

Academic Skills

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1. Introduction

You will find an overview of the key academic skills in this manual: reading, literature research, writing, speaking and giving/receiving feedback. This manual is set up in modules, allowing each of the parts to be read individually, separate from each other. This means that sometimes things may be repeated or references are made to other parts in this manual. The manual is suitable for all years. It may seem that the skills described here are things you have already learned at secondary school, however applying these skills in the fields of philosophy, theology, religious studies and in an academic manner is something quite different. This manual is intended to assist you with this.

This manual is about *academic* skills; however most tips and the stepped approaches used here can also be applied to any non-academic context. Many of our alumni for example are regularly asked to give a presentation or write a piece for publication. All the skills discussed and described can also be viewed as *crafts*. And like any craft, you retain and hone this with regular practise. You never finish learning academic skills!

Your curriculum's skills learning path

This manual is offered within the framework of the skills learning path which forms an integral part of your course's curriculum. The skills learning path will ensure that by the end of your programme, you will meet the learning outcome of acquiring the ability to communicate effectively in writing regarding your field of expertise for the benefit of both a specialist and a lay public.

2. Reading

With philosophy, theology and religious studies, written texts form a vital medium for the exchange of ideas, thoughts and arguments. Philosophical, theological and religious-scientific texts are however not always the easiest to access and digest. A concise or flowery style, content rich in information or argumentation, text interwoven with historic events or other weighty/complex theories can demand energy and determination on the part of the reader and of the reader's reading skills. To gain entry into an author's thoughts and arguments and to internalise a philosophical, theological or religious-scientific text, it is absolutely critical that you *read well*. How do you do this?

2.1 Tips

- Don't immediately open at page one and commence reading with a magnifying glass. Quietly browse first, flick through the publication and get a feel for the text (reading for orientation).
- Identify reasons why a reader may possibly misunderstand the text in the first (and even second) instance.
- When reading a text, use the 'good faith principle': as a starting point, always assume the author is a rational person with a coherent world view. If it becomes clear that certain premises are lacking, endeavour to fill these in yourself within the spirit of the author's text. However, be careful not to take this too far by allocating an entirely different viewpoint to the one the author intended.
- Draw a clear distinction between not understanding something and disagreeing with something.
- Try to obtain adequate foreknowledge. If you discover that whilst reading you still don't know enough about the subject matter, try starting with more introductory texts.
- Always keep the context in mind. Not all philosophers, theologians and religious scientists were able or allowed to write down exactly what they actually thought.
- After you have gained a global feel for the text, read both the introduction and the conclusion back to back. This will immediately provide you with a good insight into the content.
- Approach each text with the question: 'What does the author wish to eliminate and where is the author heading?'

2.2 Step-by-step plan

Step 1: Reading for orientation

A text usually comes served up with ample information about the background, content and structure which can be easily absorbed before you start to read and study the content in depth. The getting-to-know-the-text phase is aimed at revealing and retrieving this information. Closely consider the following points.

Article

1. **Title** (and sub title). These usually point at the subject matter and the article's objective.
2. **Author**. Who is this author? What do you know about him or her and about other publications under this name?
3. **Magazine**. A magazine's title and character will already give you a good global impression of what to expect from the article.
4. **Paragraph titles**. If done well, the title combined with the paragraph titles should provide you with a good summary of an article.
5. **Layout**. Are there images, diagrams, tables or text blocks within the text? Is a certain word always used in italics? Are lists included?

6. **Abstract.** This is a short summary of the article, setting out the argument's principal lines.
7. **Bibliography.** An article's bibliography usually provides a good impression of its 'intellectual environment'.
8. **Key words.** Often an author is requested to give a few key words; these also provide a good overview of the content.

Book

1. **Title and sub title.** These usually point at the subject matter and the book's objective. If it concerns a translated work, the original title may provide a different image.
2. **Author.** Who is the author? What do you know about him or her and about other publications under this name? Does the book provide a short bibliographical note on the author? Are there various authors, or has an editor/publisher/reviewer or translator been mentioned?
3. **Year of publication, edition.** Is this a recent book or not? Or is it perhaps a recent reprint (re-edited or not) of an older work?
4. **Publisher.** A book's publisher often indicates the type and quality of book.
5. **Series.** Is the book part of a (range of) series? The series' signature will give you an impression of what you can expect from the book.
6. **Title page.** The five points above can all be found on the book's title page.
7. **Back/flap text.** The back or inner leaf of a book will often provide a précis, short summary or commendation.
8. **Summary.** Some books include a summary. This can usually be found to the rear of the book.
9. **List of contents.** The list of contents provides a concise overview of the content.
10. **Introduction.** The introduction also often offers an overview of the content. Some books have a **preface**, which can also be highly informative.
11. **Index.** Books often contain a subject and/or name index. A good index can give you plenty of information about the people and subjects discussed.
9. **Bibliography.** A book's bibliography usually provides a good impression of its 'intellectual environment'.

Digital texts

1. **Source.** With all digital texts you collect, always satisfy yourself that you are clear about the source and the source's status. This also applies to all online sources you may choose to refer to. A post on *reddit* for example will have quite a different status than an article in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
2. **Reliability.** Only refer to reliable digital texts and online sources. This means sources from reliable authors, sources that refer to other reliable sources or sources which have been referred to by reliable sources. A good indication of whether a text is reliable is to check the bibliography. Is there one? Or does it only cite a limited list of sources? Then the chances are that the text is not especially academic.

Step 2: Global reading

The above points are chiefly about how a text is presented. The text itself of course will offer much more and better information. In the first instance then, have a global read of the text to acquire a 'helicopter' impression of its overall contents and structure. In the process, pay attention to the following elements, as these are important indicators of a text's content and structure.

- **Signal words.** There are a great number of signal words an author can use to organise a text. For example:
 - *for lists*: in the first place, secondly, thirdly, finally, etc.
 - *to demonstrate a development*: first, consequently, then, etc.

- *to add contrast or nuance*: on the other hand, however, besides, in particular, etc.
 - *to set out an argument*: based on, because, as, after all, consequently, therefore, etc.
 - *to instil hierarchy into a text*: (un-) important, as an illustration, otherwise, in passing, etc.
 - *to conclude*: finally, in conclusion, to sum up, etc.
- **Jargon, technical terms.** Which terms or distinctions stand out? Which terms are off-repeated? Are there terms unknown to you? Does the author use his own descriptions or definitions, does he borrow terms from other authors or from other literature? At this stage of reading, it is imperative to obtain a good handle on the meaning of specific technical terms or concepts that you may not be familiar with: **look these up!** (in good and reliable sources). It is handy to make a list of these terms and notions. This will also help you to keep an eye on whether or not the author uses these terms in a consistent manner.
 - **Core sentences.** Not all sentences in a piece have equal weight. Core or key sentences express an important step in the thought process, or will indicate a change or development in the text. Core sentences often (but not always or exclusively) come at the beginning or at the end of a paragraph or sub-paragraph. You can recognise these by the use of signal words. A question or definition can often also function as a core sentence. If you were to map out the core sentences and their mutual relations, you would create a **structure schedule** of the text. You can find an example of a structure schedule in paragraph 2.2.

Step 3: Thorough and comprehensive reading

You read a text in order to digest what is written, to understand what it is about. **Please note: whether you agree with the text is of secondary importance.** To do so you must read and study the text thoroughly. If you do this successfully you will understand the text and will also be able to provide a good summary of the text. So how do you read thoroughly with a focus on comprehension? Here are a few pointers.

