and it is especially important that if you have a very good reason for being late, that you talk to me about this ahead of time.

OPTIONAL OUTLINE AND DRAFT

Your overall grade for the paper will be worth 40% of your grade in the course. *Optionally*, you can hand in an outline and draft, each of which will be worth 10% of your final grade, and on which I will

give you feedback prior to the next stage. (If you hand in both of these, then your final draft will count for just 20% of your final grade.) This is a good way to get early feedback if you are worried about a lot of your grade resting on a single assignment. Here are some instructions for these components:

- Your outline should be a 2-page document in which you explain your plan for writing the paper (your thesis, an outline of your argument, and a preliminary list of important sources on your topic). I will give you feedback on this outline to make sure that you are making progress in the right direction. If you choose to hand in an outline for credit, then it is due on Wednesday, November 25th.
- Your draft should be about 1000-1500 words. I will give you feedback on this draft to give you a chance to improve it before the final paper is due. If you choose to hand in a draft, then it will be due on Thursday, December 10th.

I repeat that these components are optional. You don't have to do them if you don't want to. But they are good ways to break down your paper into stages, to get feedback during the process, and to lower the stakes of the final draft.