

## HOW TO WRITE A CRAP PHILOSOPHY ESSAY:

### A BRIEF GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

**James Lenman**  
(Sheffield University)

Always begin your essay along these lines: “Since the very dawn of time the problem of free will has been considered by many of the greatest and deepest thinkers in history.”

Always end your essay along these lines: “So it can be seen from the above arguments that there are many different points of view about the free will problem.”

Whenever in any doubt as to what to say about X, say, apropos of nothing in particular and without explanation, that X is extremely subjective.

When that gets boring, try saying that X is all very relative. Never say what it is relative to.

Use language with as little precision as possible. Engage heavily in malapropism and category mistakes. Refer to claims as “arguments” and to arguments as “claims”. Frequently describe sentences as “valid” and arguments as “true”. Use the word “logical” to mean plausible or true. Use “infer” when you mean “imply”. Never use the expression “begging the question” with its correct meaning but use it incorrectly as often as possible.

“Argument” is perhaps the most important word in philosophy. So why not impress the marker by spelling it with two “e”s?

Get into the habit of inserting words like “so” and “therefore” between sentences that are entirely irrelevant to one another. This, all by itself, will bring into being a mutual relevance that previously did not exist.

Be careful always assiduously to avoid answering the question asked. There are so many other more interesting things for you to discuss.

Put “quotation marks” round words “entirely” at random.

Be completely defeated by apostrophes. Systematically confuse “its” and “it’s”.

At some point in every essay, treat the marker to a brief Dr McCoy style sermon about the dangers of being too “logical” when trying to think about the existence of God/moral obligation/free will/the theory of knowledge/any subject matter whatever. To reinforce the point it always helps to point out how once again how very subjective the subject matter in question is.

Avoid clarity at all costs. Remember: nothing that is clear can possibly be really deep. If as a result the marker gives you a third that just shows that your wisdom is going straight over his/her head.

(*Don't*, whatever you do, heed the words of Peter Medawar: “No one who has something original or important to say will willingly run the risk of being misunderstood; people who write obscurely are either unskilled in writing or up to mischief.” – What a *silly* man!)

Remember. Paragraphs are for sissies. So are headings.

Only little people use examples. Avoid them strenuously. If you must insist on using some, be sure to do so with studied irrelevance.