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WINNER

Fall 2017 James Stevin Assignment Sequence Prize

We are pleased to invite applications for the James F. Stevin Assignment Sequence Prize. This prize of \$500 will be awarded to the graduate student instructor submitting the best substance of writing assignments for a First-Year Writing Seminar (second place winners, if any, will receive \$150).

Assignment sequences in a writing course are built around a series of essay topics. These sequences probably represent work assigned during a portion of the course rather than all of the essay assignments distributed over an entire semester. Submissions should include a narrative and a description of your plans for eliciting and responding to student drafts and revisions, as well as a description of how you prepare students for each essay assignment, for example by engaging them in preparatory writing exercises, including informal writing designed to help students understand the material on which they subsequently write formal essays. Reflection on what worked well, and why, and what you could change another time, are welcome.

The winner will be announced to the Cornell community. Winning essays will be deposited in the Knight Institute's web accessible archive and made available to other instructors under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. (See [creativecommons.org](http://creativecommons.org) for more information about CC BY-NC-SA.)

To facilitate future searching of the Institute's archive, we ask that you provide a brief descriptive abstract (about 75 words) of your document, and a short list of appropriate keywords that might not appear in the text. Examples might include terms like "rhetorical situation," "style," "situation," etc. Any borrowings such as quotations from course texts or handbooks must be cited properly in the document itself.

Submissions due date is 5:00 PM Eastern time by Thursday, December 14. All assignments due by noon.

Fall 2017 James F. Stevin Assignment Sequence Prize Application

-Please Print Clearly. Do not staple. Use paper clips only-

Applicant's name: Fiona Morris  
Department: Phil. Culture & the Arts Phil III 104 Philosophical Fiction  
Experiment of the Novel



Should I win a prize, I give the John S. Knight Institute permission to publish, disseminate, and distribute copies of the assignment sequence, and to distribute publicly to newspapers and other publications, social media, and our website, about my winning the prize. I also grant the Knight Institute permission to deposit the assignment sequence in a web accessible archive and make it available under a Creative Commons Attribution, Non-Commercial License. I am prepared to send electronic versions of my text to Daniel Hevlin ([dhevlin@cornell.edu](mailto:dhevlin@cornell.edu)) in the Knight Institute. I understand that I will receive the award for my prize-winning sequence upon submission of the electronic text.

I have to agree with a professor  
Title of Assignment Sequence

Instructor's signature: Fiona Morris Date: 12/14/17

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## ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCE: HOW TO ARGUE LIKE A PHILOSOPHER

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Freya Mobus

*Abstract:* This assignment sequence helps students to learn how to argue like a philosopher. Philosophical arguments have a certain structure, and the often very abstract content requires a high level of clarity. My preparatory writing exercises focus on three components of clear writing (quotations, transitions, and verbs). My assignment sequence consists of three assignments that ask students to write papers of increasing complexity. The third assignment provides an opportunity for students to use their acquired skills in a real-life debate about a controversial topic.

Keywords: argument, philosophy, transition, verbs, quotation, peer review

The primary learning outcome for my First-Year Writing Seminar “*Philosophical Problems: The Explanation of Human Action*”, taught at Cornell in fall 2017, was for students to learn how to argue like a philosopher. Philosophy is all about arguing clearly, carefully, and convincingly. In order to achieve this goal, I created a sequence of assignments that asks students to write papers of increasing complexity. The first paper assignment was to simply summarize an argument in their own words, while the second paper assignment asked students to reconstruct an argument in premise and conclusion form, and to present a response. In their third paper, students developed a multiple-step argument: they (i) reconstructed an argument in premise and conclusion form, (ii) presented an objection against this argument, (iii) anticipated a response to that objection, and (iv) replied to that response. In their fourth paper assignment, I wanted students to show that they can apply the argumentation skills and the content learned in class to a real-life debate. The assignment was: respond to a newspaper article that defends the role of disgust in moral judgment formation and legal sentencing.

The first student papers showed that my students (freshmen at Cornell) struggled with presenting someone else’s argument. The main issues were: (1) they listed too much unnecessary information, and (2) they did not properly connect the information, more precisely: they did not (2.1) integrate and explain quotes, (2.2) use helpful transition words or phrases, (2.2) use verbs that best describe what someone is doing. In order to better prepare them for their second paper assignment, I prepared a handout and in-class exercises. I set up three different work stations, one for each issue (quotes, transitions, verbs) and split students into three groups. They rotated from one work station to the next and at the end of the class, we all discussed particularly interesting cases together (e.g., when should we use the verb ‘suggest’). Students applied their acquired skills during a peer review exercise the following week.