- Read the text in its entirety.
- Look up all the words you don't know, whether these concern more general but unknown words in the text's language or philosophical or theological technical terms.
- Use a proper dictionary: a general, philosophical, theological, historical or perhaps even an etymological dictionary. Whichever you choose to use, use a *good* dictionary; there are excellent German, English, French, Latin and Greek dictionaries available, also online. Simply googling a word is not always the smartest option.
- Mark what is/what you find important in the text. Identify the signal words and core sentences as described above. Introduce a colour and sign system for your markings (underlining, question marks, etc).
- Make notes. You can make notes in the text, but it is often better to write these down on a separate sheet. Marks and notes can also be made electronically in a PDF document.
- Find out what the central point of the text is. What is the core idea or thought proposed by the text?
- Find out the means by which the author substantiates this idea or thought.
 - Are the arguments set out well?
 - Or does the author only use rhetorical means?
 - Does he refute objections without substantiations?
 - How do the examples chosen function?
 - How does the author use his sources?

- To discover the central thought or idea and how this is substantiated you need to consistently query the text or consistently consider a number of questions (which boils down to the same thing).
 - what does the text really say, what does the author mean here?
 - what is the author's argument?
 - what does this notion mean and does the author use it in a consistent manner, does it mean exactly the same in all parts of the text?
 - does the author do what he initially promised? A handy way to find this out is to read the introduction and the conclusion together without reading the text in between.
 - Is there a point in the text where you are unable anymore to follow the thread of the argument or discussion? Why has this incomprehension occurred?
- Read a text at least twice.
- With all the information gathered together during your reading of the text (markings, notes, answers to questions) you will now be in a position to give a concise overview of the core concept along with its substantiation. You can set out your understanding of the text in writing in various ways:
 - **extract**: you can make an extract whilst reading, noting the most important sentences in each paragraph and sub-paragraph, closely following the original text. This offers you the facility of quickly familiarising yourself with the text again at a later date. Ensure you note here where these parts are in the original text so that you can quickly find them again.
 - **reading report**: a reading report is also made whilst reading and contains all the notes you made during the reading: notes about the key elements, your questions, possible answers to these, critical remarks, etc. This is a report of your experiences, activities and reactions during the reading. It can provide insight into the way you have approached the text and the manner in which you solved problems when reading.
 - **analysis of the structure**: a structure schedule can clarify what the mutual relationship is between a text's various parts (sentences and/or (sub-) paragraphs). Signal words and core sentences (see above) should feature prominently in a structure schedule and include references to the formal qualities of the text. A structure schedule will contain very little about the content of the text.
 - **summary**: a summary - more or less similar to an extract - traces the main lines of the argument. You produce a summary by fleshing out your structure schedule with detail. This does not necessarily need to mirror the original text's structure and can, in a more elaborate form, include points for discussion, references to other literature, background information, etc. Again, ensure you note here where the various parts are located in the original text to make it easy to locate them again. Also ensure that in your summary you draw a clear distinction between your own remarks and the formulations that originate in the text.
 - **paraphrase**: a paraphrase is a summary of the text in your own words. If you include a paraphrase of a text in your own work, then these are indeed your own words (and therefore not quotes), but you need to refer to the source you have paraphrased.

Step 4: Criticism: reading whilst analysing and interpreting

If you know what a text is about, understand what it says and can give a summary or paraphrase the text, then you are ready for the next stage: reading whilst analysing and interpreting. The objective of analysing and interpreting can also be considered criticism (in

the philological sense of text criticism, i.e. a substantiated assessment of a text). This criticism is often expressed in a paper, presentation or discussion.

2.3 Example of a structure schedule

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signal words are underlined 	
Introduction	I will argue that science cannot function without metaphysics.
Function	Proposition.
Sub-paragraph 2	To me, 'science' is
Function	Definition
Sub-paragraph 3	Science makes many statements about non-visible reality
Function	Argument 1.
Sub-paragraph 4	The meaning of the notions she uses can <u>therefore</u> not be derived from direct experience.
Function	Argument 2 [following on from argument 1].
Sub-paragraph 5	The Higgs-particle <u>for example</u> is not immediately visible.
Function	Elaboration on argument 2.
Sub-paragraph 6	It is <u>however</u> important that we can establish whether or not this particle actually exists.
Function	Argument 3.
Sub-paragraph 7	<u>But</u> this cannot be achieved through direct, empirical experience.
Function	Argument 4 [reformulation of argument 2].
Sub-paragraph 8	<u>After all</u> , empirical determination of whether or not an entity exists can only be achieved by direct observation, not based on indirect observation by instruments.
Function	Argument 5 [support of argument 4]
Sub-paragraph 9	<u>On the other hand</u> , some people are of the opinion that technical measurements (as carried out in CERN) can indeed provide an answer regarding the existence of subatomic particles.
Function	Counter argument 1 [possible refute of argument 5].
Sub-paragraph 10	<u>Nevertheless</u> , this is impossible, <u>because</u> ... etc.
Function	

	Refutation of counter argument 1. <i>You can of course include various counter arguments and refutations.</i>
Sub-paragraph 11 Function	<u>In short</u> , various arguments for and against the proposition can be given. Summary
Sub-paragraph 12 Function	<u>Therefore</u> , I conclude that... Conclusion

2.4 Other languages

Many philosophers, theologians and religious studies students will have written or are currently writing in a language other than your own. If the original work was written in a language of which you have sufficient command, then it is recommended to read these authors in their own language. This way you will pick up more nuance and you don't need to worry about a translation perhaps being too interpretative. With specialist literature, specific terms are also often used in the original language. Further, not all texts have actually been translated. To successfully complete your studies, excellent mastery of English is a prerequisite. If your English is not at the required level, then make sure you start working on it as soon as possible and continue to do so to maintain or surpass the necessary level. For example, you can do this by joining a course at Radboud in'to Languages. You can also watch TV with English subtitles or read in English.

Dictionaries

- A good online German dictionary is LEO's Wörterbücher at <http://www.leo.org>. It has *Flexionstabelle* for nouns, *Adjektivtabelle*, connections with DWDS (Das Wortauskunftssystem zur deutschen Sprache in Geschichte und Gegenwart) for more descriptive/detailed meanings, etymology, *Verwendungsbeispiele*, etc.
- On paper: Duden
- A good online English dictionary is Dictionary.com at <http://www.dictionary.com>. It also has a pronunciation function, more descriptive/detailed meanings, etymology, synonyms, etc.
- A good online Latin dictionary is [A Latin Dictionary](#) by Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, available through Tufts University's *Perseus Digital Library*.
- For ancient Greek, use [A Greek-English Lexicon](#) by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, available through Tufts University's *Perseus Digital Library*.

3. Literature research

Before you can start writing a paper you must first read something you can write about. Before you can read something, you must first identify the appropriate literature which you can write about afterwards. The aim of this step-by-step plan is to streamline the process. This plan assumes you possess RU login details and have the facility to read PDF files.

3.1 Tips

- A general rule of thumb says that the less literature you can find on something, the less quality there usually is! If a book can only be obtained from abroad at an eye-watering price, then think twice about whether it really is worth the trouble and the expense.
- Try to source and use only high quality literature. Good literature can be recognised by its wealth of references. Articles will have preferably been published in a peer reviewed journal. You can find out whether a journal is peer reviewed on the journal's website.
- In the bibliography of an article you consider suitable material, look out for essential passages and other articles that crop up regularly. If the same texts or passages are mentioned often, then there is a good chance that these will be relevant for you. Wikipedia is **not** a suitable scientific source, but you can use the references at the end of the article to help you with your literature research.
- Document everything. Make sure that you note all literature references correctly. If you do this consistently and habitually it will not be much trouble. On the other hand, if you need to get everything regarding your bibliography in order an hour before your submission deadline, then all you're doing is lining up a great deal of grief for yourself. Also keep a clear record of what information comes from which source.

