



# Guidelines for Individual Research Projects

Kenneth R. WESTPHAL  
Department of Philosophy  
Boğaziçi Üniversitesi (İstanbul)

Course Description.....	1
SCHEDULE.....	1
PROJECT MEETINGS.....	2
Meeting 1.....	2
Source Reports.....	2
Meeting 2.....	2
Meeting 4.....	3
Meeting 6.....	3
Progress Report Questions.....	3
SAMPLE SOURCE REPORTS.....	4

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Independent research projects and dissertations focus on topics developed by individual students, in consultation with their faculty advisor(s). The point of these *Guidelines* is to provide an effective framework for pursuing independent research. To do this, these *Guidelines* schedule regular meetings between student and advisor, along with guidelines for research and progress reports. Details about the aim and format of research papers are provided in my *Guidelines for Philosophy Essays*. Taken together, these two documents form a syllabus for your independent project.

These *Guidelines* are written expressly for guided undergraduate research projects. However, the basic procedures, techniques and strategies are central to research at any level, including doctoral dissertations or professional research, and can be easily adapted as required. (*E.g.*, graduate students may not be required to submit source reports. Regardless, writing them is very useful for anyone's research.)

As your project advisor (and highly skilled researcher), I am happy to discuss with you (at your request) basic research strategies, methods and techniques.

These guidelines can also be used by students to plan and monitor their own research, either

when taking a course, or independently, without arranging faculty supervision.

### Required Texts:

- A. Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*. Hackett.
- G. Harvey, *Writing with Sources*. Hackett.
- M. Harvey, *The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing*. Hackett.
- M. Temple, *Grammar Book*. Blackwell.
- D. Fisher & T. Harrison, *Citing References*. Blackwell.  
(Provides the essentials of the author/date system of citation.)
- K R Westphal, *Guidelines for Philosophy Essays*.

These are brief, extremely useful handbooks on philosophical analysis, argument and essay writing. If you are unfamiliar with them, buy a copy of each and read them carefully. Then re-read them in the same way, and refer back to them periodically while researching and writing your project essay. (Even if they are familiar to you, this is an excellent time to refresh your recollection.) These materials stress cogent 'analytical' thinking, though they do not favour 'analytic' over 'continental' philosophy. Philosophy requires cogent reasoning, which is equally central to continental philosophy, even if the 'reasoning' involved may be phenomenological or hermeneutical.

## SCHEDULE

We shall schedule a 45-minute meeting each week to discuss your project. The following is a model working schedule, subject to revision if need be. Take these dates as *fixed*, unless specific provisions are made for variance.

### Week Assignment

- 1 Meeting 1; brain-storming & initial plans.
- 2 1<sup>st</sup> set of source reports & 1<sup>st</sup> progress report due.
- 3 Regular meeting.
- 4 2<sup>nd</sup> set of source reports & 2<sup>nd</sup> progress report due.
- 5 Regular meeting.
- 6 3<sup>d</sup> set of source reports, detailed provisional topic statement and project outline due.
- 7 3<sup>d</sup> progress report due.
- 8 Developed topic statement & full sentence outline due.
- 9 Regular meeting.
- 10 Complete 1<sup>st</sup> draft due; returned with comments ASAP.
- 11 Final draft due, 2<sup>nd</sup> day of exam period.

## PROJECT MEETINGS

### MEETING 1.

Your first meeting is your opportunity to discuss your interests and topic area; this is a brain-storming session. Be prepared to discuss your interests in your topic area and whatever information, expectations or hunches you have about it. You should develop answers to the questions listed under 'Progress Report Questions' (p. 3). Obviously at this initial stage your answers to these question will be preliminary, but they should help you focus your research, thinking and preparation for your next meeting.

Your ASSIGNMENT for Meeting 2 is to find three different sources relevant to your project. These sources may be an article, an interview, a chapter of a book or a relevant example pertaining to your project. (Do not focus solely on finding relevant examples, nor solely on interviews.) Write a half-page 'source report' on *each* of the three sources (1.5 pages total). This first set of reports are due at Meeting 2.

### SOURCE REPORTS.

Each 'Source Report' should provide your name, topic and a *complete* reference for your source. (For citation methods, see 'Required Texts'). Your report should summarize the point of the source in your own words. At the end of each report state how useful you anticipate the source will be to your project. (See below, Sample Source Reports, p. 3.)

It is not required that your final project use each of the sources you report on, nor is it prohibited to use sources you do not report on, though it is expected that many of the sources on which you report shall find their proper place in your project. (Otherwise you are wasting both your time and mine.) It is permissible that a couple source reports may reach the verdict that a source initially expected to be relevant is deemed, for good reasons stated in your report, not to be (obviously) relevant after all. Finally, these reports are plainly provisional. Your research may and should involve revisiting and reassessing your sources as you progress.

### MEETING 2.

At this meeting you should discuss the three sources you located since Meeting 1, along with your reports on them. You should now try to narrow your topic area, to be more specific and to be philosophical. (See the essay *Guidelines* for advice about philosophical focus.) You should determine what further research you need to do in order to have sufficient information to develop, analyse and present your issue in your project. For Meeting 2 you should again answer the questions listed under 'Progress Report Questions' (p. 3). Although the questions are the same, your answers should now be significantly more specific. These are *progress* reports, and progress is largely reflected in specificity, both about your issues and about which sources you expect to use – and how you expect to use them – in your project. You should attach a copy of each of your reports on your sources to this sec-

ond Progress Report and submit it to me at the end of your meeting.