Below, you can find:

- (i) Preparatory writing exercises and handouts: to prepare students for their second paper assignment.
  - a. Handout: Presenting Someone Else's Argument
  - b. Practice: Group Exercise on Quotes, Transitions, Verbs
  - c. Application: Peer Review Exercise
- (ii) Second Paper Assignment: Reconstruct an Argument
- (iii) Third Paper Assignment: Develop a 4-Step Argument
- (iv) Fourth Paper Assignment: Engage in a Real-life Debate

# Presenting Someone Else's Argument

FWS Fall 2017 | Freya Mobus

## Classic mistakes and how to avoid them

The classic mistake when presenting someone's argument is *listing*:

1. Too much unnecessary information
2. Information is not connected.

How to avoid listing:

### 1. **Focus and select!**

Read the prompt carefully. Ask yourself: is what I'm writing *directly* relevant for answering the prompt? Make a list of points you think are relevant, then put them in hierarchical order (most relevant points on the top). Start your essay with the most relevant points for answering the prompt, only add less relevant points if you've space and time!

But even if you carefully select the relevant information, your essay might still read like a list because the individual pieces of information are not connected.

### 2. **Connect your thoughts – but how?**

- a. **Quotes**: Don't be a hit-and-run quoter (*They Say / I Say*, p.44)!  
Introduce and explain quotation!
- b. **Transitions**: Don't let your reader figure out how your thoughts are connected!  
Make connections between sentences and paragraphs explicit!
- c. **Verbs**: Don't use random verbs!  
Chose verbs that help your reader understand the structure of the argument!

Short instruction for summarizing someone's argument well:

1. Select relevant information and
2. present the information in such a way that your reader can understand the flow/structure of the argument.

But that's easier said than done....let's practice!

## **(a) Quotes**

Read the following excerpt from Guyer's article [*with which the students were familiar*] carefully.

- i) Underline all sentence parts that integrate, introduce, or explain quotations.
- ii) Discuss with your group: How does the writer integrate the quotation into his own text? How does he introduce the quotation, and what does the writer say to explain it and tie it to his own text?
- iii) Erase some of those introductions and explanations. How does that change your reading experience?

Guyer: "Hume is famous for the assertion that "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them," meaning that our ends are set entirely by our feelings and that reason merely figures out the means to those ends. As a member of the "moral sense" tradition previously established by Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, Hume intends this to apply to moral as well as any other practical reasoning: morally permissible or mandatory ends are likewise supposed to be determined solely by feeling, with reason again confined to the role of figuring out the means to realize those ends. Thus, Hume says, "'tis impossible, that the distinction betwixt moral good and evil, can be made by reason: since that distinction has an influence upon our actions, of which reason alone is incapable. Reason and judgment may, indeed, be the mediate cause of an action, by prompting, or by directing a passion," but they cannot "bestow those moral qualities on the actions, which are their" immediate or primary "causes."

Meanwhile, Kant is equally famous for the assertions that the ground of moral obligation "must not be sought in the nature of the human being or in the circumstances of the world in which he is placed, but a priori simply in concepts of pure reason," from which it is supposed to follow that "an action from duty is to put aside entirely the influence of inclination and with it every object of the will; hence there is left for the will nothing that could determine it except objectively the law and subjectively pure respect for this practical law, and so the maxim of complying with such a law even if it infringes upon all my inclinations." The contrast could hardly be clearer: for Hume, passion alone determines even our moral goals and the role of reason in the realization of these goals is strictly instrumental, while for Kant reason alone determines the principle of morality and our inclinations or feelings must play no role either in determining what is morally good or motivating us to try to realize."

### **Your Quotation Guide:**

Is the quote integrated into your text (do you introduce it)?

Do you explain what the quote means?

Further readings: *They Say / I Say* (p. 46–47)

## **(b) Transitions**

Read the following excerpt from Guyer's article carefully.

- i) Underline all transition words and phrases, i.e., words or phrases that connect the content between sentences and paragraphs (e.g., 'however', 'on the one hand').
- ii) Discuss with your group: How does the writer connect his sentences and paragraphs.
- iii) Erase some of those transitions, or substitute them for worse options. What is your reading experience now?

Guyer: "The contrast could hardly be clearer: for Hume, passion alone determines even our moral goals and the role of reason in the realization of these goals is strictly instrumental, while for Kant reason alone determines the principle of morality and our inclinations or feelings must play no role either in determining what is morally good or motivating us to try to realize.

