

A Paper on Truth

Throughout this quarter, you will be building a paper about truth. You will construct the paper in three parts:

1. your initial personal conceptions of truth,
2. explorations into different philosophical approaches to truth, and
3. the implications of the concepts of this class (the ideas of Einstein and Goedel).

Your final, polished writing will include about 3000 words, 1000 words of writing for each of these sections.

The due dates for each of these sections are as follows:

- Wed 13 April (week 3): Section 1 (peer reviewed during week 4)
- Wed 4 May (week 6): Sections 1 and 2 (peer reviewed during week 7)
- Wed 25 May (week 9): Sections 1 through 3 (peer reviewed during week 10)

As the schedule implies, you will be expected to revise the previous sections and include them when you turn in the next section.

Objectives

It is our hope that this assignment, including the peer review process, allows students to

- focus on the writing process: brainstorming and researching, composing, revising, editing, receiving feedback, and rewriting;
- clearly communicate complex ideas by leading the reader through a well-defined, small number of steps to reasonable conclusions;
- investigate the concept of truth both personally and philosophically; and
- demonstrate understanding of the 'big ideas' presented in this program.

Criteria

Feedback will be based on the following questions:

- Is the writing engaging and clear?
- Is each section appropriately limited in scope so that the ideas presented can be developed and supported?

- Does each section contain the appropriate content? That is, does the autobiographical section contain personal experiences, not research; and does the philosophical section contain research, not personal conjecture? Are the ideas of both Goedel and Einstein included and discussed in the final section?
- Is there an appropriate mix of exposition, explanation, examples, and quotation?
- Is anything in the paper that is not the writer's own work (ideas, information, etc.) either quoted or completely rewritten, and is the source properly cited in some consistent style?
- Are general conventions of capitalization, spelling, and grammar followed?

Section Details

Your initial personal conceptions of truth

Take some time to explore what "truth" and "true" mean to you personally. What experiences have you had which defined these terms for you? How do you use these words in everyday speech? What are their opposites? How are they used in modern society? Give some examples of phrases which illuminate the various different ways that people talk about truth.

This section of the paper is not meant to involve research beyond you and your life. You can glance at other sources, but we are not looking for dictionary definitions of truth or examples from encyclopedias. We want you to explore truth from an autobiographical perspective. This is not an easy task, but it becomes easier if you realize that there are no right or wrong answers. Focus on the exploration, and work to create an engaging, informative piece of writing.

Explorations into different philosophical approaches to truth

Throughout history, human thinkers have struggled to define truth and outline its limitations. This has resulted in many different schools of thought about truth and how humans can come to know what is true and what isn't. For this section of your paper, you should pick one or more of these schools of thought, research the ideas, and present both a summary of your findings and a discussion of how your findings relate to the autobiographical explorations of truth you related in the first section of the paper.

This section of the paper does involve research. We will not be presenting these philosophical ideas in class, so it is up to you to find resources of interest to you and your reader. It is also important that you provide proper citations of the sources you use to inform your writing. Remember, we don't want to read what someone else has already written about philosophical approaches to truth; we want to read YOUR take on the ideologies of the past in relation to YOUR current conceptions of truth. If you find yourself just rearranging the words of someone else's article in an encyclopedia or other source, then you are not doing what you are supposed to be doing. It will likely be useful to use quotations from other authors (with appropriate citations), but the synthesis of ideas should come from YOU.

Implications of the concepts of this class

The two big ideas we are exploring in this class are Einstein's theory of special relativity and Goedel's insight into the limitations of logic and deductive reasoning. Both of these ideas should make you think twice about what counts as "truth." In this final section of your paper, you should focus on discussing the changes in your own thinking which have occurred as a result of the ideas we have been discussing in class. This may involve very unfinished, unsettled ideas, but that is okay. Your task is simply to represent, as best you can, the ideas about which you are confident as well as the the ideas which you still find confusing. Use specific examples from class to illustrate your ideas. And remember to keep your paper focused on the big picture – Truth. When you delve into the details of Einstein's and Goedel's ideas, lead the reader by the hand and bring him or her back quickly to the main themes of your paper.

This section of the paper does not involve research beyond your own experience of this class. However, you should feel free to use other resources including the readings of the class to illustrate the points you make. Just make sure that the points you make are all related to the material covered in class. Again, any resources you do use should be given credit both for any inspiration and for any direct quotations they provide.