
Guidelines for Short and Long Theoretical Papers

1. Select your own topic or write on (or modify). Err on the side of being too narrow rather than too broad so that you can “sink your teeth” into the topic rather than stay on the surface.
2. At the outset get as clear as you can on exactly what issue you are treating, what problem you are trying to solve, what question you seek to answer, or what thesis you are defending (in contrast to the issues you are not treating, etc.). Clarify key and technical terms.
3. Do we want your opinions? Yes, but you must clarify and argue for them and for your analyses and evaluations of the views of others.
4. Anticipate and try your best to answer at least one objection to your views or counter arguments to your argument. This requirement is crucial and is often the difference of a letter grade.
5. These papers are “thought” papers rather than “research” papers. For short papers, you will want to focus on some issue in the readings for the concurrent or adjacent class sessions. Although you may want to read additional materials for the short papers, the readings give you sufficient material to analyze and evaluate. For the long papers, your reading may but need not take you beyond the class assignments.
6. If and when you depend on or borrow the arguments, views, or data or someone else, indicate so in a footnote or endnote. If you use secondary sources, even “expert” ones, don’t assume they are correct. Don’t commit the fallacy of “appeal to authority”. Even experts can be wrong and/or have bad arguments. Think for yourself. Plagiarism, like other forms of cheating, will result in an F in the class.
7. Your papers should be double-spaced with 1” margins and use a 12 point font.
8. Your grade will be lowered at least ½ letter grade if your spelling (including typos), grammar, sentence structure, etc., is judged to be sub-standard. Non-native speakers should have a native speaker check their paper before you hand it in.
9. Late papers will not be accepted (with the exception of a death in the family).