

Department of Philosophy  
University of Western Ontario  
Philosophy 154E (001)

## Topics for the First Assignment

Write a **1000 word** paper on one, and **only one**, of the topics below. Make sure you follow the instructions also provided below (and elsewhere). This first assignment is due on **October 16<sup>th</sup>**.

**This first assignment is largely exegetical** (i.e. has to do with the *careful interpretation of the text(s)*). There is little room in this assignment for critical evaluation of the position you are explaining/examining ... this will come later. **This does not mean you don't need to defend your interpretative claims/judgments!**

1. What is Brahman, and why is there an emphasis on Nirguna Brahman in the *Upanishads*?
2. Explain 'the' view of Atman proffered in the *Upanishads*.
3. What view of the self (uppercase 'S' and lowercase 's') does Krishna offer Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*?
4. How are we to live a moral life according to the *Bhagavad Gita*?
5. How is the goal of moksha consistent with artha and kama (i.e. two of the other purusharthas)?
6. How would Ishvarakrishna understand/interpret the practice of Yoga? Is there a problem here for the Yoga practitioner?

### *Instructions*

1. This is an exercise in *brevity and precision*. Do not waste space on flowery introductions or digressions (e.g. facts about the philosopher's biography). **All I need to see in an introduction is a 'map' of the paper.**
2. Take care in your choice of words. **Do not unfairly portray the position of the philosopher or texts on whom or which you are focusing.** *Do not say anything false* about the philosopher's point of view, or the position advocated by the text.
3. *Do not make claims you do not (adequately) defend (even when they are claims of interpretation!)* Provide arguments for your conclusions (or statements/claims). Your arguments should show the reasonableness of the relevant conclusions (or statements/claims). Remember the **ARG** criteria for argument evaluation: Are your reasons or premises **Acceptable** (true or probably true [if in doubt defend them!]), **Relevant** (pertain to the truth or falsity of your conclusion [or statement/claim]), and do they (adequately) **Ground** (or support) your conclusion (or statement/claim)?
4. Your paper should demonstrate *your* knowledge of the relevant topic. Take care to avoid using direct quotes (**you should not use more than one direct quote**). When using sources for your ideas other than yourself, *put them into your own words (remember, however, to properly footnote them)*.
5. Keep your discussion focused. **Stick to your chosen topic.** Do not try to cover too much material in your discussion. *Only move on to another point when you have adequately discussed the previous one.*
6. **Avoid clearly fallacious reasoning.** I.e. in defending your position: Do not appeal to questionable (or controversial authorities); Avoid mere appeals to the popularity of a belief; Avoid circular arguments; Avoid *ad hominem*s (or mere character attacks/assassinations); Avoid Red Herrings (or irrelevancies); Do not equivocate; Do not make hasty generalizations (or unfounded broad-sweeping generalizations); Avoid *non sequiturs* (concluding something that does not follow from what you have provided as evidence); Don't contradict yourself.
7. In grading your assignment I am limited to what you clearly communicate in the course of your discussion. Make sure you provide *clear* statements and defending arguments.
8. Make sure to include footnotes **and** a bibliography. You can follow whatever manual of style you wish, but you must be consistent and include all the relevant information in your citations and bibliography. **Be forewarned, you will not get a good grade for an assignment that does not contain adequate citations.**
9. Take care to avoid spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. I will deduct marks for such errors if they interfere with the clarity or accuracy of your assignment.

Writing a good philosophy paper is an acquired skill. If you need help in writing your assignments I do recommend utilizing the Effective Writing Program at the Student Development Centre (UCC 210).