Philosophy 112

Tips for Writing a Good Philosophical Essay

When I ask you to **present a view** you should state the view as it appeared in the ppt.

When I ask you to **explain a view** you should do two things. First, define any the key terms. (Generally speaking, if I write out a definition or take time to discuss the meaning of a term in class, then you should explain it in your essay.) Second, restate the thesis in your own words, perhaps using examples from class. In general, you need to show me that you understand the view under discussion.

When I ask you to **present an argument** you should reconstruct the argument as it appeared in the ppt. Ideally, this will involve writing out all of the numbered lines.

When I ask you to **explain an argument** you should do two things. First, define any key terms. Second, say what the reasoning is behind the argument in your own words. Ideally, this will involve going line-by-line and explaining the justification for each step.

Note: Almost every argument in this class will have a premise of the form *If__________, then ______*. These are called *conditionals*. Conditionals require special explanation. In order to explain a conditional, you need to say why the thing that appears in the second blank is supposed to follow from what appears in the first.

When I ask you to **evaluate an argument** you should say whether or not the argument is successful. This will involve discussing objections that we made in class (e.g., *the argument is invalid because...*).

Note: I will often raise more than one objection to an argument. You should address all of them. If I write it on the board, I will be look for it in your essay.

Note: Your primary goal is to show me that you understand the material we discuss in class, whether or not you agree with the relevant arguments or conclusions. Once you have accomplished that goal, you are free to state or defend your own views on the matter. Giving your own reaction or response to an argument will never hurt you and it can help you.