3.2 Step-by-step plan

Step 1: Choosing a subject

If free to do so, selecting a subject can be difficult. There are various ways of choosing a subject if you go through a thorough orientation phase.

- Look at what you have written before. What was good? What did you find interesting? Of the problems you encountered, which of these could you have spent more time on?
- Ask everyone you know for pointers: what subject do they think would suit you?
- Keep an eye on the news: is there something playing out you feel the need to say something about? Keep in mind that it takes time to write a paper: a topic may be a lot less current and/or interesting by the time you have finished.
- Log your ideas in a notebook/app you always keep with you. Good ideas can come at the most unexpected moments.

Step 2: Definition and drafting the research question

Subject chosen; now you have to pin it down. You need to work towards formulating a good research question. Limiting your subject can be done in a variety of ways.

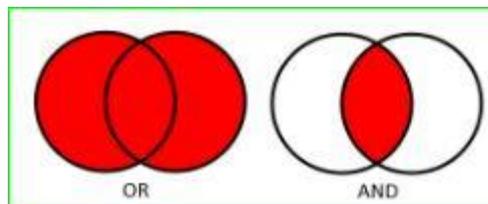
- Brainstorm on a big sheet of paper and in the widest possible context. Link up things in any way connected and write down in a few words what this connection entails.

Ideally you can start defining main and sub questions from here. You can use the key words from your brainstorming to source literature.

- Discuss! Try to explain your idea to people and discuss and describe the inherent problems. Talking about things is an excellent way of arranging your thoughts and ideas.
- Pose questions. What would you like to discover about this subject? Do you want to find arguments for or against a position/theory? Would you like to know something about the history or reception of a certain subject? Try to find a connection between the questions.
- Draw up a main question and various sub questions. The sub questions must be formulated in such a manner that when taken together they provide an irrevocable answer to the main question. If this is not the case, then there is something wrong with the connection between the questions.
- Read relevant literature. Make certain you acquire a good overarching view of what has already been done; no one is asking you to reinvent the wheel! This will also let you find out what is still lacking and *reveal* the gap you can occupy with your paper. In the next step you can read about the best approach to researching the available literature.

Step 3: Sourcing literature

Sourcing literature is something you do throughout the various stages of writing a paper. In the orientation phase you will probably mainly use databases. Start with the key words from your brainstorming and expand this list. Add synonyms, antonyms, abbreviations, language variants and translations to your list. Each search system works slightly different, but often they share the same key principles. All search systems for example differentiate between AND and OR:



- Always look for ways in which to hone down and specify your search. For example if you only wish to look for literature of the past few years, all databanks provide an option to tick a box to reveal only sources from this period.
- Be selective with the search words you use: 'Merleau-Ponty' will deliver fewer results than searching for 'philosopher'.

Databanks

You can search for different types of literature using a databank.

- You will have access to a range of databanks via www.ru.nl/ubn, both at the university and from home.
- On the home page - using **RUQuest** - you can search the university's central library (UBN), as well as the collections of other libraries.

You will find an overview of databanks on <https://libguides.ru.nl/philosophy>; <https://libguides.ru.nl/religiousstudies> ; and <https://libguides.ru.nl/theology> which includes more specialist databanks, however these may be less suitable for the orientation phase.

- www.philpapers.org is a databank geared to philosophy and includes direct links to articles. You will find good tips and related literature at the bottom of the page.
- www.jstor.org is a databank offering myriad sources. You will be automatically logged in while on campus. If you work from home you can reach the website via the UBN site.
- scholar.google.com is a massive academic search engine. There really is a great deal to find here, however there is no guarantee to the quality of the articles.

Shortcut: encyclopaedias

Encyclopaedias offer a range of articles relating a subject's main overviews. This will give you a good impression of a specific debate, which also means there is no need to create a complete outline of the relevant literature yourself. Once you have selected your subject, encyclopaedias provide a good starting point for literature research. Take a look in the bibliographies referred to and track down the relevant sources. **Please note carefully: the references found in these encyclopaedias don't comply with CMS, therefore make certain you don't copy these literally!**

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu>
- Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://www.rep.routledge.com>

Cannot find it anywhere?

If you would like to use a specific article but are unable to locate it via the above options, then email the author. Most authors are connected in some way to the university which mean their contact details can usually be found. In addition, authors often appreciate an interest in their work and will send you the article you are looking for.

3.2 Source reference: Chicago Manual of Style

During your studies you will be required to write a considerable number of papers, accompanied by references, footnotes or endnotes and lists of literature. We use the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) at the FTR faculty. This is an excellent system and can accommodate many different styles. The complete version is available at www.chicagomanualofstyle.org. You will have access to the full information if you visit the site when on campus or arrive via www.ru.nl/ubn. From the next page you will find a number of frequently used examples.

Tips

- Keep track of your references at all times. Ensure you don't end up in a panicked search for these just before a submission date.
- Make sure you follow the examples **exactly**. Even one out of place punctuation mark can make your reference incorrect.
- Use a system consistently. There are two systems: **never** mix the two simultaneously.
- A source reference in the ongoing text or note is written differently than the source reference in the bibliography. Make sure you know the difference.
- Don't forget to include a bibliography. The bibliography must be in alphabetical order, sorted by the family name of the first author. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz therefore must be listed after Immanuel Kant.
- If you use software such as Endnote, Mendeley, Zotero or BibTeX to create the source references, make sure that the details in your library are complete and correct.
- **Don't blindly trust websites or other information telling you how to create references: always check that you have used the proper way of referencing. Correct use is entirely your responsibility.**

Why do it?

- You research in a scientific manner. The scientific process entails the correct presentation of your sources.
- You acknowledge the work of the authors you have used. This is the same whether you use quotes or paraphrases, a summary, etc.
- It makes your research easy to search/find or check.
- It is the proof that you have actually done the research.
- It prevents plagiarism.
- Your sources are apparent in a single overview.
- It demonstrates a scientific approach.
- Source referencing is obligatory at the FTR faculty.

When?

- If you copy a text verbatim, you need both to acknowledge you are quoting and make a reference.
- If you include an idea, image, table, numbers, facts, theories or other information, then a reference will suffice.

When in doubt: *always* make a reference! You will never receive feedback marked "this paper has too many references".

3.2.1 CMS system 1: notes and bibliography

Note	Bibliography
Elements separated by commas, publication information in brackets	Elements separated by commas, publication information not in brackets
Full first name first	First author's family name first
Words such as 'translated', 'edited', etc. are abbreviated	Only nouns are abbreviated
Author, title, publication information	
Titles of larger works, such as books, in italics	
Titles of smaller works, such as articles, between quotation marks	

Examples

After number 1 comes the first entry in full. After number 2 comes a shortened version. You can only use this shortened version if in a previous note you have given the full information of that particular work. After number 3 is the notation as it is used in the bibliography.

