



Philosophy Teaching Library: Submissions Guide

Have you ever assigned a primary text to students only for them to get nothing out of it? Do they get lost, or not have the background necessary to understand what they've read? Is it impossible for them to productively interact with primary texts outside of class? If you answered yes to any of these questions, The Philosophy Teaching Library is here to help.

The Philosophy Teaching Library is a collection of introductory primary texts. Instead of leaving philosophical texts as impenetrable and incomprehensible, introductory primary texts facilitate student understanding via textual commentary, illustrative examples, and detailed argument breakdowns. Each piece allows students to develop their philosophical understanding along with their ability to grapple with further primary texts.

This is where you come in. The advantages of using introductory primary texts are clear, and many philosophy instructors are looking to integrate them into their course syllabi. Our library of texts is limited though, so we need your contributions to grow our collection. We know what our instructors want – now we just need to deliver.

Below you'll find a comprehensive walkthrough of how to create an introductory primary text. We provide detailed guides for each element that show you how to write and format the piece before we publish it in its final digital form. You can find a checklist at the beginning of this document to help you ensure that your piece is ready for submission.

Philosophy is not just for the ivory tower, but for thinking about how to lead good lives. Thank you for all the work you are doing to help students begin their philosophical journeys.

The Philosophy Teaching Library Team

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Quality Checklist (before you submit)

- Are the selections from the primary text 2,500 words long or less?
- Is the entire piece less than 5,000 words long?
- Have you noted the word counts for the primary text and the entire piece at the top of your submission?
- Does your piece have the following sections? Warm-Up, Introduction, Key Concepts, Summary, Want to Learn More?, and Acknowledgments?
- Does the Introduction a) give information about the author, (b) give the title of the primary text that you'll be using, (c) a link to that primary text and (d) any background information necessary to understand the essay?
- Does the Key Concepts section list 3-5 key terms with definitions?
- Are the key concepts in **bold** when they first appear in the text?
- Is there a Pop-Up associated with each Key Concept?
- Are there at least 5 elements of spice throughout the piece? These can include Argument Breakdowns, Connections, Thought Experiments, Main Ideas, Objections, Videos, Polls, Legendary Quotes, and Do It Yourself!
- Is there only one element of spice associated with each section of primary text? I.e. Each chunk of primary text should only have one of Argument Breakdowns, Connections, Thought Experiments, Main Ideas, Objections, Videos, Polls, Legendary Quotes, and Do It Yourself!. This excludes Pop-Ups, as each section can have as many Pop-Ups as necessary

Where to Begin

Examples

What will your final product look like? Below, you will find examples both of what your final Microsoft Word submission will look like along with what that same material will look like as part of the Philosophy Teaching Library. It will be helpful to continue to refer back to these as you are

- Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1 ([Google Doc](#)) ([Digital](#))
- Doubt Everything: Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 1 ([Google Doc](#))([Digital](#))

Locate a Version of Your Primary Text in the Public Domain

To maximize accessibility, The Philosophy Teaching Library is an open educational resource. In order to make this possible, the primary texts used in the library are found in the public domain.

There are many different ways to find primary texts that are in the public domain:

- (1) One helpful resource is Toronto Metropolitan University's [Public Domain Core Collection](#). Our translation of [Descartes' First Meditation](#) is a part of this collection.
- (2) Another possibility is the [Internet Classics Archive](#), as all of their material is part of the public domain.
- (3) Older translations enter the public domain when their copyrights expire. For rules on when copyrights expire, see [the Wikipedia page](#) on copyright and public domain laws.

Create the “Excerpts Version” of Your Text

Introductory Primary texts contain less than 2,500 words from the original primary text. This does not include your commentary. Once your piece includes commentary, it can contain up to 5,000 words. At the top of your submission, you should not the word count both for the primary text and for the piece as a whole.

Perhaps your entire primary text contains less than 2,500 words, but in most cases, some of the text will need to be omitted. In order to decide what to cut and what to keep, it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

- What passages give a helpful overview of the work as a whole?
- What passages make the essential points/contain the key concepts of the passage?
- What passages are most attention-grabbing or controversial?

