

Because philosophy is about the logical relationship of ideas, there are a number of rules of thumb about presentation. Here are four important ones.

E6. Four rules of thumb:

- a. Don't use a 'technical term', like 'the greatest happiness principle' or 'the ontological argument', without saying what it means.
- b. Describe a theory before evaluating it. (If you have described it in answer to a previous part, you don't need to describe it again.)
- c. Keep related ideas together. If you have a thought later on, add a footnote indicating where in the answer you want it to be read.
- d. Don't state the conclusion to an argument before you've discussed the argument, especially if you are going to present objections to that conclusion. You can state what the argument hopes to show, but don't state it *as* a conclusion.

For part (b), it is worth noting that evaluation is more than just presenting objections and responses side-by-side. Get the objections and the theory to 'talk' to each other, and try to come to some conclusion about which side is stronger. Finally, it is worth noting that one good discussion is worth more than many weak or superficial points, so choose two or three of the most powerful relevant objections, and discuss those in depth.

E7. Make sure your discussion is not just reporting a sequence of points of view, but presents objections and replies, and tries to reach a particular conclusion.

Finally, it is very easy to forget something, or say it in an unclear way. Leave time to check your answer at the end. You might find you can add a sentence here or there to connect two ideas together more clearly, or that some word is left undefined. These little things can make a big difference to the mark.

30 minutes on each part (b). This isn't exact, and you may want to spend more time on the part (b) questions, which require more planning.

E2. The number of marks available for each part should be a rough guide to how long you spend on it. But allow a little extra time for the later parts and parts you find difficult.

Before you start to write your answer to any part, read the question again very closely. There are two things to look out for. First, notice the key words, and remind yourself what they are asking for. For example, the question might be 'Explain and illustrate what is meant by 'power' in political concepts.' If you only explain, and do not provide examples, then you won't get full marks. Second, notice the precise phrasing of the question. For example, in part (b), it might say "All ideas derive from the sense experiences which they copy." Discuss.' If you don't make any reference to the view that ideas are copied (not just derived generally) from experience, again, you won't get full marks.

Because an exam is exciting (good or bad), many people have a tendency to notice only what the question is about, e.g. empiricism or power. They don't notice the rest of the words in the question. But the question is never 'so tell me everything you know about empiricism!' Every word counts. Whether you are describing, outlining, or evaluating, your answer should relate not just to the issue in general, but to the specific words of the question.

E3. Before starting your answer, read the question again very closely. Take note of every word, and especially the 'key word' which tells you what to do.

You are now ready to start answering the question. But, especially with the longer answers (parts (b) and (c)), many people find it is worth organizing their thoughts first. What are you going to say, in what order? This is particularly important with questions that involve evaluation, since arguments require that you present ideas in a logical order. If you've memorized an outline or a web-diagram, quickly write it out at the beginning so that you note down all the points. It is very easy to forget something or go off on a tangent once you are stuck into the arguments. Having an outline or web-diagram to work from will help you keep your answer relevant and structured. It will also remind you how much you still want to cover, so it can help you pace yourself better. However, you might discover, as you develop your answer, that parts of the outline or diagram are irrelevant or just don't fit. Don't worry – the outline is only there as a guide.

E4. Before you start your answer, especially if it will be comparatively long, it can be worth writing out your outline or web-diagram first. This can help remind you of the key points you want to make, and the order in which you want to make them.

All the questions ask for examples at some point. Finding and using a good example is very important. Good examples are concise and relevant, and support your argument. But you need to explain why they support your argument. An example is an illustration, not an argument.

E5. Keep your examples short and make sure they support the point you want to make. Always explain how they support your point.

Question Structure and Marks

The same key words always appear in the same parts of the question. This is because the marks given for each part of the question relate to a particular AO in a very strict way. For AS exam questions, all of the 15 points for part (a) are for AO1. There are 30 points for part (b): 3 for AO1, 18 for AO2, and 9 for AO3.

Why is this important? For the same reason that the key words are important. It tells you what you should be doing. If all the marks are for AO1 (knowledge and understanding), there is no point spending any time evaluating. And if there are 9 marks for AO3 (assessment and evaluation), then no matter how clearly you describe the theories and arguments, you cannot get a good mark for the question if you do not also evaluate them.