Book

One author

1. Christine Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* (London: Routledge, 2010), 49.
2. Daigle, *Sartre*, 50.
3. Daigle, Christine. *Jean-Paul Sartre*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Two to three authors

1. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor, *The Merleau-Ponty reader* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 48.
2. Toadvine and Lawlor, *Merleau-Ponty*, 31-32.
3. Toadvine, Ted, and Leonard Lawlor, *The Merleau-Ponty reader*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

Editor or translator together with the author

In the case of ancient books and authors, the standard numbering rather than the page number of a specific edition is preferred (for example, use Bekker numbers for Aristotle and Stephanus numbers with Plato). This also applies to later authors of whose work detailed standard numbering exists. This preferred variant is indicated in example 1:

1. Aristoteles, *De eerste filosofie: Metaphysica Alpha*, ed. Carlos Steel (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 2002), 983b30-35.
1. Aristoteles, *De eerste filosofie: Metaphysica Alpha*, ed. Carlos Steel (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 2002), 50.
2. Aristoteles, *Metaphysica*, 51.
3. Aristoteles. *De eerste filosofie: Metaphysica Alpha*. Translated, introduced and provided with notes by Carlos Steel. Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 2002.

Chapter or other part of a book

1. James J. Gibson, "The Theory of Affordances," in *Perceiving, acting and knowing*, ed. Robert Shaw and John Bransford (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1977), 70.
2. Gibson, "Affordances," 74-75.
3. Gibson, James J.. "The Theory of Affordances." In *Perceiving, acting and knowing*, reedited by Robert Shaw and John Bransford, 67-82. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1977.

Preface, introduction or similar

1. Alphonse de Waelhens, preface with *La structure du comportement*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2009), v-xv.
2. de Waelhens, preface *Structure*, vi.
3. Waelhens, Alphonse de. Preface with *La structure du comportement*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, v-xv. Introduced by Alphonse de Waelhens. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2009.

Article

Article in a printed magazine

1. Bonnie Kent, "Aquinas and Weakness of Will," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 75 (2007): 81.
2. Kent, "Aquinas," 74-75.
3. Kent, Bonnie. "Aquinas and Weakness of Will." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 75 (2007): 70-91.

Article in an online magazine

1. Leslie Stevenson, "Who's Afraid of Determinism?," *Philosophy* 89 (2014): 444, accessed on 15-11-2016, doi: 10.1017/S0031819113000867.
2. Stevenson, "Determinism," 434.
3. Stevenson, Leslie. "Who's Afraid of Determinism?" *Philosophy* 89 (2014): 431-450. Accessed on 15-11-2016. doi: 10.1017/S0031819113000867.

Online encyclopaedias and dictionaries

1. Lex Newman, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Descartes' Epistemology," last adapted on 6 October, 2014, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/descartes-epistemology>.
2. Newman, "Descartes' Epistemology."
3. Newman, Lex. "Descartes' Epistemology." In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University, 1997-. Article published on 6 October, 2014. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/descartes-epistemology>.

3.2.2 CMS system 2: author and year

	In the text	Reference list
Structure reference	Name, year, page number	Name, year, title, other publication information
Division of various parts	Only a comma between the year and the page number	Divided by full stops, publication information not between brackets
	Between brackets	Family name of the first author first
		Only abbreviate nouns
		Titles of larger works in italics
		Titles of smaller works between quotation marks

After number 1, the reference as it appears in the text is mentioned. This reference is placed before the punctuation. The only exception to this is the hyphen -. After number 2 the reference as it should be in the bibliography is mentioned.

Book

One author

1. (Daigle 2010, 31)
2. Daigle, Christine. 2010. *Jean-Paul Sartre*. London: Routledge.

Two or three authors

1. (Toadvine and Lawlor 2007, 44)
2. Toadvine, Ted and Leonard Lawlor. 2007. *The Merleau-Ponty reader* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Editor or translator together with the author

1. (Aristoteles 2002, 50)
2. Aristoteles. 2002. *De eerste filosofie: Metaphysica Alpha*. Translated, introduced and provided with notes by Carlos Steel. Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij.

Chapter or other part of book

1. (Gibson 1977, 74)
2. Gibson, James J.. 1977. "The Theory of Affordances." In *Perceiving, acting and knowing*, reedited by Robert Shaw and John Bransford, 67-82. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Preface, introduction or similar

1. (de Waelhens 2009, vi)
2. Waelhens, Alphonse de. 2009. Preface with *La structure du comportement*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, v-xv.

Article

Article in a printed magazine

1. (Kent 2007, 81)
2. Kent, Bonnie. 2007. "Aquinas and Weakness of Will." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 75:70-91.

Article in an online magazine

1. (Stevenson 2014, 444)
2. Stevenson, Leslie. 2014. "Who's Afraid of Determinism?." *Philosophy* 89:431-450. Accessed on 15-11-2016. doi: 10.1017/S0031819113000867.

Online encyclopaedias and dictionaries

1. (Newman 2014)
2. Newman, Lex. 2014. "Descartes' Epistemology." In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University, 1997-. Article published on 6 October, 2014.
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/descartes-epistemology>.

Tip: Chicago Manual of Style E-learning module

Have a look at the University Library's e-learning program on the Chicago Manual of Style:
https://libguides.ru.nl/ChicagoManual_eng

3.3 Plagiarism

As a new philosophy, theology or religious studies student, it is vital that you learn how to handle the sources you use 'properly'. If you quote or paraphrase parts of texts or ideas from another person's work and present these as your own, then what you do is called plagiarism. Plagiarism can be considered intellectual theft. In science, plagiarism is considered intolerable behaviour; you need to demonstrate clearly your 'indebtedness' to the original source. Exam committees will take strong action if they encounter plagiarism in any form. You can even be expelled and barred from further study. However, it may not always have been intentional; it may have been the result of inexperience, ignorance, negligence or forgetfulness. Plagiarism can be prevented by handling your sources very carefully and mentioning these wherever required. There is a module on plagiarism you can follow at https://xot.ru.nl/play.php?template_id=203

What is plagiarism?

- copying (passages from) another person's work **verbatim**, without indicating that these are indeed someone else's words and/or without stating the exact location of the passage in the source.
- **paraphrasing** (passages from) another person's work, without indicating that these lines of thought were originally the work of someone else and/or without stating the exact location of these lines of thought in the source.
- copying **ideas** from another person's work without indicating that these are indeed someone else's ideas.

How do you prevent plagiarism?

Plagiarism is very easy to prevent. It is just a matter of a combination of honesty and carefulness. You can prevent it by always:

- only submitting your own work;
- if you create work in collaboration with other students, always mention this explicitly;
- recording your sources if you present or paraphrase another person's opinions, ideas and/or results in such a manner that the reader can find the original;
- using quotation marks if you copy someone else's words (and state the source by recording the author, book/magazine, date and page);
- mentioning the web address (and the date of access) if you use any information found online.