Even if the text is less than 2,500 words, do not feel the need to keep everything. The point of an introductory primary text is to emphasize passages that are most relevant to the key concepts and ideas of the text.

Make a Title

Your title will be composed of two elements, an attention-grabbing phrase or question and then a subtitle that says what primary text you will be drawing from. As you have already seen, possible examples include the following:

- The Good Life and How to Live It: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1
- Doubt Everything: Rene Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation I

Write the Warm-Up

Warm-Ups are intended to be engaging, interactive hooks into the primary text, designed to get the readers thinking about the main ideas of the reading. Below, we have broken down the key steps to writing a strong Warm-Up. For examples, see the previously mentioned model primary texts [here](#) and [here](#).

1. Begin with the heading "Warm-Up:" and then provide an attention-grabbing question or phrase to complete the title of the warm-up
2. Create a brief and exciting lead-in to your reading. This may take the form of
 - a. A thought experiment or moral puzzle
 - b. A connection to a current or historical event
 - c. A short video that poses a thought provoking question or scenario
 - d. An example and explanation of the type of argument going on in this reading (i.e. Argument by Cases, Reductio, Genealogy, etc.)
3. Warm-Ups should not primarily focus on content from the primary text. All that will come later!

Write the Introduction

After the Warm-Up, the introduction will serve to bring the student into the reading before they officially jump into the text. You'll write a brief 1-3 paragraphs setting the stage for the rest of the essay. Your introduction should include the following:

1. Begin with the heading "Introduction"
2. Provide some details about the author of the primary text, including when they lived and died. Potentially relevant details include:
 - a. Where did they live, and what events were happening immediately before and during their lifetimes?
 - b. What tradition did they write from or follow, and what are its core tenets?
 - c. Any fun facts about their life?
3. Next, give some context for the reading. What are some of the author's key ideas? How did their contemporaries influence them and/or how did the author leave an imprint on the world? How does the reading connect with the author's larger body of work?
4. Provide a link to the full original text in the public domain

Identify Key Concepts

Key concepts are terms or phrases that are essential, iconic, or directly associated with the essay's topic (for instance, the Greatest Happiness Principle for a piece on John Stuart Mill, or Pragmatism in a piece on William James); in other words, they're the words that are necessary to understand the topic well.

1. Create the heading "Key Concepts"
2. List 3–5 key concepts in a bullet-pointed list.
3. Provide an explanation or definition of each key concept.
4. As you write your piece, the first time you discuss a key concept, you should always display that same definition using a Pop-Up.

A Note on References

You do not need to use a large number of references in your Philosophy Teaching Library piece. We want your commentary to be mainly your own commentary on the text. If you do use a reference, though, you should use an in-text citation with a hyperlink to the cited text.

The Sections

Divide the Text into Sections

Next, you will need to break up the primary text into manageable chunks.

1. Locate the places in the text where there is a natural transition
2. Add horizontal lines between the sections
3. Pare down the sections, eliminating any unnecessary text. Wherever you skip text be sure to add an ellipsis [...]
4. Label the sections of text. For example, the first section of Descartes' Meditations is labeled "Meditation 1, Paragraphs 1-2", and the first section of Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics is labeled "Book 1.1-2"
5. Create a title for each section related to its main point
 - a. In the *Apology*, Socrates's argument about not fearing death could be titled "Do not Fear Death", "Fearing Death is Irrational", "Who's Afraid of Death?"
 - b. These titles will be separated from the text labels by your commentary
 - c. Don't be afraid to employ some comedic relief!

Craft Your Commentary

Now you're ready for the most important part of introductory primary texts: The commentary!

1. Before every excerpt from the original text, there should be a note transitioning from the previous section and explaining the main ideas of the excerpt.
2. Use "[Spice It Up](#)" elements that correspond to what the section is trying to accomplish. Is the section...
 - a. Laying out an argument? *Compose an [argument breakdown](#). Point out an [objection](#). Or offer a [thought experiment](#).*
 - b. Providing background context? *Highlight a [main idea](#).*
 - c. Describing an example? *[Make a connection](#). Or find a [video](#).*
3. You don't need all the commentary elements in your digital essay
 - o The commentary you use depends on the particular context of your reading
 - o Feel free to reference the examples at the beginning of this manual for how to use each type of commentary.