There is another reason this distribution of marks is important. It can help guide your revision. There are 45 marks available in total; 18 for AO1, 18 for AO2, and 9 for AO3. So you need to have a very firm grasp of the facts about ideas and arguments, and how to interpret and analyse them. However, you will find it difficult to get an 'A' or 'B' grade unless you also know how to evaluate them well.

EXAM TECHNIQUE: GETTING THE BEST RESULT YOU CAN

If you've understood the question structure, and know what to expect in the exam, the exam will not seem so daunting. You'll have a good idea about how to proceed, and a sense of how the parts of the question are testing different aspects of your knowledge. This section gives you some tips on how to approach the questions when you are actually in the exam.

Exams are very exciting, whether in a good way or a bad way! It can be helpful, therefore, to take your time at the beginning, not to rush into your answers, but to plan your way. The tips I give below are roughly in the order that you might apply them when taking the exam. You might be surprised at the number of things it can be worth doing before you write anything at all.

If you have studied just two issues for Unit 1 and two issues for Unit 2, you have no choice about which questions to answer. If you have studied more than two issues in each unit, you need to decide carefully which question to answer, and this means reading the whole of each question before making your decision. You might find that although you know the answer to part (a), you aren't sure about part (b). If you don't read the whole question first, but just start your answer to part (a) straightaway, you could end up wishing you had answered the other question.

E1. Read through all the relevant questions before starting your answer. This will help you to decide which question you can answer best overall, taking into account all the parts.

Once you've decided which question to do, you need to think how long to spend on each part. Here the marks available for each part should be your guide. You have 90 minutes for the exam, and there are 90 marks available. So you've got just over one minute per mark. That means you should spend around 15 minutes on each part (a), and

Exam technique

UNDERSTANDING THE QUESTION: GIVING THE EXAMINERS WHAT THEY WANT

This section is about how exams ‘work’. The key to doing well in an exam is understanding the question. I don’t just mean understanding the topic of the question, like ‘empiricism’ or ‘free will’. Of course, this is very important. But you also need to understand what the question is asking you to do. And this is related, in a very strict way, to the three Assessment Objectives examiners use to mark your answers. They are:

- AO1: *Knowledge and understanding*: how well do you know and understand the central debates for an particular issue, the positions philosophers have defended, and the arguments they use to defend them?
- AO2: *Interpretation and analysis*: how well do you interpret and analyse relevant philosophical positions and arguments? Are you able select and apply relevant ideas, concepts, examples, and arguments to support your account of an issue? Do you understand how the argument works and what the implications of a position is?
- AO3: *Assessment and evaluation*: how well do you do assess and evaluate arguments and counter-arguments? Are you able to construct arguments in support of a particular position, and defend it against objections? Do you understand whether an argument succeeds or fails and why? How well do you compare arguments and counterarguments to weigh up what the most plausible position is?

Key Words

If you look at the examples of exam questions, you will see that they start with different ‘key words’, such as ‘explain’, ‘illustrate’, ‘outline’, ‘assess’, ‘discuss’, ‘consider’, and ‘evaluate’. Obeying these instructions is crucially important to getting a good mark. If you are asked to explain an argument and you argue that the argument is unpersuasive because..., then you will fail to gain marks. And the same is true if you are asked to assess a claim and you only describe and illustrate what the claim means.

In the exam, each question has two parts – the first uses one set of key words, the second uses a second set. The first set – ‘explain’, ‘illustrate’ and ‘identify’ – relate to AO1 (knowledge and understanding). You are being asked simply to say what the theories say in a way that is relevant to the question asked. All the marks available here are for AO1.

The second set – ‘discuss’, ‘consider’, ‘assess’ and ‘evaluate’ – relate to AO2 (interpretation and analysis) and AO3 (assessment and evaluation). You need to present an argument, explaining and illustrating it as you go along, which aims towards an answer to the question, showing why that particular answer is the best one.

The key to understanding what the question is asking, and so to getting a good mark, is to take notice of the key words.