4. Writing

Writing is a vital skill to master for every (prospective) philosopher, theologian or religious studies professional. It is essential to be able to communicate your ideas in a clear, structured and distinct manner. There are many types of texts you may write, including the following four:

<p>Philosophical, theological or religious-scientific essay or paper</p> <p><i>This may contain the following parts:</i></p>	<p>Text on a philosophical, theological or religious-scientific issue, in which a research question is answered. Philosophical and theological issues concern fundamental presuppositions. Religious-scientific issues mainly concern substantive or contextual relations and comparisons.</p>
<p>Argument</p>	<p>A text in which the author adopts a clear stance and delivers arguments in support of this.</p>
<p>Analysis</p>	<p>A text in which a different text is explained and analysed to the finest details. There is room here also for critical notes. Critical notes do <i>not</i> belong in a summary.</p>
<p>Summary</p>	<p>A text explaining the main line of an argument in a different text. The sequence of the original text does not necessarily have to be mirrored. A summary must be clear to someone who has not read the original text.</p>

4.1 Tips for everything you write

- Carefully read what is expected for the assignment.
- Stick to the assignment. Not entirely sure what is expected of you? Then ask your lecturer. Don't fill in any gaps yourself with what you *think* the lecturer may expect from you.
- *Less is more*. Try not to showcase everything you know, limit yourself to the boundaries of the assignment.
- Try to ensure that your text is as clear, succinct and unambiguous as possible. Write fully formed sentences in Dutch/English. Avoid speaking language or literary ambitions: clarity is key. Limit yourself to *one* point per sentence.
- Keep your public in mind. An article which you intend to send to a peer-reviewed journal must be written with a different voice than a summary of Plato's allegory of the Cave.
- Rather than merely posing your viewpoints, record the arguments for them. Your opinion is irrelevant, only your arguments count. Therefore avoid 'discussion killer' statements along the lines of 'Well, that's just my opinion', but rather provide well considered structured arguments for what you think.
- Be meticulous, precise and conscientious with your references. Refer where necessary and ensure you do it often enough. Keep in mind that a bibliography is no more than an elaborate list of references in your text. Therefore don't include sources in your bibliography that are not referenced in your text.
- Take the number of words as a hint. Can you justify everything you want to say within the number of words given? If yes, you are probably on the right track. If no, you are probably trying to say too much or too little.

- You are assessed on what you write, not on what you actually mean. Therefore make sure that your writing is clear and unequivocal.

There are various steps to writing a paper.

4.2 Step-by-step plan

Step 1: Orientation

Before you commence writing you need to know *what* you intend to write about. The answers to the following guiding questions can help.

1. Who are my public?
2. What is the subject of my paper?
3. What is the relevance of the things I write?
4. What form will my paper take?
5. What do I wish to refute and where am I heading?
6. What literature will I use?

1. Who are my public?

It is imperative to anticipate the reader's level of knowledge. Do you need to explain who Aristotle is or not? During your philosophy course, your public will usually be a reader interested in philosophy. Explaining who Descartes is therefore unnecessary, however you do have to set out which definitions you will be using. Your intended public is also the deciding factor for the paper's tone of voice: a piece written for a fellow student is different from a work to be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal.

2. What is the subject of my paper?

You must select a suitable subject for your paper, as well as draft a solid research question. For tips on how to do this, have a look at the 'step-by-step 'Literature research' plan on page 10. A good research question will be focused and cover only a small area. It is better to explain one viewpoint in detail with solid arguments, than to skirt around various viewpoints less thoroughly. Try not to be too ambitious with your research question.

3. What is the relevance of the things I write?

A good research question has a certain philosophical (and/or social) relevance. Your paper will explain why you have chosen a specific research question. You do this by following the existing debate: What are the viewpoints adopted up until this point? What is the hiatus in the discussion? How does your paper address this?

4. What form will my paper take?

You can select various forms for your paper, depending on its objective. Most forms used are exegetical, present an argument or provide historical context. In the first (exegetical) you analyse a (primary) text down to the finest detail, concentrating your efforts on explaining the text. This goes further than creating a simple summary. Your explanation will introduce and refer to other interpretations of the text and will preferably add a new element. In the second (present an argument) you pose arguments from a particular viewpoint. In this case, precisely what is stated in primary sources is of less relevance than with an exegetical paper; your reasoning is much more of significance here. In the last (historical context) the emphasis must be on the larger total, the context and/or the historical backdrop within which a certain text, author or problem is placed.

5. What do I wish to refute and where am I heading?

You can use this question as a guide for every philosophical text. You believe something is not quite right and are seeking an alternative. Be clear about what it is you wish to refute and the direction in which you are heading. You can use the answer to these questions when formulating your research question.

6. What literature will I use?

For tips on how to assemble the appropriate literature, see 'Chapter 3 Literature research' on page 10. Read through the literature in a global manner to obtain an overall feel and idea of the content. You will start studying the literature thoroughly in step 3.

Step 2: Drafting a research question and creating a structure schedule

Whether a paper will be of any value will depend on a well formulated, appropriate research question. It is often difficult to alight on a good phrasing of the question. Ensure the question is not too lengthy so that you can answer it in an academically responsible manner. This means that you can explain and support your answer with reference to sufficient literature. Obviously, a good research question for a paper of 1000 words will be different from one for 10,000 words. Based on the first orientation step, you will already have a fair idea of what you are going to write about. Now you need to hone a question into shape. Answer the following questions:

1. Is the question interesting enough to keep you occupied for the required length of time on the one hand and, on the other, sufficiently challenging to allow you to formulate your own thoughts and reasoning on the subject? You could opt for an 'easy' question, but if this fails to trigger your own interests, then this will certainly be a tedious paper to write.
2. Can the question be answered based on (literature) research?
3. Is the amount of information you must process reasonable? If you need to read three fat volumes of primary text for a paper of just 1000 words, the answer to this will clearly be 'no'.
4. Do you have access to the required sources? Remember that via the University Library's website (www.ru.nl/library) you will have access to a wealth of sources.
5. Does the research question cover sufficient terrain? Or in other words: is your question too wide or, on the other hand, perhaps too specific?

Particularly this last question can often be the source of difficulties. Most research questions start off too wide. Remember the general rule of thumb: it is better to explain *one* argument comprehensively in detail, than skirt around five superficially. In a paper of 1500 words, don't attempt to give *the* answer to the question of whether free will exists or how free will can exist in a determined environment. An impossible task and, anyway, an unnecessary one. What you *can* do is critically compare the opinions of one author with those of another. You could compare for example the compatibilism of Daniel Dennett in a critical manner with the incompatibilism of Derk Pereboom within the context of moral responsibility. It is therefore a good idea to limit your research question by linking it to a certain period, author or work. The question 'What is space and time?' is way too wide. You can limit such a question by siting it for example in the Leibniz-Clarke debate. This corrals the subject to a limited period, two authors and one series of correspondence. The research question could then for example be 'How do the positions of Leibniz and Clarke regarding time and space differ in the *Leibniz-Clarke correspondence*?'. This question would be easy to separate out into three sub-questions:

- 1) What is Leibniz's position on time and space in the *Leibniz-Clarke correspondence*?
- 2) What is Clarke's position on time and space in the *Leibniz-Clarke correspondence*?
- 3) What are the differences and the similarities between Leibniz's and Clarke's positions on time and space in the *Leibniz-Clarke correspondence*?

These sub-questions could be used to create your structure schedule. Only use sub-questions that directly contribute to your paper's objective, i.e. answers the research question. You can clarify the argument structure of the text in a structure schedule. Divide the structure into different sections or parts. After this you can divide a section into sub-paragraphs. When writing you will notice that some sub-paragraphs will again need to be sub-divided into various parts. For every paragraph/part, write down a core sentence and explain what the connections are between the various parts. Is this not possible? Then this is probably a sure sign that you haven't quite thought out your text yet. A structure schedule must at the very least contain a research question and an explanation of how the sub-questions will invariably lead to answering the principal question.

Step 3: Reading

Once you have answered the questions you will be ready for the next phase. This is the phase where you will study in detail the texts you first sourced and so far have only taken a birds eye looked at.

- Study the literature thoroughly. Make structure schedules of the sources you have used. At all times, keep a close track of and note down which information you got from where in accordance with the CMS system you have selected.
- Analyse the relevant passages and look for the logical connections and links. Do this following the 'charitable' principle: always assume as a starting point that the writer has written a logical, coherent narrative. Therefore search and identify the most robust argument you can extract from the text.
- Try to find out if there are passages that contradict your interpretation. If need be, adjust your interpretation.
- Take another critical look at the structure schedule created for your own text. Adjust this if a thorough study of the sources requires such.

