

PHILO 36400: PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE | SPRING 2024

FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

INSTRUCTIONS

Submit the paper in a direct message to me on Discord no later than 11:59pm on **Friday, March 29th**. Please write the paper in a word processor of your choice, save a copy (!), and then **send me a PDF as a private message on discord**.

Your essay should be clear and concise, **approximately 1500 words**. Do your best to stick to this length; it is not better to write a longer essay.

You should cite any sources that you use, including required readings, whether you discuss them explicitly or just use them as inspiration or for background information. It is not required that you read and cite sources other than our required readings, but it might be useful, depending on your topic.

The exact formatting/citation style don't matter, as long as it is clear and consistent.

SOME PAPER IDEAS

The purpose of this paper is for you to further deepen your understanding of something we've been learning about in the class so far. There are lots of ways that you could use the paper to do this, and I am open to discussing various options. But here are a few more specific things that you could do:

1. An overarching theme in the course so far has been the tension between two opposing viewpoints of language as a cognitive capacity within individuals and language as a social phenomenon. Explain a single concrete way in which these two perspectives seem to conflict with each other, and then explain why you think this conflict either is or isn't a genuine one. The hardest part of this assignment will be finding a way to do it clearly and convincingly in 1500 words. Don't bite off more than you can chew!
2. Find a confusing passage in one of the required readings that we've covered so far. Explain what is confusing about it, and why it is important that we figure it out. Then give an explanation of how we should make sense of this passage, relating it to the broader aims of the text of which it is a part.
3. Find something in a text we've read that you disagree with. Explain why the author has this view, as charitably as you can. Then explain, as clearly and concisely as possible, why they are wrong.

These are examples of the form that your paper could take. But I am open to other options, which you can discuss with me in class, in office hours, by email, or on Discord.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- Did writing the paper deepen your understanding of something we talked about in class? This is what this assignment is all about, and it is the most important thing I'll be looking for.
- Clarity: It should be easy to understand what point is being made at all times. This means writing well, but also structuring your essay carefully so that it's obvious how each thing that you say fits with your overall aims.
- Persuasiveness: When you make an argument for some philosophical or interpretive claim, it should be a rationally persuasive one, even to someone who wouldn't otherwise agree with your conclusion. And when you summarize another author's argument, you should make it clear what is persuasive about this argument.
- Accuracy: If you're discussing other people's ideas—including those in the readings—you should show that you understand them properly.