

**Essay Technique**  
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Consult Tom Stoneham's guide to writing essays on the departmental webpage: <http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/phil/current/essay4.pdf>. Also have a look at Jim Pryor's article: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>.

**1. Introduction and conclusion.** In the introduction say what thesis you are going to argue for. In the conclusion, say what you have argued for, and how that answers the question that you were set. Also mention any issues that remain unaddressed.

**2. Define technical terms.** Essay titles often contain technical terms. Explain what you mean by these terms.

**3. Be accurate and charitable.** You need to accurately describe the positions you consider. In doing so, avoid long quotations: use your own words as far as possible. Try to be charitable, too. For instance, if an author isn't very clear about what they mean, suggest alternative interpretations. Also try to explain why someone might want to hold a particular position: what are its advantages?

*But note: accurate and charitable exposition is necessary but not sufficient for a good essay...*

**4. Engage.** Your reader doesn't just want to know what X thought. They want to know what *you* think. *Engage* with X's views. Say what you think about them; do not merely paraphrase them.

**5. X is right because...** If you agree with someone, *argue* for their position. For example, consider objections to that position, and then say why you think that those objections don't work.

**6. But that's implausible...** If you think that an account is implausible—a common reaction—say *why*. In what ways is it implausible? Which intuitions in particular does it violate? Why are these intuitions important?

**7. Develop your objections.** Once you have an objection, push it. Convince your reader that *you* are right. For example, suggest replies on behalf of your opponent, and say why you think that those replies are unsuccessful.

**8. Don't dump.** Don't simply spit out everything you know on a subject. Make sure that what you say relates directly to the question. And make it clear to your reader *how* the material directly relates to the question.

**9. Be selective.** Even if there is a lot of material that is directly relevant to the question, you only have a limited amount of time. Pick what you think are the most interesting and important points, and focus on these.

**10. Order your objections.** Your objections to a theory should be ordered from weakest to strongest. Deliver the killer blow just before your conclusion.