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Sample Paper Prompts

Précis

This *précis* should not be shorter than 590 words or longer than 610 words. You are required to include a word count at the end of your paper. The paper should be font 12, double-spaced, with regular margins.

A *précis* is a summary of a text. I purposely chose a text that makes many side points. It is important that you only summarize the main structure of the argument and if space permits, some of the important responses and rejoinders to the argument. If you go over or under the word limit, you will receive a 1/3 letter-grade deduction.

The following three things are extremely important: First, everything in your paper should assume that the reader or grader of your paper has zero background in philosophy. Do not use a technical philosophical concept, word, or phrase without explaining it by using simpler concepts and examples. Write as if you are teaching a competent college student who has no background in philosophy. Second, for this specific assignment, you are not allowed to directly quote from the text. Try your best to put things in your own words. You are, of course, allowed to paraphrase a particular passage, but make sure to cite properly. Third, do not use outside sources on this paper; only use the assigned reading in the syllabus.

PROMPT:

Reread George Sher's paper, "But I could be Wrong." Then write a concise *précis* of the paper. A good *précis* is not verbose. Read your sentences carefully and ask yourself: what words can I cut out of this sentence without changing the main substance of the sentence? If there are words like that, then cut them out. Most of these words will likely be adjectives or filler words/phrases (for more on writing concisely, see *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk). A good *précis* also incorporates all the important moves made by the author's argument. Identifying these moves is the main challenge of this assignment. Putting these moves in your own words while staying under the word limit is the second main challenge. You must proofread your paper. Check for spelling and grammar errors. The best way to do this is to print a hardcopy of the paper and read it out loud to yourself. Then mark down awkward sounding sentences and other mistakes. Unlike future papers, writing a *précis* does not require you to contribute anything critical. You merely need to summarize the text in your own words. In that sense, this assignment, if done properly, should help you to start to develop skills that will aid you in writing your future papers.