

**Holy Names University**  
**PHIL 140-W: The Human Person**  
Instructor: David A. Sylvester

**Some Suggestions on Preparing and Writing your Debate Paper:**

Topic: "Thinking makes us human".

Feeling confused or overwhelmed by the prospect of writing a debate paper, even after our class?

Well, this started simply enough. I thought I'd lay out some suggestions for you so you wouldn't get stuck staring at blank paper. But as I worked on this, it changed from being a simple "10 E-Z Steps to a Paper" into description of how I'd write this paper.

*First....*

This is way too long and entirely optional. If you get annoyed, stop reading. It's a beautiful day outside.

*I tried to put myself in your position....*

As I put myself in your position, I realized I would be a lot more worried about the debate than the paper. For me, 3 pages is not the issue. It would be easier to write a 10 page paper. But pros can be difficult, so first, I'd focus on the debate. I'd write out my arguments and evidence and make a list, as I suggest below. Then do a fast, rambling 10-15 page draft of the arguments. (When I had an oral class presentation to do, it was easier for me to write out my presentation first as a way of thinking it through. It was a 10-page ramble, but helped discipline my thinking.) I might break up the draft into pages for each argument, or put the points and evidence of the argument on cards to bring to class and reshuffle based on which side I was on. I like the feeling that I can crush my opponent... I'd prefer a knock-out to a judge's decision. (As I've said, I'm not really competitive... as long as I win.)

From this, I'd pull out a 3-page paper. It would be more of a summary of my longer draft.

*But my experience is probably different.....*

That said, when I'm writing a paper, I usually start slowly, working for only an hour or two at a time. The ideas come slowly and I have a lot of resistance, laziness and get distracted easily. Then as I collect the bits for the paper and start putting them into a rough draft in some haphazard fashion, I gain momentum. By the time, usually under deadline pressure, I might be working 6 hours at a stretch, revising and revising the paper. As soon as I finish, I go back to re-read it and I'm revising it more. I might not notice time passing -- something that would have been unthinkable the week or two before when I was first starting the paper. (As I've said, I was in grad school full-time from 2007 to 2012 and all the courses required papers.)

Maybe you work like that also, but when I was an undergrad, it was torture to sit still for 2 hours, and I had no idea how to write papers. I had no idea how to think. I had no idea what it meant to take a position and argue it. I even graduated two years late because I had 3 incompletes for papers, including an unfinished my BA Thesis! I had to learn all this on the job during my years as a reporter. The emphasis in the word "deadline" was always on the first syllable.

*Basically...*

I put 25 percent of my time into coming up with a decent first draft, then 75 percent into revising it into a good almost-final draft and then the remaining 15 percent into polishing and spellchecking. I try to make the final copy error-free. (As a reporter, if I made a single mistake, misspelled a single name, used a single wrong date or number, I had 250,000 readers who could complain to my editors – and probably 1,000 or more Stanford profs and PhD's reading my stories, all experts on the subject I was writing about! Still, I made plenty of mistakes.)

*So here's what I'd do with this paper....*

First, I'd start this paper this weekend and try to get my first decent draft within a few hours. I'd work from the notes and my memory of the quickwrite that we did in class, then take Spring Break, and come back ready to do a deep dive into it to finish it over the weekend before school starts. I'd want it finished a day in advance, so I could re-read it and revise it one more time, and I'd definitely file it in TurnItIn several hours before the deadline shuts it off. I'd be very nervous with this squirrely HNU system!

In total, I might work this weekend for 4 to 6 hours getting the first draft, no matter how sloppy it was, and then next weekend, maybe 6 hours spread over Saturday and Sunday to get my almost-final draft, and do a final revision for a couple of hours on Monday night after the ideas from our Monday class and spend a bit of Tuesday afternoon making last adjustments so I could file it around or just after dinner on Tuesday. Total time: 12 to 14 hours.

Maybe this seems like a lot of time. You may be able to do it in 10 to 12 hours. However, remember that it's HNU policy that students do 2 hours of outside work for every hour of class time. For this class, that's 5 hours of outside work each week, and this paper covers at least two weeks, if not more, of class time. Also, this estimate of time includes debate prep AND the paper. They are inseparable projects. Length isn't the key issue. (Once, I had a 2-page paper due for a class, and I spent an entire day on it. By the end, I could have written 5 to 8 pages, but only summarized it in the 2-page paper.)

*If I have to guess, here's how this paper might go for me....*

Saturday 3 p.m. Warm-up:

1. A cup of coffee, my computer, my class notes and class readings.

*Wonder what's in my inbox.... better not look.... I'll never get this done...*

3:15 p.m. Prewriting:

2. Quickwrite: Open up a Word doc, retype my Quickwrite from class as I remember it. Save this under the name "Rough Draft" even if it's not. (It's mine so I can call it whatever I want!) Revise and add to it from my free associations and thoughts, including confusion, worry, annoyance etc. (I hate trying to write when I'm annoyed and resentful! So I dump my negativity in parentheses.... and sometimes my negativity turns into the breach birth of a good idea....)