Step 4: Writing

If you have carried out your preliminary research in a thorough manner, then the actual writing of the paper should really not be too taxing. You will have a structure schedule formulated with the core sentences and the various connections. Writing the paper is little more than detailing your arguments by following the structure schedule.

- Start by writing the introduction. Consider the introduction to be a template for yourself. Begin with a short introduction of the subject and formulate a clear research question. Then explain how you will answer the research question in the text to follow, so your readers will immediately know what they can expect. You can always rewrite the introduction later. End the introduction with a short overview of your paper's structure.
Keep the introduction short and succinct. If you have a great deal of information regarding the context or for example about current ongoing discussions regarding your research question, then dedicate a separate section to a more detailed explanation.

- For your paper's middle piece or body, explain your argument in steps, following your structure schedule. With every sub-paragraph, ensure that you make clear how this will contribute to answering your research question.
- Learn how to work with writing structure sentences: signposts which ensure your readers know at all times where they are in terms of your arguments' structure.
- In your conclusion, try to indicate *why* exactly the argument in the middle or body of your piece has led to answer the research question you formulated and presented in the introduction.
- Place everything relevant in the running text, meaning avoid footnotes or sub text between brackets to explain things. If it is not that important, just leave it out.
- Try to write in paragraphs of approximately 100 words, consisting of one core sentence and an explanation of this core sentence. If the paragraphs become much longer or are shorter, then this is probably a sign you are putting too much or too little into a single paragraph.
- When writing your conclusion, check that your argument is indeed as watertight as you hoped it would be. If you are unable to formulate a clear answer to the main question, then something is probably still not quite right with your argument.
- Make certain you always write in your own words. This prevents plagiarism and also ensures you remain in charge of your strategy.
- Have you finished the first version? Then check it against the review model, to see where you may have stumbled. Check your text for spelling and grammar; many readers find these kinds of errors irksome. Your feedback provider/assessor also has no wish to be distracted by sloppy work and will rather wish to concentrate on your argument.

Step 5: Feedback

- Let others read your text. Does your intention and what you desire to convey come across clearly? A fresh pair of eyes may see other things. Look for the optimum amount of feedback: too much might derail you, whilst with too little you run the risk of missing your own blind spot. Three people giving feedback will usually suffice. **Don't rely solely on the feedback provided by your lecturer; make sure you remain in control.**
- While your text is critically read by a number of other people, put a bit of distance between yourself and the matter for a short time. This will ensure that when you come to rewrite you will start with a fresh view.
- If you change the text considerably, then request further feedback. A second version can often be worse than the first, as the feedback may not have been well processed into the piece. This can also often happen if the feedback has been a bit woolly. Repeat the feedback process as often as necessary.
- For more information on giving and receiving feedback, see "Chapter 6: Feedback" on page 31.

Step 6: Definitive version

If you have rewritten the text, based on the feedback, and are satisfied with the result, then you can move forward to finalise the text. Check it against the following list:

- Does my text contain all the required elements?
- Are there any language errors in the text?

- Have I included my name and student number (and possibly any other obligatory information)?
- Is my research question and its answer clear? Read the introduction and conclusion, in order to assess this. They have to be attuned to each other.
- Is the lay-out okay?
- Are my references and bibliography without fault?
- Did I score well on the Rubric (or other review model)?

4.3 Language

It is essential to check every written piece for language errors. Spelling and grammar errors impart a sloppy image and can result in lower marks or even an assessment being refused. There are still many students who believe that language rules and good language skills are not important. “Its wot it says that matters innit... wotz the problem, s’long asitz clear?” Actually the problem with this attitude is that often the people not in command of language rules are often the very same people who have a problem getting their message across clearly. It can also result in your text demanding too much interpretation on the reader’s part. Of course your lecturer knows what it should say at a given juncture, but if this is not what it says, no points will be awarded for it. In philosophy nuance is vital, therefore it is essential that you acquire the ability to express yourself fluently, succinctly and appropriately. Errors in spelling and grammar also come across as sloppy and have the decided effect of making you appear well... dim!

4.4 Use of Rubrics

A Rubric is a checking framework or model which specifies what you need to do to attain a certain mark for each part. If your lecturer uses a Rubric, it is important you study this well before commencing the writing process. If you are not quite clear about what is expected of you, then a Rubric can help. Along with the assignment’s instructions, you can ask your lecturer to provide details on how the assignment will be assessed.

There is an example of a Rubric for a written text on the next page. The percentages can be adjusted to give different assignments different weightings for appropriate scoring. The various criteria can also be adjusted. Each assignment can have its own specific Rubric. What never changes is how the scores are treated. A mark will be given for each element. Each partial mark has its own weight and the end or overall mark is arrived at by pooling all marks. This allows lecturers to assess assignments as objectively as possible. It also makes it possible to compensate: if for example you are not so strong on the content, then you can still achieve a decent mark with an excellent structure and style. However, ensure you avoid depending on this sort of compensation and keep working on your weaker points. A Rubric used with feedback will point you directly towards elements that require attention.

Feature	Excellent (10)	Good (8)	Sufficient (6)	Insufficient (4)	Poor (2)
General structure 25 %	<p><i>The introduction:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introduces the subject in an informative, attractive manner. - contains a clear phrasing of the question. - describes the structure of the text. - clearly indicates the relevance of the research question <p><i>The middle or body piece:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - presents a clear structure to the argument which connects question and conclusion. <p><i>The conclusion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - summarises what went on before. - offers a clear answer to the research question. 	<p><i>The introduction:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introduces the subject. - contains a clear phrasing of the question. - describes the structure of the text. - indicates the relevance of the research question <p><i>The middle or body piece:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - presents a structure to the argument which connects question and conclusion. <p><i>The conclusion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - offers a clear answer to the research question. 	<p><i>The introduction:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introduces the subject. - contains a clear phrasing of the question. - indicates the relevance of the research question <p><i>The middle or body piece:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - does not present a clear structure to the argument. <p><i>The conclusion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - offers an answer to the research question. 	<p><i>The introduction:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - does not contain a clear phrasing of the question. - does not indicate the relevance of the research question very clearly <p><i>The middle or body piece:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has little structure. <p><i>The conclusion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - gives an unclear answer to the research question - the conclusion does not quite follow from the middle piece 	<p><i>The introduction:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - does not contain a clear phrasing of the question - does not indicate the relevance of the research question <p><i>The middle or body piece:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has no structure <p><i>The conclusion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - does not give an answer to the research question - the conclusion does not at all follow from the middle piece
Structure of paragraphs and sub-paragraph 25%	<p><i>Paragraph level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - appropriately set out in paragraphs with relevant headings. - clear introduction and rounding off of paragraphs. <p><i>Sub-paragraph level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - single thought per sub-paragraph. - each sub-paragraph has a core sentence. - connecting sentences or transition phrases between sub-paragraphs. - systematic use of signal words. 	<p><i>Paragraph level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - appropriately set out in paragraphs with relevant headings. - introductory sentences at the beginning of the paragraphs. <p><i>Sub-paragraph level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - single thought per sub-paragraph. - most sub-paragraphs have a core sentence. - regular use of connecting sentences or transition phrases and signal words. 	<p><i>Paragraph level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - appropriately set out in paragraphs with headings. <p><i>Sub-paragraph level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - single thought per sub-paragraph. - most sub-paragraphs have a core sentence. - sufficient use of connecting sentences or transition phrases and signal words. 	<p><i>Paragraph level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - paragraphs without headings - paragraphs not appropriately set out <p><i>Sub-paragraph level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - various thoughts per sub-paragraph - sub-paragraphs mostly without a core sentence - incidental use of connecting sentences or transition phrases and signal words 	<p><i>Paragraph level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no paragraphs. <p><i>Sub-paragraph level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no or badly structured sub-paragraphs. - no connecting sentences or transition phrases and signal words.
Content, distance and own voice 25 %	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The visions and ideas of the authors discussed are correctly <i>and</i> appropriately presented (not too much, not too little) - There is critical distance regarding the authors discussed. - The author has a clearly discernable own voice. - No contradictions - Terms are always used consistently - Terms are clearly and distinctly explained - There are good and convincing arguments for each step in the reasoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The visions and ideas of the authors discussed are correctly <i>and</i> appropriately presented - There is distance regarding the authors discussed. - The author has a discernable own voice. - A few contradictions - Terms are used consistently - The inconsistencies do not lead to confusion - Terms are clearly explained - There are good arguments for most steps in the reasoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The visions and ideas of the authors discussed are more or less correctly <i>and</i> appropriately presented. - There is some distance. - The author has a detectable own voice. - Few contradictions - Terms are usually used consistently - The inconsistencies sometimes lead to confusion - Terms are usually clearly explained - There are arguments for most steps in the reasoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The visions and ideas of the authors discussed are not correctly or appropriately presented. - There is insufficient distance. - The author has a hardly discernable own voice. - Some contradictions - Terms are used inconsistently or unclearly - Terms are unclear - There are insufficient arguments for the steps in the reasoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The visions and ideas of the authors discussed are not <i>correctly</i> and <i>not</i> <i>appropriately</i> presented. - There is no distance. - The author has no discernable own voice. - Many contradictions - Terms are not used consistently. - Terms have not been defined - There are no arguments for the steps in the reasoning

