

The Apology

In 399 BCE, Socrates was put on trial for corrupting the youth of Athens. He was found guilty and executed by hemlock poisoning. (The thumbnail on our Canvas site is Jacques-Louis David's *The Death of Socrates*.) The *Apology* represents Socrates' defense at the trial, his speech before the sentencing vote, and his remarks to the jurors after being sentenced to death. Importantly, the *Apology* is one of the Socratic dialogues historians believe most accurately reflects the words of the historical Socrates.

The *Apology* is notable for both its well-reasoned arguments and the boldness with which Socrates makes his claims; Socrates could have been acquitted or forced to pay a small fine if he had deferred to the court or simply watered down his public views. Basically, Socrates argued for what he believed was true in spite of the danger this posed to his life.

Over the course of the semester, we have examined how we ought to live our lives by investigating three questions: What should I value? What are the moral rules for individuals? And, how should we organize political power? This assignment gives you the opportunity to offer your own apology by answering these three questions.

What should I value?

The first part of your apology should be a defense of what is most valuable in life. In other words, you should present an argument for what sort of values are necessary for the good life.

How should I obtain what is most valuable? What are the moral rules?

The second part of your apology should be an account of what moral rules one ought to follow in order to flourish or obtain that which is most valuable.

How should we organize society?

The third part of your apology should present an argument for how society ought to be organized in order for the most people possible to fairly obtain what is valuable or live the good life.

Structure

Your apology can either be a traditional academic paper, a letter (like the Letter to Menoceus), or dialogue (like the Allegory of the Cave from the *Republic*). I'm also willing to entertain other formats, but you must get my approval for them first. I don't want to limit how you can make your argument, but some alternatives (e.g., a video or speech) will be easier than others (e.g., longform interpretive dance), and I need to know what people have in mind. Regardless of what form your apology takes, you will want to keep to the following basic structure:

Introduction: This section should include a brief overview of the topic you are discussing, your thesis, and a brief outline of your apology.

The three questions: Each question should be part of its own section that deals only with the question at hand. You should not, for example, argue about what the moral rules ought to be when you are presenting your argument for what is most valuable.

Objections and Replies: You must present and respond to two objections over the course of your apology. No question may have more than one objection, so you will ultimately end up considering an objection to two of your three positions. These objections and replies can either be integrated into the sections themselves (e.g., your objection to your argument about value could be in the section about value) or they could come after your answers to the three questions in their own section.

Conclusion: This section should summarize the main claims of your paper very briefly.

Works Cited: Since you will be referencing other people's work, you will need to cite that work in the text and include a bibliography at the end of the assignment.

Length

Your apology should be between 1,500 and 2,000 words, not counting citations, references, titles, and headings. Failure to meet this requirement will reduce your grade by at least $1/3$ of a letter grade. This penalty will increase as your length gets further from the requirement.

Citations

You must cite at least four sources in your essay. You are welcome to cite material from outside of class, but such material must be academically appropriate. It may be a good idea to check with me *before* using a source if we have not discussed it in class.

Grading

Your apology will be graded according to the quality of argumentation in each section. The three questions will each be worth 20% of the assignment grade. Each objection and response will be worth 15%, and the rest of the essay will be worth 10% of the assignment's grade.

For the three questions and objections, I will be asking two questions of my own:

1. Does the author's argument clearly and coherently summarize the view they are presenting? In the case of your objections, I will also want to know whether the view in the objection itself is presented charitably.
2. Is the author's argument well-reasoned? By this, I mean that you must present an argument based on reasonable, plausible claims and that your argument must be logically well-constructed. I don't need to believe your ultimate view, but I do need to believe that a reasonable person could hold it based on the arguments you provide.

For the remaining 10%, I will ask the following:

1. Is the paper well-written (i.e., free of grammatical and spelling mistakes that inhibit understanding)?
2. Are the citations appropriate? Is the bibliography complete?
3. Do the introduction and conclusion satisfy the requirements listed above?

Helpful Advice

There are several helpful resources posted to the Canvas site, and I would encourage you to use them. Also, many of the things you are being asked to do in this assignment are the sorts of skills you are learning about in Cornerstone. Use what you have learned in that class!

In philosophy, it is perfectly acceptable to speak in the first person. It often makes your writing clearer, especially when you are discussing your own view.

A good thesis does more than just state the claim you are defending (e.g., “I will argue that Andrew Jackson was a bad president”). A good thesis will also include the main reason for why you hold a particular view (e.g., “I will argue that Andrew Jackson was a bad president because of his actions towards native populations”). Because your paper asks you to answer three questions, you will probably have a three part thesis that will be three sentences long. This may seem strange or non-standard, but for this assignment, it is perfectly acceptable.

Good objections try to directly refute a specific argument, rather than give an argument for an alternative view. Similarly, good responses directly respond to an objection, rather than simply give an alternative or reiterate the original argument.

Primary sources are better than secondary sources, and secondary sources are better than lecture notes. Whenever you can, you should always cite the primary source, rather than someone else’s description of that source. The farther you get from the primary source, the less authoritative your citation gets.

Examples and citations are two excellent ways to strengthen your arguments. Examples can make dry arguments more relatable and understandable, and citations can quickly back up claims you make with strong evidence without taking up too much space in your essay.

Get an early start and take advantage of office hours. Students who start early tend to do better than students who wait because it gives them more time to revise and they are able to see me for feedback when I am more available. My office hours get very busy as due dates approach, and if you want to maximize the feedback I can give you, you need to see me early.