

Writing Workshop Handout #1

Your Name:

Name of Author of Paper #1:

Name of Author of Paper #2:

1. Organization

Is the paper appropriately organized? A paper may lack a thesis, an argument, and may be so inarticulate that no one can understand it, but does it at least have a discernible introduction, body, and conclusion? Although you might think that the central argument or idea is the most important part of a paper, good arguments and ideas are highly dependent upon the organizational structure of a paper. A paper that is well-organized has discernible parts throughout. As you are reading the paper, you should be able to identify large chunks of text and say “This part of the paper performs this general function, while this part of the paper performs this general function”.

1.1 Suggestions

If the paper you are reading is *not* appropriately organized then you will want to suggest how the author might organize it more effectively. You might suggest that he/she

- Include section titles (e.g. *1. Introduction, 2. Knowledge as JTB, 3. Gettier’s Objection, 4. The Causal Theory of Knowledge*).
- Include sign-posts and metadiscourse (e.g. *In this section I will articulate Gettier’s objection to knowledge as justified true belief and then present my own Gettier-style objection*).

2. Effectiveness & Coherence

If the paper is well-organized, then you should be able to identify large chunks of text and determinate what function they perform. If this is the case, the next thing you will want to consider how *well* different portions of text *achieve* their function? The paper you are reading may be properly organized but it may articulate a concept incorrectly, it may have weak arguments, or it may simply be gibberish.

No paper is perfect, try to find the weakest part of the paper you are reading and offer a suggestion to the author. You might suggest that he/she:

2.1 Suggestions

If the paper could benefit from articulating (or arguing) a point better, you might suggest

- Re-examine a section of the book where a certain concept or argument is discussed. There are lots of subtleties in philosophical texts and learning to articulate a concept or reiterate an argument sometimes requires re-reading certain passages.

- Suggest that the author provide an example to clarify a concept, or that he or she clarify a certain sentence.
- Are there any places that could be made clearer with more precise phrasing?
- Do you find yourself saying “You’ve already said this, get to the point?” If so, then you should make a note of this.
- Are controversial points or positions that seems subjective appropriately justified with evidence?

3. Style, Grammar, Rhetoric

You will want to consider stylistic features of the paper.

- Are there any glaring mistakes in grammar or spelling?
- Are any sentences too long?
- Is the paper appropriately formatted? (12 font, 2-3 pages, 1.5 or 2 spacing, Times New Roman, standard 1 inch margins, Title and identifying information, a resource page)
 - If a paper lacks these features then it is likely the paper will be immediately returned.
- Is there anything that could be construed as offensive?
- Is there anything *overstated*?
 - Example #1: From the dawn of time, philosophers have considered the problem of knowledge.
 - Since you are not writing a paper about the entire history of knowledge, this is too much.
 - Example #2: I have shown conclusively that no one has any knowledge, now, in the past, and forever.
 - Have you really?