2021 Philosophy Subject Assessment Advice

Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the 2021 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 (25%)

Students complete two Argument Analysis tasks. Each task is to consider a different type of text. 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.

The more successful responses commonly:

* offered brief, salient context for the argument while avoiding prolonged preamble
* defined the argument early in the response, using correct philosophical terminology
* analysed the argument methodically, combining understanding of formal elements, such as the use of standard form, with a broader discussion of the student’s findings regarding the nature and veracity of premises and conclusions
* selected texts from popular media, per syllabus, containing identifiable arguments
* showed how, in response to audio-visual media, textual elements suggested as examples in the syllabus comprise part of the argument. For example, symbolism, sound, images, irony, or analogy
* were based on the student’s original critical thinking, rather than tertiary analysis of others’ views of the chosen text
* explained esoteric terminology or concepts in the student’s own words
* followed one referencing convention consistently
* provided a comprehensive and accurate bibliography.

The less successful responses commonly:

* neglected to specifically define or address an argument within the text
* provided a recount of narrative either as a preamble or throughout the response
* were eclectic rather than methodically organised, making the student’s analysis difficult to follow
* overlooked one or more assessment features, or focussed on irrelevant assessment design criteria for this assessment type
* relied on critics' analysis of famous philosophical arguments from secondary sources
* focused largely on technical explanation of argument types (i.e. deductive, inductive) unconnected to the argument in question
* used a text as a starting point to discuss a broad philosophical issue from one of the key areas rather than defining and analysing an argument
* analysed narrative elements without relating them to the argument. For example symbolism, sound, images, irony, or analogy.

Assessment Type 2: Issues Analysis (45%)

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

The more successful responses commonly:

* demonstrated deep knowledge of the sources
* demonstrated originality of thought
* clearly defined the philosophical issue or question and strictly adhered to this in the subsequent discussion
* explained esoteric terminology or concepts in the student’s own words
* briefly contextualised the philosophers they referenced, without incorporating lengthy, extraneous biographical material
* were sufficiently conversant with philosophers’ positions to discuss them primarily in their own words
* incorporated and acknowledged quotations judiciously to support student’s argument
* Included specific discussion of philosophers’ reasoning
* assumed and defended a philosophical position, which followed logically from their interrogation of the issue
* used examples to illustrate complex concepts
* acknowledged quotations and paraphrasing, using accurate, consistent citation
* included a comprehensive bibliography.

The less successful responses commonly:

* did not specifically define an issue or question
* broadly discussed textual material
* did not format task in a structured way, making argument difficult to follow
* focused on addressing specific features in Knowledge and Understanding assessment design criteria at the expense of other specific features
* mostly consisted of cut and pasted materials from other sources
* Included only one philosopher’s perspective
* were poorly edited, misspelling names and terminology
* did not appropriately acknowledge sources by including citations or a bibliography.

External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Issues Study (30%)

Students undertake one issues study in negotiation with their teacher, choosing a philosophical issue of interest from any of the three key areas. It is to be presented in written form, but is not limited to an essay format: it could include dialogue or another genre.

The more successful responses commonly:

* created focused questions relating to a specific philosophical issue which enabled them to come to their own conclusion
* chose a topic from one of the three key areas: Ethics, Metaphysics and Epistemology
* clearly explained the question, relating it to a particular branch of philosophy
* focused their response on the question, clearly presenting and defending their own position in response to the question
* discussed the question in a perceptive manner and with insight, showing a high level of understanding of the topic and the arguments
* explained a range of relevant philosophical positions relevant to the question, showing a high level of understanding of the reasons and arguments used by philosophers on those issues and positions
* provided a detailed and perceptive critical analysis of each philosophical position, assumption and argument presented
* wove together the discussion of a range of philosophical positions with their response to the question
* appropriately acknowledged sources by including an accurate bibliography and correctly cited quotes and ideas.

The less successful responses commonly:

* chose a broad topic area rather than articulating area of study as a focussed question
* chose topics which were too complex for them
* chose a topic from an area other than the three key areas: Ethics, Metaphysics and Epistemology, such as Aesthetics
* provided a superficial discussion of many different philosophical views
* provided a little or no analysis of philosophical positions, assumptions and/or arguments
* included a history of philosophy
* were unable to reach a conclusion in response to their question
* were not able to provide a defence for their position
* used citations inaccurately
* omitted a bibliography and/or citations.