

Philosophy

2011 Assessment Report



Government
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PHILOSOPHY

2011 ASSESSMENT REPORT

OVERVIEW

Assessment reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

SCHOOL-BASED ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Argument Analysis

Generally students make suitably perceptive comments about arguments when they relate to topics of general interest as presented in newspaper articles, films, documentaries, letters to the editor, and other forms of the media. Better responses come from the analysis of arguments presented by philosophers on philosophical issues in books, magazines, or journals, or on the Web. One example is the analysis of Peter Singer's argument for euthanasia in *Practical Ethics*. However, the emphasis needs to be on the analysis of the actual argument or arguments, not a discussion of the issue.

For the more successful argument analysis, one of the assessments generally focussed on a general interest topic, while the other was a philosophical issue. In this way students were given the opportunity to demonstrate insightful *reasoning and argument* and perceptive *critical analysis* in a range of contexts.

As well, in order to demonstrate evidence that clearly meets the higher levels of the *critical analysis* assessment design criteria, the more successful students were able to demonstrate the use of certain forms of argument terminology effectively and with justification. These include: standard argument form, the different types of premises, inductive and deductive arguments, valid and invalid, sound, cogent, circular and equivocation. Some reference to logical fallacies may also be relevant in this component.

Moderators were pleased to note the range of presentation methods used in class, in particular PowerPoint and DVD recordings. PowerPoint presentations can be quite useful because the dot-point format encourages simplicity in analysing standard argument form and the stating of premises.

Assessment Type 2: Issues Analysis

Moderators were impressed by the range of philosophical issues considered by students and the breadth and depth of analysis demonstrated. The subject outline certainly provides scope for this kind of broad exploration of the key areas.

With this in mind, assessment tasks that invited students to analyse an issue from the point of view of a number of different philosophers or positions elicited the stronger responses. This allowed students to demonstrate evidence of the *knowledge and understanding* assessment design criteria more effectively. In order to allow students to demonstrate *the reasoning and argument* assessment design criteria, particularly RA3; “Coherent and convincing formulation and defence of positions taken”, successful assessment tasks required students to take and defend a position of their own having analysed the issue from a consideration of the positions of a number of philosophers.

Some assessment tasks viewed by moderators were limiting and did not explicitly address the relevant assessment design criteria. A task which solely asks students to give a descriptive account of one philosopher’s position, without the requirement to compare the position with other philosophers’ positions, nor to formulate and defend the student’s own position, can not elicit student evidence at the higher levels.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 3: Issues Study

As in previous years, the more successful students continue to follow a straightforward structure.

The topic is generally framed as a question. This gives students a direction for the study whereby they can present an answer to the question which incorporates a range of opposing or different positions. Students can then analyse the arguments for and against each position, and then conclude with their own position, reached as a result of the analysis.

The more specific the question the more successful is the analysis. Rather than ‘Does God exist?’ the question could be ‘How successful are the arguments for the existence of God?’ Or, instead of ‘How should we live?’ it is preferable to ask ‘Which ethical system is the best to follow in our lives?’

Better studies also showed a greater depth and breadth of analysis by referring to the arguments of actual philosophers rather than just a broad position, for example Jean-Paul Sartre as opposed to existentialism.

Some students put themselves at a disadvantage from the start by not following the specifications in the subject outline. Students are expected to choose a topic from the three key areas: ethics, epistemology or metaphysics. This excludes aesthetics, unless the student can clearly demonstrate that the topic is being considered from the point of view of epistemology.

Similarly, the biography of one philosopher and the analysis of his/her ideas is not a suitable topic for the issues study. The subject outline clearly requires that students ‘examine a philosophical *issue*’ and ‘what positions *various philosophers* hold.’

Students would do well to use the focus questions in the subject outline as a starting point before deciding on the issue they wish to undertake in the study.

Chief Assessor
Philosophy