Spice It Up

Introductory Primary Texts work well when they are engaging to read rather than just blocks of text. Here are several ways you can spice up your text. As a rule of thumb, aim for at least 10 elements of “spice” throughout the piece (this number includes Pop-ups, which you should include for each of your key concepts)

Insert Pop-Ups

Pop-ups allow you to expand upon key concepts and ideas in a way that doesn’t distract from the main point or clutter the piece. Below are guidelines for using pop-ups in your piece.

1. Whenever you introduce a Key Concept, you should have a Pop-Up with its definition
2. Pop-ups can contain more than just necessary information - it can also be a humorous analogy or fun fact.
3. Formatting: In order to insert a Pop-Up into your word document, highlight the text that should trigger the Pop-up, [create a comment](#), and type the Pop-Up text

Microsoft Word Example:

before him, particularly in how they were inspired by certain
 to create a basis for science that was not vulnerable to such
 the **Cartesian Method of Doubt**. Following this method,
 a chance he could be wrong about, even if that chance

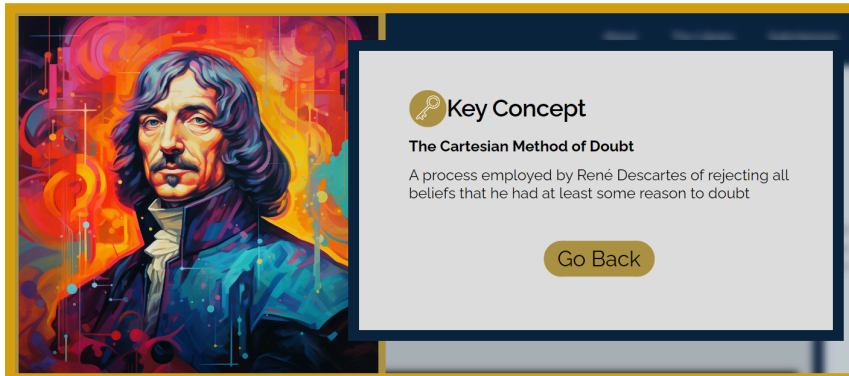
Anonymous

Pop-Up: Process employed by René Descartes of rejecting all beliefs that he had at least some reason to doubt

Website Example:

ains that he wants to establish a firm foundation for the sciences. Descartes disagreed with many
 how they were inspired by certain Aristotelian philosophy, and so his project was to create a basis
 order to do this, Descartes employs the [Cartesian Method of Doubt](#). Following this method, Desc
 could be wrong about, even if that chance seems very remote and far-fetched.

1. When the bold text is clicked, Pop-Up will be displayed



Argument Breakdowns

Argument breakdowns help convey the main points of the original text by breaking down the author's position into clear, logical parts. Below are some general guidelines for constructing the argument breakdown.

1. Before diving into the argument breakdown, you may need a recap of the author's main point as a lead-in to begin the section
 - a. Example: "Plato seems to cross a lot of philosophical ground in this section, jumping from individual culpability to community-level standards. Let's break it down."
2. Recreate the argument in premise-conclusion form.
 - a. Each Premise and the Conclusion should be in **bold**.
 - b. There should be an explanation for each premise after the argument
 - c. Feel free to any additional observations after the argument breakdown, but these are not necessary

Here is what an Argument Breakdown might look like, first in your submitted word document, and then later in its final digital form:

Microsoft Word Example:

Argument

The Evil Demon

In this passage, Descartes imagines a demon powerful enough to deceive him about everything he believes (there is actually one key belief that he thinks he can be certain about, but we'll have to save that for his second Meditation!), giving him at least a small reason to doubt all that he thinks is true. If we lay out the **Evil Demon Argument** using premises and a conclusion, it would look something like this:

Premise 1: It is possible that I could be deceived by a powerful demon about everything I believe

Premise 2: If it is possible that I could be deceived by a powerful demon about everything I believe, then I cannot be certain about anything that I believe

Conclusion: I cannot be certain about anything that I believe

Descartes motivates the first premise by imagining a demon so powerful that it could deceive him at will, creating vast and complex illusions. In this case, the demon might even be capable of deceiving him about basic arithmetic, so strong would the illusions be. But, as we see with the connection drawn by the second premise, if such a demon does exist, then we cannot be certain about anything that we believe. While it might only provide us a very small reason to doubt that the reality is as we take it to be, that can still be enough reason to prevent us from being absolutely certain.