Style 25 %	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear, well formulated sentences - Sentences have been written in a compact, lucid manner - Style appropriate to the target group - Quotes have been well embedded in the text - Good use of secondary literature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sentences are nearly always well formulated. - Sentences have nearly always been written in a compact, succinct manner - Style appropriate to the target group - Quotes have been reasonably well embedded - Good use of secondary literature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sentences are sometimes not clearly formulated - Sentences have sometimes not been written in a compact, lucid manner - Style reasonably appropriate to the target group - Quotes have been sufficiently embedded - Sufficient use of secondary literature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sentences are often not clearly formulated - Sentences have often not been written in a compact, lucid manner - Style inappropriate to the target group - Quotes have been insufficiently embedded - Limited use of secondary literature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sentences are usually not clearly formulated - Sentences have usually not been written in a compact, lucid manner - Style inappropriate to the target group - Quotes have not been embedded - No use of secondary literature
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5. Oral skills

When studying philosophy, theology or religious studies, and certainly also throughout the rest of your life and career, excellent oral skills will be of great value to you. Not only will it yield excellent assessments, it also enables you to hold talks in front of a wider audience or deliver a presentation at work. Many of the tips apply to the various different parts of oral skills. When expressing yourself orally, you will be endeavouring to get a specific point across. This is comparable to writing a scientific paper. However, there are clear differences between writing and speaking. When speaking, it is vital that you are able to adjust swiftly to new, unforeseen situations. You must be able to grab *and* maintain your public's attention.

5.1 Tips

When delivering a presentation:

- know the make-up of your public
 - know who your listeners are;
 - approximately how many there are;
 - what the level of their prior knowledge is;
 - and what their expectations are.
- be prepared
 - have an overview of your entire story;
 - start from a serene, calm position;
 - make certain to grasp your audience's attention immediately and try to keep them with you.
- know what you wish to express
 - place your narrative within a framework (with context, background, ...);
 - have a key position supported by arguments, examples;
 - be confident about what you say (or at least give the impression you are).
- speak clearly, calmly, with the correct intonation and appropriate volume
- maintain a good posture
 - stand up straight;
 - be visible to everyone;
 - ensure you don't stand in the way of (or behind) your visual materials;
 - make sufficient supporting gestures;
 - Do you not know what to do with your hands? Then try to arrange a lectern, to have something to hold on to.

- seek eye contact with various people in the audience (don't focus on only one person).
 - Do you find this scary? Then look at your public's foreheads.
- be open to questions or remarks from the audience
 - make sure you can react appropriately;
 - admit it if you don't know something. However, this should not happen too often, if it does you probably don't know enough about your subject.
- If you use a slide presentation
 - Ensure your slides don't contain too much text;
 - The slides must support what you say in a structured manner - and not distract from what you are saying;
 - Slides must be correct and clear in colour, layout and use of text;
 - If you want input from your audience, you can for example use Mentimeter (www.menti.com).

As a speaker, always keep a clear eye on the following:

- the time; make sure you don't exceed the available time (place a watch in front of you on the table);
- technical facilities:
 - ensure you know how to use the various technical facilities;
 - also ensure that your presentation is ready to roll, so that you don't for example need to open up your email first while everyone is watching.
- unexpected circumstances: improvise!
- your appearance: holding a presentation unwashed and in soiled clothes gives an entirely different impression than when clean cut and well dressed. When selecting clothes, take the situation into account.

More information about delivering a presentation

- Amy Cuddy on the importance of body language: various videos on YouTube.

5.2 Step-by-step plan

Step 1: Preparation

- Know your subject. Be aware of the various issues and problems. Research possibly different and alternative viewpoints.
- Keep your eye on the news: it is always good to link up your viewpoint with a current situation.
- Prepare your arguments thoroughly. Make certain you are entirely clear about the structure of your arguments.
- Don't write out your presentation verbatim.
- Why? Because at any moment during a presentation if you get a bit lost, it will be a lot more difficult to pick up the thread of your story. If you know and have the structure in your head, it is usually no problem to continue.
- Run over your presentation a few times. Have someone watch and give you feedback, or record yourself on video.

Step 2: The presentation

- Try to remain calm. Breathing exercises can help with this.

- Construct your narrative with a well laid out storyline. Announce the number of points you intend to make and for every point, mention whether this is the first, the second, etc.
- Don't roll out too many arguments; it is often better to work *one* argument really well than propose five half-baked ones.
- Use of the **AEE** method: first present your **A**rgument, followed by an **E**xplanation and finally reinforced with an **E**xample.
- Let there be no doubt about your point of view. Start your presentation by clearly stating whether you're for or against.

5.3 Other forms of oral skills

As well as a presentation, there are other ways you can demonstrate your oral skills. Below we discuss the debate, the discussion and the Socratic conversation.