But is the contrast between Hume and Kant as simple as I made it seem? I will argue that there is more common ground between the two philosophers than first appears, and suggest that it is only on the ground that is common between them that we could erect a plausible theory of our motivation to be moral. On the one hand, while Hume does stand by his theory that our ends are always determined by our passions, he also supposes that most of us are ultimately motivated by a passion for calm or tranquility, or a passion for freedom, at least in the negative sense of freedom from domination by importunate desires. Thus, reason may be the slave of the passions, but we also have a fundamental passion to be reasonable and enjoy our tranquility. On the other hand, for Kant the ultimate aim of morality is also freedom, although his understanding of freedom is fuller than Hume's. Further, Kant's theory of moral motivation, at least at the empirical level, is that we cannot be moral without an original passion for freedom, although that passion must be redirected by reason from our own freedom to the freedom of all without losing its force. Thus, both authors ground the content and the possibility of morality in our passion for freedom, although for Hume that is equivalent to a passion for reasonableness, while for Kant our native passion for freedom must be tempered by reason, and once so tempered Kant himself would no longer call it a passion."

### **Your Transition Guide:**

Ask yourself: What is the connection between my sentence/paragraph x and y?

How can I make this connection as clear as possible to my reader?

Further readings: *They Say / I Say* (p.109-10).

### **(c) Verbs**

Read the following excerpt from Guyer's article carefully.

- i) Underline all verbs the author uses to present someone else's argument.
- ii) Discuss with your group: Does the author use the right verbs, i.e., do they help you to understand the structure/flow of the argument?
- iii) Exchange some of those verbs with better/worse options – how does that affect your reading experience?

Guyer: "I now turn to the second part of my argument, namely, that Kant supposes that to act morally requires actually refining an initial passion for one's own freedom into a positive feeling for the freedom of all. In the Groundwork, as we saw, Kant states that since "an action from duty is to put aside entirely the influence of inclination . . . there is left nothing for the will that could determine it except objectively the [moral] law and subjectively pure respect for this practical law," and he describes respect as a "feeling self-wrought by means of a rational concept." Here the feeling of respect seems to be epiphenomenal, merely our empirical consciousness of being motivated solely by the moral law at the noumenal level where the choice of principles really takes place.

In the Critique of Practical Reason, Kant begins to complicate this simple picture. He again asserts that "What is essential to any moral worth of actions is that the moral law determine the will immediately," thus suggesting that the determination of the will by the moral law must itself be the cause of anything else involved in moral motivation, including any conscious feeling of respect. But he now elaborates a more complicated model of the causal role of the feeling of respect, suggesting that it intervenes between the immediate determination of the will by the moral law and the actual performance of a morally mandated action: he states that "the moral law, as the determining ground of the will, must by thwarting all our inclinations produce a feeling that can be called pain" but also produce a "positive feeling," and that by these means "the moral law deprives self-love of its influence . . . and thereby the hindrance to pure practical reason is lessened and the representation of the superiority of its objective law to the impulses of sensibility is produced."

#### **Your Verb Guide:**

First, identify the structure of the argument. Separate thesis, argument, explanation, example etc. Then, pick verbs that would best describe what the author is doing.

Thesis – the author claims, states...

Argument – the author argues...

Example – the author illustrates...

Objection – the author anticipates/responds to/objects...

Further readings: *They Say / I Say* (p. 39-40).



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# PEER REVIEW CHECKLIST

**Name of reviewer (your name):**

**Name of author:**

Exchange your paragraph with your colleague, read your colleague's paragraph once, then read it again and go through the checklist below. Circle your answer.

- |  |     |        |
|--|-----|--------|
| 1. Overall, is the paragraph clear? Can you follow?  | YES | NO     |
| 2. Focus:  |     |        |
| a. Can you tell what the purpose of the paragraph is?<br>Which part of the prompt does it answer?  | YES | NO     |
| 3. Quotes:   |     |        |
| a. Are quotes integrated/introduced?   | YES | N/A NO |
| b. Does the author explain the quote in her/his own words?   | YES | N/A NO |
| 4. Transitions:  |     |        |
| a. Are there transition words (e.g., however, further, despite)<br>or phrases (e.g., in other words, the second premise is that)?  | YES | NO     |
| b. Do those transition words or phrases fit?<br>Do they help you to follow the argument?   | YES | NO     |
| 5. Verbs:  |     |        |
| a. Do the verbs best describe what the author is doing, or<br>what Nichols/Kennett/ the rationalist is doing?<br>Do the verbs help you to follow the argument?   | YES | NO     |
| 6. From Lenman " <i>How to write a crap Philosophy Paper</i> ":  |     |        |
| a. Does the author say things like "from the dawn of humanity"?  | YES | NO     |
| b. Does the author say things like "it's all very subjective"?   | YES | NO     |
| c. Precision: does the author use precise terminology  | YES | NO     |
| d. Are there any typos?  | YES | NO     |
| e. Does the author use examples?   | YES | NO     |
| 7. Summarize your evaluation. Identify the main issues in the paragraph and give advice on how to fix those issues (4 sentences max.). Write your evaluation in the box below AND on the enclosed index card (add: your name and author's name). |     |        |

