

## How to approach your final paper

The trick is going to be to carve out a paper topic that you can address well enough in 10 pages. This length is the length of a colloquium paper at the APA and at various conferences, so being able to write a good paper of that length is a good skill. Your paper topic should be a direct question to which your paper is a detailed answer. However, it will take a lot of work and distillation to get your paper topic ideas into one question, so start early and keep at it until you get it down to just one question. Often a good place to start is with your own frustration about something we have read or discussed and the more precise the claim or idea is that frustrates you, the better. Then your paper topic can be something like: is that particular claim true/plausible? If you approach it like that (again, it need not be), then the structure of your paper *can* be as following:

1. Introduction: here you introduce the topic of your paper and get the reader ready to understand your discussion of the topic.
2. Discussion of author A's reasons for holding claim C. Here you introduce all philosophical machinery needed to understand C and its significance.
3. Your arguments against A's reasons for holding C. Your arguments against holding C. Your arguments for holding not-C
4. Objections to your arguments.
5. Responses to your objections.
6. Conclusion: Here you draw together your conclusion and state your thesis clearly.

Note, that your paper need not have this structure, but needs to have all the ingredients, organized in some way that makes sense rhetorically.

### Keep in mind the following:

- Your paper should be self-contained (another SF State student, not enrolled in this course, should be able to pick it up and read and understand it) and provide an argument for a certain precise thesis regarding a clearly defined topic.
- The structure of the paper should be clear. It should be clear what work each section is doing, what each paragraph is doing, what each sentence is doing. Any words not doing any work should be left out. Any sentences not doing any work should be left out. Any paragraphs not doing any work should be left out. Any sections not doing any work should be left out. More is not better!
- All technical terms needed for the argument should be defined. Any technical terms not needed should be left out. No jargon!
- You need to explain in precise detail the claims and arguments of the authors you discuss, as well as your own. You then need to stand back from the text and evaluate those claims and arguments. I want your evaluation of the ideas involved. You need to grapple with the pros and cons of what the author actually says, as well as what the author could say. This means that *your voice* needs to be on the page. Ten pages of “strings of quotes” is no real engagement.
- Always cite your sources, but only quote if either of the following holds: i) the reader would not believe that the author had written this if you didn't quote; or ii) what the author says is ambiguous. If the latter, please provide the relevant alternative interpretations of the text.