

**Welcome to the workshop!**

Welcome to ‘Approaching philosophy exams’! By the end of this evening, you will:

- a. Understand [what is expected](#) of students in philosophy exams.
- b. Understand the philosophy [assessment criteria](#) and [grade boundaries](#).
- c. Have [resources](#) on preparing for exams, [writing essays](#), & how to [manage stress](#).
- d. Know what it is *really* like to do a philosophy exam, from the student perspective, and how to perform at your best.

**Session plan & timetable**

Time	Activity	People
18:00-18:05	Welcome, introductions	<a href="#">Stephen B. Ryan</a>
18:05-18:25	Some general advice on philosophy exams: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Assessment criteria and grade boundaries</a>.</li><li>• Tips on tackling <a href="#">exam questions</a>.</li><li>• <a href="#">Planning, structuring</a>, and <a href="#">doing</a> revision.</li><li>• <a href="#">Schedules, rules, format types</a> &amp; <a href="#">environment</a>.</li></ul>	<a href="#">Stephen B. Ryan</a>
18:25-18:30	<b>BREAK</b> <b>Submit questions for panel discussion</b>	
18:30-18:55	Panel discussion—The student perspective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is it like to take a philosophy exam?</li><li>• What I wish I’d known before my exams...</li><li>• What worked (or didn’t work) for me.</li><li>• Managing revision and stress.</li></ul>	<a href="#">Alessandra Fassio</a> <a href="#">Jo-Anna Hagen</a>  (facilitated by <a href="#">Stephen B. Ryan</a> )
18:55-19:00	Feedback and wrap-up: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What worked well; what was helpful? 😊</li><li>• What could have been done differently? ☹️</li></ul>	Everyone! Please put feedback cards in the box.
19:00-	<i>Free pizza at Teviot!</i>	Everyone welcome!

THE GOLDEN RULE: Check the [Course Guide](#) for up-to-date information on exams!

### **Some general advice on philosophy exams**

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The task in a philosophy exam essay is the task familiar from coursework essays: Give a reasoned **ARGUMENT** for some definite conclusion in direct response to the question set.

The main problem in an exam is time. You really cannot afford to waste any. The biggest waste of time is writing stuff that does not add to or support your argument. So plan carefully in a focused way, and write according to that plan.

In an exam-hall exam, don't get distracted worrying about the quantity of writing you produce. Spend a few minutes deciding what you will argue and how you will structure it. Then spend 50-55 minutes writing fairly solidly. The aim is not to write as quickly as possible; you can afford to think carefully about what you are saying and how you are saying it. Make one point per paragraph, in a logical sequence. Present an argument, objection, and reply. If all this is done, the exact length of the essay is pretty insignificant.

### **Tackling exam questions**

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Focus your effort on responding directly to the question; show in your writing how your response relates to the question.

“Unpack” the question: Think about why *that exact question* has been asked at all. (Why is this a question worth asking/answering?). What kind of question is it? What is the core problem/topic? What are the contours of the issue/debate? What key terms are there? Will you need to provide definitions of any of these?

What is the question asking you to do? What steps must you take answer the question directly? (What are the necessary ingredients for a full response to the question?)

### **Five-minute planning**

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Spend a couple of minutes thinking about how to tackle the question in front of you (see above). Think about how you can respond to it, given what you know. Plan your essay.

**Here it especially useful to have rehearsed a template essay structure in advance.**

Introduction and definitions—Position—Argument—Objection—Reply—Conclusion.

Formulate your conclusion first. Know what your argument is before you start writing!

Leave space at the start of the paper; add an introduction once the essay is written.