#### MEETING 4.

You should perform whatever research is needed prior to Meeting 4. The point of Meeting 4 is to plan, as clearly and thoroughly as possible, the aim and structure of your research project. This requires that much of your research and development of your topic must be completed before this meeting!

A second set of three source reports is due at this meeting. At this stage of your work, you may and probably will need to present more than half a page of material on any worthy source. You should do so. However, you should make these reports as concise as possible for easy reference, perhaps later when you're trying to organize the material for your presentation, and for my sake, so that I can be sure your work is progressing properly.

#### MEETING 6.

The point of Meeting 6 is to figure out your strategy for presenting your issues and material. For this meeting you should locate and report on 3 more sources for your project. At this meeting you should thus be able to think about and discuss your project in detail. You should be able to specify clearly and concisely the following important points:

- 1) The main issues to be presented in your project;
- 2) Which differing views on those issues will be presented;
- 3) What sources and examples will be used in order to present those issues and views on those issues.
- 4) What philosophical *conclusions* you expect to articulate and to justify (argue for) as the *thesis* of your project.

Obviously, your position on any of these points is provisional. The point is, the more specific and detailed is your view on each and every one of these points, the more easily can you identify what must be done next to develop your project, and the more easily can you identify any points that require revision as you continue to develop your project.

Directly following Meeting 6 you shall complete a third progress report. The resulting detailed

description of your project is due at Meeting 7. To prepare this third progress report, write a detailed statement concerning the points listed under 'Progress Report Questions' (p. 3).

#### PROGRESS REPORT QUESTIONS

To write a Progress Report, answer each of the following questions. Be as *detailed* and *specific* as you can.

The same questions are to be answered in each of your three progress reports. For beginning undergraduates, the first report should be no more than 2 pages; the second report should be no more than 3 pages; the third report should be no more than 4 pages. More advanced students should provide correspondingly more extensive (and intensive, *i.e.* focussed and specific) reports.

In each case, progress will be demonstrated by greater clarity, focus and sophistication. Use the brevity of these reports as a tool for achieving concise, clear formulations of your key issues, points, aims and thesis. (About theses, see my *Guidelines for Philosophy Essays*.)

1. What is your topic?
2. What issues concerning that topic will be the focus of your project?
3. For each of these issues, what points of view do you plan to develop, examine and assess?
4. How do you anticipate presenting these issues in your project?
5. What *thesis* do you anticipate developing and defending in your project?

SAMPLE SOURCE REPORTS

NOTE: These sample source reports were written by first semester undergraduate students (for group projects). More advanced students should submit commensurately more sophisticated source reports.

(Name) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) \_\_\_\_\_  
Topic: Art & its Institutions.

Ball, Edward & Fred Dewey, 1990. "The Riddle of History". *New Statesman & Society* [vol./issue; March 1990]: 39–40.

This article is brief but gets to the heart of one aspect of our discussion of the role of museums in modern life. Ball and Dewey discuss several 'anti-institutional' shows and their aspects. It all concerns a break away from the display of venerated objects in museums and their separation from our everyday life. They describe several shows that the spectator cannot merely observe and accept but becomes engaged in or must question. At the same time the exhibit questions the role of our 'reputed' museums. Examples of this are a 'natural history' exhibit at the Museum of Jurassic Technology which is composed of displays combining history, science and non-sense, shown in a typical museum setting. In addition, the MET installed a new exhibit that displays 'normal' arts from 1600–1950, rather than only exquisitely crafted objects which has little place in everyday life, but might have been the choice of museum sponsors. Other exhibits discussed attack the voyeurism of museum boards and corporate sponsors outright. This gives examples of the distance of museums from everyday experience and the influence that donors have on the pieces we see. Finally, Chris Burden's exhibit, which literally pushed out the walls of museums it was displayed in, is discussed. Ball and Dewey state a relevant point, one that we can explore further: 'Evidently, writing a catalogue essay and a bit of wall text just isn't enough any more'.

\* \* \*

(Name) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) \_\_\_\_\_  
Topic: Art & its Institutions

[Author, date.] 'Artless Philanthropy', *The Economist* [Vol./Issue; Sept. 12, 1992]:97.

This article talks about over-built yet under-funded art museums in the US. The Brooklyn Museum in NYC has a newly renovated West Wing in which it had hoped to display works of art previously kept in storage. A problem exists due to recent budget cuts. Visiting hours of the museum have been reduced and staff numbers have either been cut or the actual staff have been issued extra unpaid leave from work. Without this money due to the budget cuts, the new renovations at the Brooklyn Museum are unable to be left open to the public, i.e., there is no staff available for this task.

The MET in Manhattan\* is experiencing the same problem. Entire rooms, those that offer a viewing of permanent collections of the museum, are closed due to budget cuts. These cuts came just after a major stage of renovation had been completed.

Rich patrons seem quite willing to donate money to build new galleries and add to existing ones. However, these same donors are less keen on providing capital required to fix a roof or pay for extra staff. Samuel Sachs, director of the Detroit Institute of Art, states: 'It is relatively easy to get the [wing] named and funded. But the [wing's] janitor is much harder to raise money for'.

The problems of today's museums stem also from the economic excess of the late 1980's. As state and local city governments swelled with extra money, there were encouraged to add to the existing museums in order to exhibit growing collections. Many museums in the USA, now with new wings and fancy additions completed, have no money due to budget cuts to keep them open and maintained.

(\*The 'MET' is the vernacular designation of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.)