*Shouldn't I be checking Facebook? .... later.... fb will suck up hours ... !*

4 p.m. Collecting and thinking through evidence:

3. List bullet points: This is a debate. I'll have an opponent.

Take a separate piece of scratch paper and write two columns: “Yes, thinking makes us human.” vs. “No, thinking does not make us human.” Divide the two sides with a line, and jot down in any random order a series of bullet points of points to make on each side. I muse and doodle, but on paper. No thinking in my head. All on paper. Gotta stay out of the Dead Zone.

4. First, ponder the resolution, especially in the definitions, from various angles. Open up a Word doc for a Quickwrite. Do some dialogue with myself in statements, not questions. Some questions to answer:

- What is thinking? Is all mental activity thinking? How is it different from other similar words, like cognition, apprehension, imagination? Or only rational thinking? What is rational thinking? Can thinking be wrong? If so, why and how? ► Can I think of any examples in my life of right and wrong thinking, rational and irrational thinking to clarify how I define thinking? Jot down under the bullet point and circle as potential evidence.

*My head hurts... is that a thought? .... is it thinking to think about thinking?... craaaazy...*

- Do animals think? What kind of thinking? Logical thinking? Instinctive thinking? But if some humans think based on appetites, is that thinking? Is there a better definition of thinking? ► Go to the HNU library, or a philosophical dictionary online, or even to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, to look up different definitions of thinking. (Take notes on any pertinent definitions or quotes as potential evidence of my argument.)

- Thinking, compared to what? Emotions? Passions? Instincts? Appetites? What is the negative argument? What are the definitions of these? How are emotions different from passions? What do I think really makes us human? ► Any evidence of examples, personal experiences of myself or others, well-known public stories to illustrate what I think?

- What does “make” mean? Are we “made” human? Or born human? How about the person in a coma with no thought? ► Any examples, stories of people in a coma? Was there mental activity or actual thinking? (Jot and circle as possible evidence.)

*That other section would probably have been easier....*

- How do I define human? Are there different degrees of being human? Compared to what, plants, animals? If humans act in savage ways, are they no longer human? And how does this “human” quality fit into the description of the soul in Plato and Aristotle ► Reread the class readings and make a note in my Rough Draft for every time “thought” or “rational” is mentioned, page number and line number for potential evidence later. ► Do the same for the parts of the soul. Type into my rough draft in the approximate place where it might fit in the final draft my summary, in my own words, of how thought fits into a picture of the soul. Use correct citation (Author, Short Title or Year, page #and line #).

*6 p.m., isn't it time for dinner?*

Prewriting turns into writing:

5. Revise Thesis: Hmm... Re-read my notes and Quickwrites. What do I really think? What's the best guess of my real idea on all this? I sum up the closest approximation of my real position, (noting any hesitations or doubts in parentheses) using a simple Subject-Verb statement and type it into Rough Draft.

6. Basic steps to my position: List on my Rough Draft the logical steps I'd have to take to show that my thesis is overwhelmingly convincing. Three or four points. No more. Key steps in my argument, or the key "issues," or "reasons" why I'm right. Write these as subheadings in the Rough Draft. Save again. (Save early and save often!)

7. I make sure I stop working at an unfinished step so I know exactly what I need to do when I come back to it. Do NOT "finish it up." Otherwise, it's hard to get going again.

7 pm: *No more! Time for fun!*

-- x --

Sunday 3 p.m. Pushing on to the decent First Draft:

*I need to get a decent first draft done now... I won't remember any of this next week...*

8. Review my notes of bullet points on the Yes and No scratch sheet. Refresh my memory. Jot down new ideas. Then open up the draft.

9. Within each subheading, look back on my handwritten notes for the examples, evidence that have come to mind and type them into my Rough Draft in my own words just as they might appear in the final draft.

10. Revise and rewrite this draft, going back to my handwritten notes, class notes, and scanning the class readings again. Anything click? Anything raise red flags? Type these into the Rough Draft as paragraphs just as they might appear in my final draft.

"However, in spite of all this, (*Plato or this example or a personal experience*) does raise a question that challenges/rebuts, disprove (*an aspect of my thesis*). On this basis, I'd have to admit that... (*revise my thesis.*)

11. Switch sides: More scratch paper. Two columns of the Yes and No thesis. Brainstorm an argument for exactly the opposite to my position. How would I shoot down ideas? Best counter-examples? (In chess games, offer to switch sides half way through. If I'm playing White, offer to play Black, or vice versa.)