Website Example:



Argument

The Evil Demon

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Premise 1: It is possible that I could be deceived by a powerful demon about everything I believe

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Make a Connection


Connections are exactly what they sound like – they link the main points of the text to broader ideas. What’s an example of living out Kantian ethics in real life? How does Karl Marx relate to Max Weber? Connections assist a student in understanding the broader implications of the text.

Here is what Making a Connection might look like, first in your submitted word document, and then later in its final digital form:

Microsoft Word Example:

<p>Connection</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Brain-in-a-Vat</p> <p>Are there any other arguments that can give us reason to doubt everything we believe? In our Warm-Up, we considered a world like the one depicted in the Matrix, where the experiences of most people are of a very sophisticated virtual simulation. If we think that this is a possibility that we can't rule out, then we could create our own version of Descartes' argument, starting with the premise that it is possible we are being deceived by very sophisticated artificial intelligence.</p> <p>In fact, many contemporary philosophers use a different thought experiment than Descartes' Evil Demon. In its place, they discuss whether we can know that we are not a brain in a vat. The example is discussed so often in philosophy, that there is now even an entire book focused on the thought experiment titled <i>The Brain in a Vat!</i> In many cases where this example is used, the imagined brain is kept alive and hooked up to a simulation by a mad scientist, but it could just as easily be controlled by advanced AI, just like we find in the Matrix.</p>

Website Example:

<p> Connection</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Brain-in-a-Vat</p> <p>Are there any other arguments that can give us reason to doubt everything we believe? In our Warm-Up, we considered a world like the one depicted in the Matrix, where the experiences of most people are of a very sophisticated virtual simulation. If we think that this is a possibility that we can't rule out, then we could create our own version of Descartes' argument, starting with the premise that it is possible we are being deceived by very sophisticated artificial intelligence. In fact, many contemporary philosophers use a different thought experiment than Descartes' Evil Demon. In its place, they discuss whether we can know that we are not a brain in a vat. The example is discussed so often in philosophy, that there is now even an entire book focused on the thought experiment titled <i>The Brain in a Vat!</i> In many cases where this example is used, the imagined brain is kept alive and hooked up to a simulation by a mad scientist, but it could just as easily be controlled by advanced AI, just like we find in the Matrix.</p>
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Thought Experiment

Thought experiments are a hallmark of philosophy. From the trolley problem to the veil of ignorance, thought experiments are a creative way to strengthen an introductory primary text and introduce students to other parts of philosophy as well. Like Making a Connection, a thought experiment can be conveyed in multiple ways (video, original text, etc.)

Here is what a Thought Experiment might look like, first in your submitted word document, and then later in its final digital form:

Microsoft Word Example:

Thought Experiment

Can I Tell When I'm Dreaming?

At first, Descartes finds it almost unthinkable that he could doubt his senses. But then he considers the possibility that what he is experiencing isn't actually produced by his senses at all, but is rather part of some elaborate dream. In this passage, Descartes entertains the possibility that everything he is currently experiencing is a dream. His nightgown, his chair by the fire, all of it. Descartes' key insight is that, if he cannot tell the difference between dreaming and being awake, then he has some reason to doubt the experiences that seem to come from his senses. So that's the question. Can you tell when you are awake and when you are dreaming? Are there any obvious indicators that give your dreams away? I have had dreams that were so strange that, right in the middle of them, I became convinced that I was dreaming. So maybe it is possible to tell when we're dreaming. What do you think? Can you tell the difference between when you're dreaming and when you're awake?

