In this class you will be asked to write a philosophy essay or paper in which you present, explain, and evaluate some idea. This handout explains how to do this.

- When you are asked to **present a view** you should state that view as it was presented in class or in the reading. You do not need to present the view word-for-word. However, the further you get away from the official formulation, the more risk there is of getting something wrong.

- When you are asked to **explain a view** you should do two things. First, you should define any key terms that appear in the statement of the view. In general, a key term is any term that was defined in class or in the reading. Second, you should restate the view in your own words. Ideally, this will involve giving examples or analogies to show that you understand the view under discussion.

- When you are asked to **present an argument** you should reconstruct that argument as it was presented in class or in the reading. Ideally, this will involve writing out all of the premises, in order, along with the conclusion. As before, you do not need to state the argument word-for-word. However, the further you get away from the official formulation, the more risk there is of getting something wrong.

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

- When you are asked to **evaluate an argument** you should discuss potential objections to the argument. More than one objection will often be raised in class or in the reading. You should discuss as many of these objections as possible.

Here is one final, very important piece of advice. Students often think of themselves as writing their essays and papers for their professors. This is natural, but it can also be dangerous. If you think of yourself as writing to someone who already understands the issues, you’re much more likely to take various things for granted. For example, you’re much more likely to leave key terms undefined. This can significantly impact your grade. In order to avoid this mistake, I encourage you to think of yourself as writing your essay or paper for a friend or family member, rather than for me. In particular, I encourage you to think of yourself as writing your essay or paper for someone who doesn’t know anything at all about philosophy. Doing this will force you to slow down and explain everything in complete detail.