(Try a Quick Write from the opposite point of view. Or try this: Open a Word document and write an imaginary story of two people meeting in a bar and imagine the argument they get into over this issue yes and no. Write fast and wildly. 1 hour = 10 pages.)

12. Save this Rough Draft, then save again as Debate Paper 2 Draft.

5 pm.: *I'm outta here! Spring Break!*

- x -

Next Saturday 2 pm. Re-thinking and rewriting First Draft into Almost-final Draft

*Is there a paper due this Tuesday? ... Something about a debate? ... Better check my notes...*

13. Debate prep: Re-read the Debate Paper 2 Draft and notes, get a stack of index cards and write down the different examples, evidence and points, one to a card. Bring these to class and reshuffle them in the order I'll need under the pressure of the debate.

14. Major revising: In the Debate Paper 2 Draft, remove all the subheadings and read through for the logical flow of my argument, inserting and rewriting for transition words and phrases between paragraphs instead of subheadings.

4 pm: *None of this makes sense. No worries. I'll deal with it tomorrow.*

- x -

Next Sunday 4 pm: The Chaos Stage

*Omigod! I'm lost. What a mess! I've got a test to study for and this is due Tuesday!*

15. Quickwrite and new draft: Quickwrite my confusion as much as I need. Then, open another blank Word doc and save it as Debate Paper 2 Draft 2. In this blank paper, start all over again, trying to write it out from memory and taking any bits that seem good from the quickwrite. Keep asking; Get to the point! What am I really trying to say? Is this really true? Or is this just more academic B.S.? (Write in parentheses why my thesis is all wrong... These might be counter-arguments later.) Keep quickwriting my way from panic into coherence...

16. Look closely at my interpretation of my examples: What are these examples really showing? Any better examples? (Generally, paragraphs open with a general point, then my interpretation, the evidence and my interpretation. But not always. Rule #1: Rules are made to be broken. Rule #2: Break #1.)

17. Keep revising and thinking.

*Whew! Close call!! This does make sense in a way... Thank God for quickwriting!*

18. Quickwrite an Intro leading up to the thesis: Introductions often start with the known and shifts to the unknown, or new perspective that the paper will lay out. There are many basic patterns:

“One of the most common assumptions is that X is true, but this leaves out a crucial perspective that shows Y is true.

“At first, X appears true, but in fact, over time, an experience, (or example) reveals that this is wrong and Y is true.”

“One of the frequent debates is between X and Y. On one side, X. On the other Y. In fact, the argument for X is flawed, and I will show that Y is true. Or: But neither side is taking into account Z. I will show that Z reconciles the two.”

19. Quickwrite a Conclusion: Sum up in new, more concise words the thesis with the implied underlying message: “Therefore, based on the reasons and evidence laid before me, it's obvious that my position is right and Y is true.” Provide a glimpse of the implications, and a better future based on my conclusion. “If this revised, true perspective were widely adopted, we'd think differently and we'd behave in a better way.”

*I've got this down now.... This is going to be a killer paper! ... An A, maybe A+... !!*

6 p.m.: *Break time!*

20. Talk it over with a friend or roommate.

*Uh-oh, better re-think some things and revise!*

21. Rework it to take into account new doubts, new unexpected points, and modify my thesis to make it more and more precise.

22. When it feels right, save as Debate Paper 2, spellcheck and print it out.

8 p.m.: *I know, it's got problems... but I've done what I can... Already spent too much time on this... Hope I squeak by with a B - ....*

- x-

Monday: 8 pm to 10 pm (or later): Final Polishing:

23. Revise again, smooth and polish. Revise again. Revise again. Revise again.

*It's better .... maybe a B... So much else to do!*

24. Make all these changes so the paper is letter perfect.

- x-

Tuesday 8 pm: Deadline polishing

*Last chance to catch errors! A horse runs the whole race but wins or loses by a nose!*

25. Now re-read the printout for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Check my citations for accuracy. Make handwritten changes in the printout. (The printout always looks different than the document in a computer.)

*What if I can't open Blackboard? Why can't this university afford a decent system?*

26. 9 pm: File it in the Submission box. Make a printed copy for myself.

*Whew! It worked!*

- x-

Wednesday 10 a.m.: Computer lab Printing

*Well, I don't care what that teacher says... this paper is pretty good!*

27. Print two copies of the TurnItIn originality report (one to turn in to the teacher and one for me to keep).

*The prof is always saying not to work for the grade...work for myself...*

28. Relax! No matter what the score is at the end of the game, you've played like a champion. No one and nothing can ever take that away from you.

- x-

Wednesday, 11 a.m. Rooster crows! Debate Time!

“Ready to debate?”

“Ready to take either side?”

*(Still.... I hope I get an A....)*