

# "My Philosophy" Final Paper Assignment

Goal: To articulate your own deepest beliefs about argument, showing that you've met course goal #5.

Due: Finals week, at the exam time (tentatively, Monday, 10 December).

Assignment: Write a five page paper taking a position on some important philosophical issue related to argument, and defend your position with strong arguments.

## Details:

1. Over the course of the semester, we'll hit a series of "big," philosophical questions about argument. There will be readings for each, and at least some time for class discussion. These questions are:

1. Why argue? What is the function of argument, or is it useless or worse, bad?
2. Many important controversies can only be resolved by relying on information from experts. Why don't we just let experts make the decision? Why if at all should ordinary citizens participate in arguments over public policy?
3. Is it inappropriate to rely on religious reasons when making arguments on issues of public policy? In particular, should presidential candidates use religion when they defend their stances on things like foreign policy or health insurance reform?
4. Jon Stewart has said that the way we debate issues—for example, on TV shows—is hurting America. Is he right? If so, what would be a better way to debate issues?
5. Do men and women argue differently? If so, does that make a difference—is the world (for example, the practice of law) set up to discriminate in favor of male style arguments and against female style?

2. You can write your paper on any one of these questions. If you prefer, you can choose another philosophical question about argument—just check it with me, first.

**3. I strongly recommend that you do not wait until the last minute to write this paper. Instead, if you find the class discussion of one of these philosophical issues to be interesting, write your paper within a few days.**

4. If you get the paper done before Thanksgiving, I'd be happy to look over a draft and discuss it with you or give you written feedback. Just send it to me by email. But after Thanksgiving break, if you want me to look at it you'll have to bring it to my regularly scheduled office hours.

5. Talk with your groupmates and friends about your issue—that will also help with brainstorming.

Assessment standards: This assignment is worth 10% of your final grade. A good paper:

1. Is well argued. By the end of the semester, you'll have a detailed sheet for assessing arguments; make sure your essay meets all the standards you've learned throughout the semester.

2. States your personal view.

3. Is well written, or at least not badly written. (Good style, appropriate references to sources, no typos—everything that shows you're proud of your work.)