

Points for a Good Research Paper:

J. Thomas Bridges, Ph.D.

1. An interesting Introduction: Some papers begin too abruptly, that is, a good paper has, as its first subheading, an *Introduction* that sets up the historical or conceptual or cultural import of the issues with which you will deal.

Example:

The problem of evil is a perennial issue in the philosophy of religion. Perhaps this is because a notion of *the* problem of evil is misleading. In fact, one's philosophical interest in the issue of God and his relationship with evil can range across many different philosophical domains, from a formal logical study and a dispassionate metaphysical approach to the sort of emotional responses appropriate in the face of suffering. Commonly the problem is delineated along theoretical and practical lines.

2. A clear Thesis Statement: A statement that summaries for the reader the goal for the paper and the intellectual route by which you will reach this goal.

Example: [Continued from Above]

This paper will not be concerned with a clear taxonomy of problems of evil, rather what I wish to accomplish in the following is to track St. Thomas' description of the theological virtues and explore how their presence or their contraries establish a generic philosophical psychology of the Christian theist and the atheist, respectively. My contention is that the presence or absence of the theological virtues bears on the practical resources an individual has in responding to evil.

3. A Well-Structured Body: The body of a paper should be a way of elaborating the elements introduced in you thesis statement. The quotations in the body should be "evidence" that you present to support your contention. Any quotation that you introduce should have some subsequent commentary by the writer. This commentary displays to the reader the way in which the quotation supports the thesis. (This does not mean that you write "this quotation supports my thesis by ...")

4. Rhetorical Questions: One of my biggest pet peeves is long strings of rhetorical questions raised in place of rigorous analysis. Questions should be raised thoughtfully and then answered in the body of the text.

Example:

Why would a person desire to engage in theft? Is it not enough that the whole of man is prone to many sins? Should a person be excused because he is hungry or needy? What would this do to society at large? How would this affect the church?

5. Colloquialisms: These are figures of speech that are not appropriate in formal academic papers.

Example:

They “jumped ship” or “got bent out of shape” :: should be translated to something like “They abandoned the positions they previously held” or “They responded with irritation and anger”

6. Formatting and Structure: These are the parameters set by Turabian (footnotes, fonts, Bibliography page, etc.). The paper should be structured with Headings and Subheadings that demarcate major transitions in the paper.

7. Conclusion: In the conclusion of the paper you need to revisit the thesis (either explicitly or more concisely) and perhaps recap the major points in its favor. DO NOT introduce new evidence and/or add to the original thesis in the conclusion. DO NOT try to end too abruptly. The page length for the paper should be met within ½ page or so. You need to spend your space well and some of this is evidenced by the fact that you have reached the point of conclusion in your paper with enough space available to close the paper in a gradual and not abrupt manner.

Example:

Conclusion

The problem of evil, we can be assured, will continue to generate interest for philosophers of religion of all different proclivities. Logical, metaphysical, and practical-existential aspects of the problem will prompt ongoing discussion, but the role that faith versus unbelief, hope versus despair, and love versus hate/apathy should not go unaccounted as an important feature of this academic debate. There is certain a role that mystery plays in the discussion as well. In the end, however, one must embrace a experiential end to the practical-existential problem of evil. If not, one will continue to demand that reason throw light where its light has, in fact, failed, and be subject to frustration. The theological virtues are the substance of this mystical union with God wherein the practical-existential problem of evil dissolves.