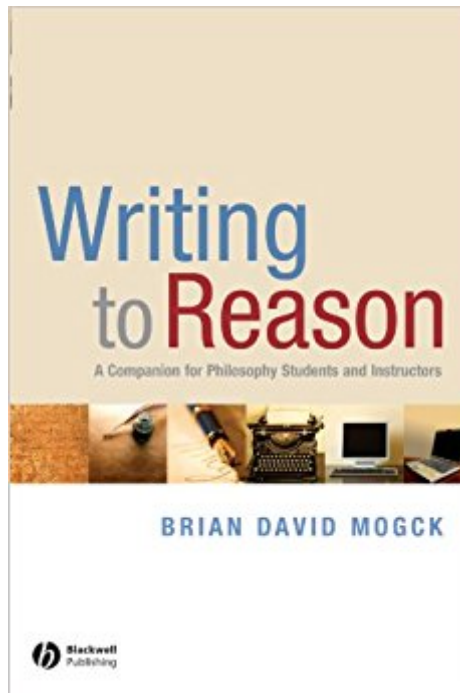




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Writing To Reason: A Companion For Philosophy Students And Instructors



Synopsis

Writing to Reason presents the principles of writing a clear and well-argued philosophy paper in an easily-referenced numerical format, which facilitates efficient grading and clearer communication between instructors and students. Points out the most common problems students have achieving these objectives. Increases efficiencies for instructors in grading papers. Presents students with clearer information, objectivity, and transparency about their graded results. Facilitates clearer communication between instructors and students.

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Customer Reviews

“Long-suffering teachers of philosophy will love this volume. It offers sophisticated help for writers at various levels, expressed with simplicity and charm. Best of all, it is directed precisely to the improvement of philosophical writing and thinking.”
— Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.,
Fordham University

Finally, a guide to writing philosophy essays that addresses the needs of instructors as well as students. Writing to Reason is both an informative guide to writing effective essays and a valuable aid to grading papers that facilitates clearer communication between instructors and students. Writing to Reason presents the concrete steps of writing a clear, organized, and well-argued philosophical essay. It also addresses common mistakes and confusions about philosophical writing. The key principles of successful philosophical writing are presented in an easily-referenced

numerical format, where the numbered sections correspond to the comments instructors most often make when grading papers. Instead of making the same comments and corrections in one paper after another, instructors simply refer students to the relevant numbered section of the book for detailed explanations of key points. The result is clearer communication between instructors and students. The grading process becomes more efficient for instructors and more edifying for students.

Since I am neither a student nor an instructor, nor a philosopher in any sense, perhaps I am not properly credentialed to review this book. Nonetheless, I opted to do so because I consider the book overall to be conceptually unique, pragmatically valuable, and quite relevant beyond the discipline of philosophy itself. Basically, the author's approach to formal or scholarly writing is clearly expressed in a compact yet thorough form, and its merit has motivated my attempt to apply or adapt the author's recommendations in drafting a research paper. After completing the book, I turned to its table of contents to locate certain topics. In so doing, I was amazed at how sensibly the book is organized, and in turn, how readily key content can thereby be located. Evidently, the author practiced the essence of his own advice in structuring and developing his message. Since I consider the book to be an enduring reference, I would expect to use its table of contents primarily in the future rather than its index. Yes, that was a bit of a surprise to me. Part I, the larger part of the book, addresses writing per se, and does so in an excellent and most practical fashion. The advice and pointers for students, moreover, are interesting and sensible. There is no doubt they can aid in coursework orientation, expository caveats, and stylistic heuristics, and hence can foster improved overall academic performance. Quite impressive! Unfortunately, Part II of the book, addressing the doing of philosophy, seems somewhat extraneous or disjunct. It might, nevertheless, serve to familiarize philosophy majors informally with the nature and protocols of their chosen discipline. Most significantly, my motivation for reading this book - an improved grasp of the craft and style of incisively writing well-reasoned research papers - was quite amply satisfied. The author's general approach is to formulate and refine a solid argument as a precondition to preparing an outline for a contemplated writing task. Once the outline is set, he advises one to begin writing without further delay, as a precaution for writers' block. Sometimes, it may then happen that the emerging draft reveals an ideational packaging or topical flow that is preferable to that of the already generated text. In such a case, his recommendation is to discard the initial draft text entirely and to begin writing anew, with a better informed sense of focus and a more promising expository trajectory. While none of these

recommendations is strictly new, they are presented in a readable, coherent, and unified form. Moreover, the author augments and amplifies his overall approach with vital compositional guidance and discipline conventions that engender scholarly text. More specifically, the following items would likely be especially valuable to a student or to a novice:

- Elaborated glossary of philosophical terms (six pages) - some of the terms are further examined in subsequent text
- Incisive guidance for articulating an argument in philosophical paper form - from thesis formulation through rendering the respective parts of a paper
- A list of definitions of Latin abbreviations typically seen in formal writing - very convenient to have this ample complement thereof in a single location
- A list of meanings/usages of Latin expressions typically seen in formal writing - along with amplified characterizations and notable subtleties of use
- A useful distinction between the meanings of *concept* and *conception* - I would add *conceptualization* as a formative or provisional conception.

As already noted, the overall coverage on doing philosophy struck me as rather weakly developed, nor did it seem integrated very well into the thematic flow of the book. Furthermore, the overall treatment here did not make the practice of philosophy seem very interesting or appealing. Nevertheless, some strong points are made: "...doing philosophy involves more than logical appraisal. It also requires explanation and development of relevant concepts, and an effort to justify a better understanding of the pertinent issues." (p. 10) This statement is augmented by a quote from J.S. Mill: "...the cultivation of the understanding consists...in learning the grounds of one's own opinions." (p. 81) More expansively, Section 8.2, entitled Philosophy Explicates What is Implicit in Our Concepts and Commitments, is very thoughtful; and the treatment of intersubjective inquiry is interesting as well. In all, this is a very valuable and constructive book that merits serious readership beyond the philosophy community. Regarding learned writing, the author outlines a compelling case for first cohering and refining a thesis, and only then proceeding to fully articulate and substantiate it in natural language form. His attendant advocacy of clear, engaging, substantive, and rigorous written argument is fostered and enabled, moreover, by the overall guidance, pointed caveats, and sensible heuristics that he presents. I just wish that I had read this book years ago! Alas, my disappointment with Part II limits my rating of this quite worthwhile book to Four Stars.

This book was required reading for a college student, and I purchased it for him.

It was in new condition. Came right on time. It ended up not being used as much as I thought throughout the course, but that's on a different note. Thanks.

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