8. **Give your review checklist to the author whose paragraph you reviewed. Give the index card (with your evaluation, your name, and the author's name on it) to your instructor.**

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Paper Assignment: Reconstruct an Argument and Present a Response**

In T 2.3.3.1, Hume argues for two theses: (1) “reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will” and (2) reason “can never oppose passion in the direction of the will”. In class, we reconstructed Hume’s argument for his first thesis. Your paper assignment is to reconstruct Hume’s argument for his second thesis and to give a short Kantian response to it:

- 1) In T 2.3.3.4, Hume gives an argument for his second thesis. Reconstruct his argument.
  - a. Present the argument in premise and conclusion form.
  - b. *Fully* explain all premises in your own words and in such a way that your roommate could understand them. Use examples.
  - c. In order to *fully* explain all premises, you will need to go back to Hume’s argument for his first thesis we discussed in class. How is his argument for his first thesis connected to his argument for his second thesis?
- 2) Say in a couple of sentences what Kant would respond to Hume’s argument.

Answer both parts of the prompt. You might very well struggle explaining some of the premises. In that case, try to explain as clearly as possible in your paper what you struggle with. If you want to bounce off ideas, see me during office hour after class, or on Friday 12-1 at Temple of Zeus.

Due: Sunday Sept. 17<sup>th</sup> at 9pm, submit through Turnitin on Blackboard (under “content”)  
2 pages max., Times New Roman 12-point font, 1.5 spaced, with 1-inch margins.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Paper Assignment: Develop a 4-Step Argument.**

2-3 pages, 1.5 spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font, with 1-inch margins

According to Nichols, Rationalists believe that moral judgments (such as “stealing is wrong”) are motivational and are the result of rational reasoning. Nichols argues that the existence of psychopaths provides evidence against Rationalism. Your assignment is to present a debate between a Rationalist, Nichols, and Kennett in the form of a 4-Step Argument. The 4 steps are as follows:

1. Carefully reconstruct Nichols’ argument against both Conceptual Rationalism and Empirical Rationalism. Number your premises! Then, explain clearly how those two arguments are connected.
2. Present an objection the Rationalist could raise against Nichols. Make sure that you say *explicitly* which premise you reject.
3. Anticipate a strong response Nichols could give.
4. Respond to Nichols’ response on behalf of the Rationalist.

There are multiple good objections one could raise and different ways for Nichols to respond. I am interested in reading what you think would be a strong objection and response. Try to make both sides as strong as you can.

Remember: a good paper is a clear paper! Make sure that you present the arguments in such a way that your roommate (who by now is a little bit more familiar with Rationalism and Sentimentalism) could understand you. Give examples.

#### **Writing Process and Deadlines:**

1. **Print Nichols and Kennett**, if you haven’t already done so!
2. **Sketch:** due **Saturday Sept. 30<sup>th</sup> 1pm on BB.**
3. **Paragraph:** On **Monday Oct. 2<sup>nd</sup>** bring a paragraph of your draft to class. We will team-up and edit each other’s paragraphs.
4. **Whole Paper Draft:** due **Wednesday Oct. 4<sup>th</sup> 1pm on BB.**
5. **Revised Paragraph:** On **Wednesday Oct. 11<sup>th</sup>** bring to class: a section of your draft with your instructor’s comments and your revised version of it. To get the most out of it, pick a section you found a bit more difficult to revise. We will team-up and edit each other’s revised paragraphs.
6. **Whole Paper Final:** due **Thursday Oct. 12<sup>th</sup> 9pm on BB.**

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Paper Assignment: Engage in a Real-Life Debate.**

3-4 pages, 1.5 spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font, with 1-inch margins.