Website Example:



Thought Experiment

Can I Tell When I'm Dreaming?

In this passage, Descartes entertains the possibility that everything he is currently experiencing is a dream. His nightgown, his chair by the fire, all of it. Descartes' key insight is that, if he cannot tell the difference between dreaming and being awake, then he has some reason to doubt the experiences that seem to come from his senses. So that's the question. Can you tell when you are awake and when you are dreaming? Are there any obvious indicators that give your dreams away? I have had dreams that were so strange that, right in the middle of them, I became convinced that I was dreaming. So maybe it is possible to tell when we're dreaming. What do you think? Can you tell the difference between when you're dreaming and when you're awake?

Main Idea

Main Idea commentaries do exactly what they sound like – explain a main idea. Here, you’re able to focus an entire section on one particular idea to help explain a key part of the digital essay. This type of commentary can be used for multiple purposes:

1. One way to use the Main Idea commentary is to briefly cover what the author discusses at length in a non-central passage so that that text can be cut out of the introductory primary text.
2. Other times, the author’s key point isn’t clear, and needs to be explained a bit. In either scenario, the main idea element is your solution.

Here is what a Main Idea might look like, first in your submitted word document, and then later in its final digital form:

Microsoft Word Example:

Main Idea

Eudaimonia

What is our final good, the thing that we do everything else for the sake of? Aristotle says that good is ***Eudaimonia***, translated here as ‘happiness’. But it is important to note that what we think of as happiness can distort what Aristotle is saying here. When we say, “I am happy”, we often mean that we are feeling a particular emotion or having a certain kind of experience. But when Aristotle talks about *eudaimonia*, he has a broader concept in mind. He wants to know, not what makes us psychologically happy, but what makes our lives go well. He wants to know what it takes to live a flourishing, well-lived life, and so we can also translate *eudaimonia* as ‘flourishing’. So when you are considering Aristotle’s arguments, think about not just what it takes to experience a feeling of happiness, but what it takes to live a flourishing life.

Website Example:



Main Idea

Eudaimonia

What is our final good, the thing that we do everything else for the sake of? Aristotle says that good is [Eudaimonia](#), translated here as ‘happiness’. But it is important to note that what we think of as happiness can distort what Aristotle is saying here. When we say, “I am happy”, we often mean that we are feeling a particular emotion or having a certain kind of experience. But when Aristotle talks about *eudaimonia*, he has a broader concept in mind. He wants to know, not what makes us psychologically happy, but what makes our lives go well. He wants to know what it takes to live a flourishing, well-lived life, and so we can also translate *eudaimonia* as ‘flourishing’. So when you are considering Aristotle’s arguments, think about not just what it takes to experience a feeling of happiness, but what it takes to live a flourishing life.

Propose an Objection

Depending on the content of your primary text, you might want to highlight or propose some objections to the position expressed, either an objection from the original text itself, from another philosopher, or from you! Objections are a great way to demonstrate opposing viewpoints on a topic to readers and even spark insightful discussions. Below are some guidelines for incorporating objections into your digital essay.

1. Objections are not always necessary. You should only use an objection if it helps the reader understand the text better and is necessary to have an informed discussion on the topic
 - a. i.e., A digital essay on the problem of evil might be more helpful if it mentions popular theodicies like the free will defense
2. You can use a multitude of ways to demonstrate your objection (video, the original text, text from another author, your own writing, etc.)
3. If you'd like, you can include how the author of the original text, or the position the author represents, might respond to the objections. This is especially recommended if the author addresses them in the original text.

Here is what an Objection might look like, first in your submitted word document, and then later in its final digital form:

[Example coming soon!]

Show a Video

Videos are a great way to depict and explain different parts of the digital essay. The Internet is full of video resources on a wide array of philosophical topics. For your digital essay, a video should either break down part of the primary text or elaborate on its main ideas.

To find videos for your digital essay, consult the following resources:

- Philosophy [CrashCourse](#), [School of Life](#), [Philosophy as a Way of Life](#), or, just do a YouTube search!

