

PHILO 38080: WITTGENSTEIN | Fall 2025

SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

GOAL

The purpose of this paper is to further deepen your understanding of Wittgenstein or his influence on subsequent philosophy. This time, you must go beyond the required readings. There are lots of ways to do this, but any way that you do it will require reading at least two high-quality sources on your topic in addition to the required readings.

OPTIONAL: TWO-PLAYER LANGUAGE GAME

Optionally, you can choose to work with a partner on this assignment. If you choose to do this, your partner will help you to choose your topic—a question about Wittgenstein or his influence that they would like to know the answer to—and will serve as your audience for the paper. If you choose to work with a partner, you should talk to them ASAP in order to brainstorm topics for each other.

Why do I suggest this option? Basically, I think it's usually a good idea to have an actual audience in mind when writing something, as it is likely to focus your mind on the specific communicative problems that you're trying to solve. I think having a specific audience in mind will make it easier for you to write a better paper.

However, this part of the paper is optional. If you'd rather not do it this way, just let me know.

You can choose your own partner (tell me who!). If you would like a partner but haven't found one on your own, let me know ASAP and I will try to help.

INSTRUCTIONS

Submit the paper to me by email no later than on **Friday, December 19th**.

Please put it in the body of an email, not as an attachment. (Save a copy for yourself!)

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.

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

WHAT KIND OF SOURCES?

This time, you should use and cite at least two sources in addition to our required readings from class. These can be secondary sources on one of our required readings (this means that they talk about the required readings, but present original arguments about what it means) or they can be primary sources on the same topic (this means that they are the original source of an idea or argument).

What you should *not* cite is a secondary or tertiary source that just summarizes a reading or argument from another source (for example, an encyclopedia article). A source like that could be useful to you as a starting place for your research, but only for finding the original source of a reading or argument that you want to cite. For example, it's great to use the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy or Wikipedia as guides to other things to read, not as potential sources in their own right. The most important parts of these encyclopedia articles is their bibliographies.

I will also be evaluating the quality of your sources. This means that you should try to cite scholarly publications, and not just random discussions that you found on the internet. (There are interesting exceptions to this rule. Sometimes a Youtube video or a reddit post or a tweet will contain an argument

that doesn't (yet) exist in a scholarly publication. If you're unsure about a particular source, just check with me about it!)

The most important thing is that you use these sources to further deepen your understanding of some topic or required reading that we discussed in class. So, if they just seem like they're thrown in to meet the requirement, with no serious evidence that they have deepened your understanding, that's not good.

SOME IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO WRITE YOUR PAPER

The purpose of this paper is for you to further deepen your understanding of something we've been learning about in the class, this time by using additional sources beyond the required readings. 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 specific things that you could do:

1. Find something specific in the *Philosophical Investigations* that is confusing. This could be a specific passage or a recurring idea. Explain what is confusing about it, and why it is important that we figure it out. Summarize a debate in the scholarly literature about how to interpret the relevant passage or idea, and take a side, defending your interpretation or explaining why one of the scholarly interpretations makes more sense.
2. Find something in the *Investigations* 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, making sure to discuss and respond to the most relevant scholarly work that supports or is opposed to your argument.
3. Find something in the *Investigations* that you agree with. Explain Wittgenstein's position and argument for this position as clearly as you can, and provide an additional argument for this claim that goes beyond what he said. Explain and respond to the most relevant arguments that other philosophers have made on this topic.
4. Explain a specific way in which Wittgenstein's ideas influenced a later philosopher's work. Make sure to clearly explain the relevant ideas from the *Investigations*, as well as the later philosopher's work. What is the evidence that the later philosopher's ideas were influenced by Wittgenstein? What sort of influence are we talking about?

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.
- Appropriateness of sources: You should try to cite the primary or secondary sources that are most relevant to your argument, not just any old random discussion you found on the internet. You should always cite the original source of some argument, rather than something else that merely summarizes it.

- Accuracy: If you're discussing other people's ideas—including those in the readings or in your additional sources—you should show that you understand them properly.
- Responsiveness to Partner (Optional): If you worked with a partner, did your paper answer their question in a way that was understandable and helpful to them?