On the next page, you will find a fictional newspaper article. Your 4<sup>th</sup> paper assignment is to write a letter to the editor, in which you respond to that article. In your response, you are expected to show mastery of the material and ability to apply the skills learned in class. Use your knowledge to enter a real-life debate about a controversial topic, and show that you have learned to argue carefully, clearly, and intelligently.

Your response should have the following outline:

1. Identify the author's theses. Reconstruct the argument(s) for those theses, if the author provides any, in premise and conclusion form. Number the premises. Be charitable!
2. Critically engage with the argument:
  - a. Your thesis: Do you agree or disagree with the author? Which thesis or premise do you accept or reject? Remember to limit your response to your area of expertise, which is: the role of disgust in moral judgment formation and sentencing.
  - b. Argue for your thesis! Utilize the material we read in class (Nussbaum, Prinz, Haidt, Pizarro) to argue for your thesis. Make sure to quote properly and to indicate ownership of the ideas you are using. You do not have to use all the readings, but you should use those you need in order to give a convincing and an informed argument.
  - c. Anticipate your opponent's objections and respond to them.

Your final paper grade will reflect whether your response would convince a broader audience, i.e., the editor and the readers of the newspaper, who are presumably non-philosophers! Remember that you will only convince readers who can follow your argument. Clarity is key!

#### **Writing Process and Deadlines:**

1. **Print and carefully read the texts again** (in particular Nussbaum; also Haidt, Prinz).
2. **Sketch:** due **Saturday Oct. 21<sup>st</sup> at 3pm** on BB.
3. **Paragraph:** On **Monday Oct. 23<sup>rd</sup>** bring a paragraph of your draft to class. We will team-up and edit each other's paragraphs.
4. **Whole Paper Draft:** due **Thursday Oct. 26<sup>th</sup> at 9pm** on BB.
5. **Revised Draft:** On **Wednesday Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>** bring your old draft with your instructor's comments and your new, revised version to class. We will team-up and edit each other's revised drafts.
6. **Whole Paper Final:** due **Tuesday Nov. 7<sup>th</sup> at 1pm** on BB.
7. **Knight FWS Awards:** The Knight Institute awards prizes for the best student papers in First-Year Writing Seminars. Your instructor can submit the two best papers in this class for prize consideration.

# Tompkins County Journal

October 18, 2017

## **Conahey should have listened to the Voice of Disgust.**

The trial of Dennis McScott is over and the verdict leaves the community of Tompkins County in disbelief. Twenty years to life for a heinous crime, the details of which are too horrific to elaborate on in this journal. Last winter, McScott brutally assaulted and murdered a young, pregnant woman. Witnesses confirmed that he followed her shouting vulgar, sexist slurs. The woman was later found, her body mutilated in the most despicable way. McScott confessed and was unmistakably identified through DNA evidence as the killer. During the trial, McScott showed no sign of remorse, instead telling the story and explaining the details of the crime seemed to give him satisfaction.

McScott's crime and his behavior in court were so disgusting that followers of the trial expected him to receive the harshest punishment. But Judge Conahey sentenced McScott to twenty years to life in prison with a chance of parole after only fifteen years. Conahey explained the sentence saying that "the emotions of a judge, should be as far removed from sentencing decisions as can practically be achieved." In my eyes, that is a big mistake.

In assessing the severity of McScott's crime our feeling or emotion of disgust proves to be very helpful. What happened was not just a murder, but an unbelievably sickening nightmare that left the family of the victim and our entire community in despair. The intensity of disgust reflects the depth of emotional harm that the defendant has inflicted upon the victim and her family and friends. Disregarding that emotion is wrong. I believe Conahey is mistaken about the role emotions and feelings should play in assessing

the severity of a crime. I firmly believe that disgust can be a good guide in legal and moral matters. Disgust can not only inform us about how bad a crime is, but also about whether an act is a crime at all. Recall the case 'Julie and Mark against the State of New York'. Julie and Mark are siblings who engaged in intercourse, and although their activity was consensual and pregnancy extremely unlikely, it was a crime. Why? Because it is disgusting! That is why!

I believe that judges should listen more to their emotions and feelings when deliberating about appropriate punishment. Someone might object that emotions have been proven to be bad guides in the past. Disgust has been used, for example, to defend and fuel sexism and racism. I do, of course, acknowledge those facts. Yet, I argue that the McScott case is different because the people of Tompkins County agree that his crime is the most disgusting one that has ever happened in our community. Anyone should feel disgust about it. Therefore, judge Conahey should have trusted his emotional reaction and chosen a harsher sentence. He should have listened to the voice of disgust.