

Philosophy

2013 Chief Assessor's Report



Government
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PHILOSOPHY

2013 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

OVERVIEW

Chief Assessors' 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 ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Argument Analysis

Most teaching programs provided students with opportunities to perform at all levels of the performance standards, including the highest level. This is achieved by having one of the two assessment tasks focus on an argument presented in the media, and the other assessment task analysing an argument given by a philosopher about a philosophical issue.

The specific features RA2 – Explanation of the flow of logic and evidence of arguments leading to conclusions, and C2 – Use of appropriate philosophical terminology and acknowledgment of sources, are particularly relevant in the analysis of an argument in the media, be it newspaper article, film documentary, TV or radio programme.

In the second assessment task, and in addition to RA2 and C2 the remaining criteria RA1 and 3, CA1, and C1 become important. Examples of arguments students could analyse are Jean-Paul Sartre's paper knife analogy and Peter Singer's syllogisms regarding abortion.

Student success depends on them mastering some basic argument terminology, including: inductive, deductive, premise, conclusion, opinionative, metaphysical, analytical, empirical, valid, sound, cogent, circular, equivocation and perhaps some logical fallacies.

Assessment Type 2: Issues Analysis

Students and teachers are taking advantage of the wide range of issues suggested in the Philosophy Subject Outline. In order for students to perform well in the assessment design criteria knowledge and understanding, and reasoning and argument, particularly in RA3, assessment tasks should require students to analyse an issue from the perspective of at least two philosophers or philosophical positions, leading to the student developing their own position. Assessment tasks which ask students to compare philosophers or to look only at one philosopher do not always support this response.

Moderators noticed that there are still a number of students who analyse an ethical issue as a social issue rather than a philosophical one. Ethical issues need to be analysed from the perspective of some of the key ethical positions (often overlapping): virtue ethics, Christian ethics, situation ethics, the categorical imperative, Hedonism, Utilitarianism, Relativism, etc. Students then need to refer to philosophers promoting these positions and apply their arguments to the ethical issue.

Moderators also noticed that there has been a distinct improvement in referencing; this supports students to show achievement against C2, 'with appropriate acknowledgement of sources'.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 3: Issues Study

There was a broad range of topics covered, with the majority from the key areas of Ethics and Metaphysics. Focus questions which allowed students the opportunity to demonstrate all of the performance standards were:

- What does it mean to live a good life?
- Is modern meat production ethically justified?
- What is the moral justification of Capital Punishment?
- Can war ever be just?
- Do we really exist?
- Can we judge others on the principle of absolute moral truth or do we need to consider moral relativism?

Some students could not adequately demonstrate the reasoning and argument and the critical analysis assessment design criteria because they did not choose a suitable question to frame their topic

Some students did not make reference to their focus question throughout the investigation, so the development of their position was neither coherent nor convincing.

The most successful essays dealing with ethical issues were those for which the focus question promoted the analysis of philosophical ethical theories. When the question varied from this there was often no inclusion of ethical approaches even though the issue was ethical in nature.

A common phrasing of an ethical question is 'To what extent is ...ethically justified'. With this question the student is supported and encouraged to include ethical approaches in their essay rather than a general, and often unfocused, discussion.

The most successful issues studies had every paragraph connected to a philosophical approach: explaining it, identifying the logical reasoning within it, and applying it to the topic and critiquing its strengths and weaknesses particularly in relation to the topic. Extended paragraphs that did not deal with philosophical

positions were generally not able to generate evidence against the performance standards.

Students achieved a greater philosophical depth by limiting the topic to a narrow focus. For example, if dealing with the issue of euthanasia students should choose one aspect of the issue. Otherwise the risk is giving up many paragraphs to describing a variety of scenarios rather than focusing on the philosophical approaches.

Students should adhere to the 2000 word limit for this task. If the student's personal viewpoint is at the very end of the essay then students could be disadvantaged if this section is excluded from assessment.

There are a number of strategies which students could use to keep within the word count; the first is to remember that there is no need to include biographical information about a philosopher as it is not usually relevant to the discussion, for example, 'Jacques Derida (1930 – 2004), one of the 20th century's most well-known philosopher . . .'. Secondly, headings are not necessary; topic sentences should relate paragraphs to the topic of the issues study.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

When providing student materials for final moderation it would be useful if teachers made sure that each student's folio is clearly marked with the student's SACE number or name and the grade for each of the two assessment types. This allows moderators to find and moderate materials more effectively.

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