

## Essay 1: Due on Friday, October 6 (before noon)

Essays must be **1500 to 1700 words** in length (i.e., this works out to be approximately five to six pages in length, double spaced) and no longer. Your paper must present a clearly organized and persuasive argument relating to the material we have read. You must use evidence from the text to substantiate your claims, and no secondary material may be used in your papers! You are being judged on the quality of your ideas, the manner in which you present those ideas, and your use of textual evidence.

Use **only** the assigned readings, which we have discussed in class, as source material for your essay. The readings for this first essay are limited to all assigned readings up to and including The Book of Job and The Bhagavad-Gita. Refer to the file “Thesis Prompts for Essay 1” to choose one of the four allowed thesis prompts.

### Easy ways to lose points on a paper:

1. Submission of a paper that **exceeds** the **maximum** allowed length will result in a loss of one full letter grade (e.g., A-to B-)!
2. Submission of a paper that **fails to meet the minimum** length requirement will result in an automatic loss of one full letter grade (e.g., A-to B-).
3. Excessive spelling and grammatical errors (especially misspelling author names, places or titles of works) will be punished to varying degrees of severity.
4. Late essays will be marked **zero**; there are no exceptions. (See your syllabus!)
5. Plagiarism will be dealt with severely in this class! You may consult the syllabus as a reminder of how I will deal with those who commit intellectual theft!

I work hard to be a fair grader, but time constraints mean that your graded essays will be returned with more negative than positive comments on them. You likely know most of your strengths already, but you require feedback to correct weaknesses in your thinking and writing.

### Points to keep in mind:

1. **Do not use a title page.** Simply put the essay title, your name, and the correct date at the top of the first page of your essay.
2. Do not use a works cited page. Since you are allowed to use **only the texts that we have read in class**, I do not need a bibliography or a works cited page. I do require that you properly cite your quotations however. For example, “Perish the day I was born/and the night which said, ‘A man is conceived’ ” (Job, 3:3).
3. Pages must be **numbered!** Papers must be **double-spaced**. Papers that are submitted with any other kind of spacing, such as single line spacing, **will not be graded**. You must use only **12 pt. Times New Roman Font**. Papers that are submitted with any other kind of font, or font size, **will be assessed a penalty**.

4. You must submit a **WORD** document electronically via the Safe Assign feature that I will set up on Blackboard. You must name the document **Essay 1.doc**. If you fail to do this, I will return the paper and demand that you fix it, and assess a grade penalty.
5. Your **thesis** must be stated in the introductory paragraph. It can come at the beginning or the end of the paragraph, or somewhere in between. The rest of the introductory paragraph should provide a clear **road map** to your argument. The introductory paragraph, including *thesis* and *road map*, is your *thesis statement*. **The thesis must be underlined or italicized.**

General guidelines for writing an argumentative essay in HON 171:

1. You will be provided with a set of thesis prompts for this assignment. The minimum standards that Barrett Honors College demands for a Human Event essay, and which concern you, are the following:
  - i. ***You must formulate a clear thesis.*** A thesis is a clear and specific claim backed by argument and textual evidence. A thesis is not just a vague or broad assertion. Don't waste the reader's time proving the obvious. Your thesis should posit an argument or perspective that an intelligent contemporary reader might not have considered and with which he or she might possibly disagree.
  - ii. ***You must defend your thesis via a logical series of arguments.*** The goal of the argumentative essay is to compel the reader to agree with its central thesis. You must tell the reader up front where you intend to take him or her, and then take them there step by step. Each paragraph should have a **clear topic sentence** or “mini-thesis” with the overall goal of supporting the essay’s central thesis.
  - iii. ***You must support assertions with explicit textual evidence (i.e., quotations from the text).*** Quotations serve as the evidence for your thesis, just as experimental evidence is used to support a hypothesis. Specificity is the key: you must “dig” into specific lines of text, and ferret out their meaning.
2. Re-read the assigned texts with a general idea of the issues you need to address in light of the thesis you have chosen. The study questions may help guide you in this general direction. As you read, highlight, note, or otherwise save specific passages that strike you as being particularly relevant to the thesis. At this point, you do not need to know why they strike you. But it is important that you be receptive to what the text is actually saying, rather than what you think it should be saying, or what you prefer it was saying.

3. You are now ready to map out the main points of your argument, which you do before you start writing. This provides you your overall scaffolding and structure: the actual writing will be filling in the details. You should structure your paper so that each paragraph corresponds to a point in your chain of reasoning. The first sentence of each paragraph should state the point that you will support in sentences that follow. If you do this properly, someone could follow the main flow of your argument by reading the first sentence of every paragraph. They could then look within each paragraph to see that you have supported your point. **Remember: supporting a point includes anticipating potential objections.**
4. Anticipate and address the strongest (or, at least one of the strongest) arguments against your position. Your reader will have little trouble thinking of a good counter-argument to your thesis (provided that you have truly staked a substantial thesis claim), so don't leave that reader wondering why you didn't think to address it!
5. Students often feel that what they have to say does not seem enough to fill six pages. As a result, they end up repeating themselves, or, worse, start wandering into discussions that have nothing to do with their thesis. If you choose quotes wisely, however, you will find that "unpacking" the meaning of even a single line can easily take an entire paragraph (if not more). The key is to pick good quotes, and to tear them apart until you have uncovered everything you can. With good quotes and a good outline, you can arrange it so that the paper almost "writes itself."
6. **Good writing is re-writing:** this is a simple, universal and guaranteed truth, and there are no shortcuts for anyone. You have to put in the work. While an experienced writer may produce a better first-draft essay than a beginning writer, few people truly produce their best work right out of the gate. Great writers are great because they are avid (sometimes fanatical) re-writers.
7. Obtain a copy of Elements of Style by William Strunk and E.B. White and another good standard college writing handbook such as The Bedford Handbook by Diane Hacker. These will assist you in the nitty-gritty of writing. (Yes, in case you noticed, the second author of The Elements of Style is the same E.B. White who wrote Charlotte's Web. Trust me, The Elements of Style is "Some book!")