Before inserting the video, provide some information about its content, noting any particular ideas readers should pay attention to. If needed, note sensitive content, important timestamps, a particular range of minutes to watch, etc.

Microsoft Word Example:

Video

Skepticism and Descartes' Method of Doubt

Check out the following video to hear Descartes' Method of Doubt explained by a philosophy professor:
[Skepticism and Descartes's "Method of Doubt"](#)

Website Example:

Video

Check out this video to hear the Cartesian Method of Doubt explained by a philosophy professor:



Quotable

If your reading contains an important philosophy quote, it needs to stand out.

Here is what an Legendary Quote might look like, first in your submitted word document, and then later in its final digital form:

[Example coming soon!]

Polls

Polls introduce some interaction with the primary text and the intellectual community reading the essay. Students will not only see how they answered, but how everyone else answered as well!

Here is what a Poll might look like, first in your submitted word document, and then later in its final digital form:

Microsoft Word Example:

Poll

Which of the Following is the Most Essential to Living a Good Life?

- A. Fame
- B. Happiness
- C. Money
- D. Love

Website Example:

 **Poll** Which of the following is most essential to living a good life?

 Fame

 Happiness

 Money

 Love

[Vote](#)

Do it Yourself!

We want students engaging with the readings with their lives, not just their minds. Do it Yourself! challenges are ways students can live out the philosophy described in the text. These can be anything from “Keep a detailed journal of how you spend each minute of your day today” to “Eat vegan for a weekend.” To use this element, describe 1-2 ways the reader could live the philosophy they just read. Be concise, but descriptive enough to explain how they should complete the challenge.

Here is what a Do It Yourself! might look like, first in your submitted word document, and then later in its final digital form:

Microsoft Word Example:

Do It Yourself!

When Have Your Senses Deceived You?

Descartes points out that there are occasions where his senses have deceived him. We have all experienced how a stick looks bent when it is half underwater, and how the road ahead can appear wet on a hot summer day. If we are following the Cartesian Method of Doubt, then because our senses have misled us, then we should kick to the curb all of our beliefs that are supplied by our senses. Can you think of any more examples? What is another way that our senses lead us astray?

Website Example:



Do It Yourself!

When Have Your Senses Deceived You?

Descartes points out that there are occasions where his senses have deceived him. We have all experienced how a stick looks bent when it is half underwater, and how the road ahead can appear wet on a hot summer day. If we are following the Cartesian Method of Doubt, then because our senses have misled us, then we should kick to the curb all of our beliefs that are supplied by our senses. Can you think of any more examples? What is another way that our senses lead us astray?

Ending Your Introductory Primary Text

To end your digital essay, you should (1) write a concluding summary, (2) add one last bit of spice, (3) encourage further reading, and (4) acknowledge your primary text.

Conclude with a Summary

1. Begin a new section titled ‘Summary’
2. Summarize the main ideas found in the passage, including the author’s conclusion.
3. If there are important connections between what the author argues here and what they argue later in the primary text or in their larger corpus, feel free to make these connections

Add One Last Bit of Spice

1. Choose a final commentary element from the “Spice It Up” section to follow your summary
2. This can be a good place to add a Video, a Do It Yourself! Challenge, Make a Connection, or include a Poll

Encourage Further Reading

Help promote philosophy literacy by providing an easy route to more knowledge for students interested in reading more.

1. Begin a new section titled ‘Want to Learn More?’
2. Compose a short paragraph that invites readers to explore more of that author of the primary or works with a similar theme, including links to make these works easier to find.

Want to Learn More?

If you’re curious where Descartes’ method of doubt ultimately takes him, pick up the story with his [Second Meditation](#), where he lands on a conclusion of which he can be certain. And for an overview of how contemporary philosophers think about skepticism, see the articles “[Contemporary Skepticism](#)” and “[The Brain in a Vat Argument](#)” on the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

Acknowledgments

Acknowledge the public domain primary text you used at the very end of your piece:

Acknowledgements

This work has been adapted from [Meditations on First Philosophy](#), a title from the eCampusOntario [Public Domain Core Collection](#). This work is in the Public Domain.