# Philosophy Subject Assessment Advice

## Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the previous year’s assessment cycle, gives 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, and the quality of student performance.

Teachers should refer to the subject outline for specifications on content and learning requirements, and to the subject operational information for operational matters and key dates.

# School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Argument Analysis

Students apply their knowledge of reasoning and argument in identifying and analysing the arguments of others. They provide evidence and reasons to support or refute counter arguments. For this assessment type, students provide evidence of their learning primarily in relation to the following assessment design criteria:

* + reasoning and argument
	+ critical analysis
	+ communication

The more successful responses commonly:

* discussed the contemporary issue investigated along with an evaluation of the group processes including group life and group roles
* made suitably perceptive comments about arguments when they related to topics of general interest as presented in newspaper articles, films, documentaries, letters to the editor, and other forms of the media (first assessment task)
* analysed arguments presented by philosophers on philosophical issues in books, magazines, journals or on the web (second assessment task)
* used certain forms of argument terminology effectively and with justification. These included: 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 were relevant, where appropriate
* used PowerPoint or similar presentations as the dot point format encouraged clarity and logical flow when analysing standard argument form and the stating of premises.

The less successful responses commonly:

* discussed issues rather than analysed actual arguments.

Assessment Type 2: Issues Analysis

Students undertake three issues analysis assessments, one for each of the key areas of ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics. Students identify:

* + why the chosen issue is a philosophical issue
	+ different responses to the philosophical issue
	+ what position they will take in response to the philosophical issue
	+ a justifiable defence for the position they have taken
	+ how they will communicate this position to others.

For this assessment type, students provide evidence of their learning primarily in relation to the following assessment design criteria:

* + knowledge and understanding
	+ reasoning and argument
	+ communication

The more successful responses commonly:

* demonstrated depth and breadth of analysis
* analysed issues from the point of view of a number of different philosophers or positions. This allowed students to demonstrate evidence of their Knowledge and Understanding more effectively
* demonstrated evidence of their learning in the Reasoning and Argument criterion, particularly “Coherent and convincing formulation and defence of positions taken”, by taking and defending a position of their own, as a consequence of consideration and analysis of the issue from the positions of a number of philosophers.

The less successful responses commonly:

* gave a descriptive account of one philosopher’s position, without comparing the position with other philosophers’ positions
* did not formulate and defend the student’s own position.

# External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Issues Study

Students undertake one issues study.

They examine a philosophical issue from any of the key areas, choosing the issue in negotiation with their teacher. Students consider the following questions:

* + why is it a philosophical issue?
	+ what positions do various philosophers hold on the issue?
	+ what are the philosophers’ reasons for holding these positions?
	+ what objections or counter examples are relevant to these positions?
	+ what is the student’s own position, and why?

For this assessment type, students provide evidence of their learning in relation to the following assessment design criteria:

* + knowledge and understanding
	+ reasoning and argument
	+ critical analysis
	+ communication

The more successful responses commonly:

* made sure that the topic question allowed the student to formulate his or her own view. E.g., Compare A and B doesn’t work as well as To what extent is A better than B
* ensured that the topic question gave scope for the student to explain and analyse a number of philosophical positions and the arguments for and against those positions
* made sure that the topic question provided opportunities for critical analysis of strengths and weaknesses of philosophical assumptions, positions and arguments
* ensured that their topic came from one of the three topic areas of ethics, epistemology or metaphysics, and were not political or aesthetic philosophy topics
* provided nuanced answers to questions which asked “To what extent…”
* included a wide range of philosophical positions to demonstrate Knowledge and Understanding
* clearly expressed the reasons and arguments for these positions
* demonstrated depth and breadth of analysis by referring to the arguments of specific philosophers rather than just broad positions. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre’s arguments rather than simply existentialism
* clearly presented and defended the student’s own position on the question
* discussed both strengths and weaknesses of arguments to demonstrate successful Critical Analysis
* referenced appropriately and presented a bibliography accurately and correctly.

The less successful responses commonly:

* had a general topic rather than a specific question
* were an investigation into a particular philosopher rather than a probing study of a philosophical issue
* were an attempt to define a branch of philosophy rather than a study of a philosophical issue
* did not present and defend the student’s own position on a question
* used rhetorical questions
* had a chatty or informal writing style which limited opportunities to express sophisticated reasoning, argument and critical analysis
* gave irrelevant biographical detail and philosophers’ achievements and writings
* presented a sociological, economic or psychological study and/or approach rather than a philosophical study
* did not closely adhere to the requirements of the assessment type in the subject outline.