Discussion

A discussion is the most general form of oral skill. In a discussion, a particular point of contention lies on the table, which the participants proceed to talk about. The participants have various views. Discussions can have a range of objectives. A distinction can be drawn for example between viewpoint-shaping or problem-solving discussions. In philosophy, most discussions are viewpoint-shaping. The aim of such a discussion is to explain, sharpen and if necessary to adjust your viewpoint, as well as understand your opponent's viewpoint. In problem-solving discussions, a problem needs to be solved. During any discussion, maintain a clear view on the following:

- Be open to other people's viewpoint. Listen to their reasoning and arguments. You may be convinced by them!
- Always respect your discussion partners. Never descend into personal attack (*ad hominem*). Among other things, this means that you listen to your discussion partners and give them the space to finish. This does not mean that you cannot attack your discussion partners' ideas. However, always do this with arguments.
- Remain matter-of-fact; stick to your arguments and don't be tempted to add unnecessary shrill, emotional statements. This does of course not mean that you cannot use or must avoid introducing personal experience.
- Acknowledge mistakes. Not knowing something or making an error in your reasoning/logic is not a major problem. By admitting it, you can all jointly move on.
- Take as a starting point that you and your discussion partners share the same destination: i.e. learning more about the subject at hand. You are not opponents, but jointly seek to learn more. The fact that your viewpoints are not the same is a good thing, as this will allow you to illuminate various aspects of the subject.
- Don't digress, but stay on the rails with the subject.
- Avoid 'discussion killer' statements such as 'Well, that's just what I think' or 'Everyone is entitled to his own opinion'. Discussion from this point forward is simply no longer possible as you will have no joint base from which to continue.
- Try to reach agreement on definitions. Often it may *appear* the discussion is about *one* subject, but participants can have such wide ranging definitions that in reality they can often be talking about different subjects, literally talking at cross purposes.
- Explain your line of thinking in full; don't simply come up with the conclusion, but clearly set out how you arrived at it.

Debate

A debate is actually a discussion which follows clear cut rules. A debate is always about a particular matter and can take various forms. The best known are the American Parliamentary debate, the British Parliamentary debate and the 'Lower House' debate. In all instances there are three parties: those *for* the proposed position, those *against* and the group still to be convinced either way. Participants for or against stick to their viewpoints and try to convince the third group. Usually turns for speaking are set in advance, along with strict time limits for each. A debate demands different skills than holding an oral presentation.

- Make sure you are fully informed about the content and about the various possible interpretations of the proposal. The supporters usually get to interpret the proposal.
- Listen to your opponent. Summarise what the other party has said so you can then counter it.
- Always stick to the content: never make it personal and don't offer lame excuses for your own actions.
- Make notes when your opponent is talking to help you remember what has been said.
- Confer with your team: you have to defend a *united* viewpoint! Together, analyse what the best and what the lesser arguments are and why. Have someone record this process.
- Determine which arguments will be used at which point in the debate. Deliver the strongest points either at the beginning or at the end of your turn. Your audience will remember these better.
- Know your opponent thoroughly.
- Consider closely beforehand what the opposition might say. Ensure you have a strong counter point prepared for every argument you can think of in the other party's viewpoint.

Socratic conversation

A Socratic conversation is a form of discussion in which the participants are also required to adhere to certain rules. It is important to realise that the Socrates from Plato's dialogues would hardly be a good discussion leader in a Socratic conversation, as he talks the most and is the principal contributor to the content. The discussion leader in a Socratic conversation needs to be more remote, whilst endeavouring to ease out ideas from the participants. A Socratic conversation always starts with a question. Together with the other participants you try to reach an answer in a systematic manner. Your own experience will also play a big role in a Socratic conversation: it is your starting point. In a Socratic conversation all participants are of course on the same side pulling in the same direction: everyone is seeking to get closer to an answer to the question.

A Socratic conversation runs along a set pattern:

1. Formulation of the question
2. Selecting an example of an experience
3. Formulating the core statement
4. Looking for justification of the core statement by setting out criteria
5. Testing the justification

In practice, the last three steps are difficult to keep apart. Therein lies an imperative role for the discussion leader.

To arrive at a successful conclusion in a Socratic conversation everyone needs to abide by a number of rules.

- Only refer to personal experiences, not to authorities. What Plato or Kant once said has no place in a Socratic conversation.
- Don't use hypothetical situations or thought experiments.

- Try to reach a consensus. This does not mean that you will actually achieve one.
- Communicate clearly. Check that you understand your fellow discussion partners by summarising what they have just said and then react to this. Don't be afraid to say you don't understand something.
- Have the discussion leader write down the most important statements. This will force the participants to be specific in their formulation. It also slows the process down a little allowing everyone to keep up with the conversation, whilst at the same time creating an overview.

Part of a Socratic conversation is a reflection on how it is proceeding as it develops. This reflection is better known as a meta conversation. The meta conversation considers how the conversation is progressing. Does everyone get an opportunity to speak? Is the discussion leader reacting appropriately? Other matters concerning the process can also be discussed in a meta conversation. Following on from this, a strategy conversation may take place. If participants cannot agree but still require a decision, then agreements regarding the procedure can be made in a strategy conversation. Both the meta conversation and the strategy conversation can be requested at any given point by (one of) the participants. The meta conversation will in principle be led by someone other than the discussion leader.

5.4 Checking framework for a presentation

1. Structure, format and arguments	Insuff.	Suff.	Good
The speaker explains in the introduction what the presentation will be about and how it will be set out.			
The speaker sticks to the main line and limits digressions.			
The presentation is well constructed around arguments and viewpoints are adequately substantiated.			
The presentation demonstrates sufficient and appropriate knowledge of the subject.			
The literature references are relevant to the narrative. (If no references are made to any literature, the mark here may be 'insufficient' for this part)			
The conclusion is substantiated and links back to the initial question.			
Explanation:			
2. External structure and style			
The speaker sticks to the previously agreed length of the presentation (8-12 minutes)			
The speaker focuses on the public and speaks in an audible and clear manner.			
The speaker uses fitting language.			
The speaker strikes a self-assured pose.			
The speaker makes eye contact with the public.			
The speaker uses the equipment in a self-assured and functional manner.			
The speaker offers opportunity for questions, which are addressed businesslike and are succinctly handled.			
Explanation:			
Grade:			

6. Feedback

Giving, receiving and processing feedback is an important skill you will need to learn during your course. It is vital to realise that feedback in the academic context always addresses the performance: the paper you have written or the presentation you gave. Feedback is never about you as a person. Feedback can be both positive and negative. The person giving feedback also dispenses valuable information by expressing what the person receiving the feedback has done well.

6.1 Giving feedback

- Ensure that the feedback you give is always constructive. You do this by being concrete, clear and by sticking to the facts. If your feedback is negative, then always include a tip for improvement. Don't say "I didn't understand a word of your text", but say "Try writing a clear introduction in which you explain the research question and how you intend to answer this".
- Try to couch your feedback in a friendly manner. Of course you have to be honest, but you can do this in a respectful way.
- Do not only give bad feedback. Although it is easier to focus on what is not right, it is also vital to point out what went well. This ensures that the feedback is better received and makes the person receiving the feedback more aware of his or her qualities. In other words: give the person tips *and* express what went fine.
- Only give feedback on the presentation and not on the person.
- Think about your own work in view of the product you have just given feedback on: was there anything in there you can use to improve your own paper?

6.2 Receiving feedback

- Carefully listen to or read the feedback you receive. Make sure you understand the feedback and ask for clarification if something is unclear.
- Take a critical look at the feedback you have received. Do not blindly follow or immediately act upon the feedback given, but remain in charge of your text.
- Don't react defensively to the feedback by starting up a discussion with the feedback giver. Apparently your written text was not clear enough: make sure that the next version is.
- Don't take feedback personally. Feedback is not an attack on your person, but a means of helping you improve your text. Be grateful for the opportunity, even if some feedback is not always pleasant to hear.
- Try not to be overwhelmed if you receive a great deal of feedback. Often this feedback will be aimed at different levels. Feedback on your spelling is of a different order than feedback on your structure.
- Always start with processing the overarching, fundamental feedback. You may then find that some specific feedback no longer applies.