2019 Philosophy Subject Assessment Advice

Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the previous year’s assessment cycle, gives an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, and the quality of student performance.

Teachers should refer to the subject outline for specifications on content and learning requirements, and to the subject operational information for operational matters and key dates.

School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Argument Analysis

Students apply their knowledge of reasoning and argument in identifying and analysing the arguments of others. They provide evidence and reasons to support or refute counter arguments. For this assessment type, students provide evidence of their learning primarily in relation to the following assessment design criteria:

* reasoning and argument
* critical analysis
* communication

Moderators noted the majority of responses were the same as for 2018.

The more successful responses commonly:

* included the context and purpose of the arguments to be analysed
* included the standard form of the argument/s that were to be analysed in detail
* used the appropriate argument analysis terminology depending on whether the argument being analysed required the terminology for deductive arguments or inductive arguments
* showed a perceptive approach to critical analysis by going beyond labelling the parts of the argument being discussed.

The less successful responses commonly:

* inaccurately used the argument analysis term ‘sound’. This term should be used in relation to deductive arguments. It requires two criteria to be present – valid form (e.g. classic successful deductive pattern) and true premises
* inaccurately used the term ‘cogent’ which is a term used for Inductive arguments. This term also has two criteria: true premises and strong (i.e. premises have a strong link to the conclusion)
* omitted to explore whether a premise could be considered true or not. This is important to establish as it has such an impact on being able to apply the terms sound or cogent. This analysis also feeds into the student’s ability to generate marks in the critical analysis section of the perceptive analysis performance standards
* discussed the whole text in general terms rather than analysing one to three arguments more thoroughly.

Assessment Type 2: Issues Analysis

Students undertake three issues analysis assessments, one for each of the key areas of ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics. Students identify:

* why the chosen issue is a philosophical issue
* different responses to the philosophical issue
* what position they will take in response to the philosophical issue
* a justifiable defence for the position they have taken
* how they will communicate this position to others.

For this assessment type, students provide evidence of their learning primarily in relation to the following assessment design criteria:

* knowledge and understanding
* reasoning and argument
* communication.

Moderators noted the majority of responses are the same as for 2018.

The more successful responses commonly:

* analysed issues from the point of view of a number of different philosophers or positions allowing students to demonstrate evidence of their knowledge and understanding more effectively
* demonstrated evidence of their learning in the reasoning and argument criterion, particularly ‘Coherent and convincing formulation and defence of positions taken’, by taking and defending a position of their own, as a consequence of consideration and analysis of the issue from the positions of a number of philosophers.

The less successful responses commonly:

* gave a descriptive account of one philosopher’s position
* did not formulate and defend the student’s own position at all.

External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Issues Study

Students undertake one issues study.

They examine a philosophical issue from any of the key areas, choosing the issue in negotiation with their teacher. Students consider the following questions:

* why is it a philosophical issue?
* what positions do various philosophers hold on the issue?
* what are the philosophers’ reasons for holding these positions?
* what objections or counter examples are relevant to these positions?
* what is the student’s own position, and why?

For this assessment type, students provide evidence of their learning in relation to the following assessment design criteria:

* knowledge and understanding
* reasoning and argument
* critical analysis
* communication.

The more successful responses commonly:

* posed a clearly defined and well-crafted philosophical question, not just a topic area to discuss. This allowed for the focused development and discussion of the arguments relating to the question and enabled the discussion to reach a conclusion in response to the question
* provided nuanced answers to questions which asked “To what extent…”
* chose a question related to the one of the three topic areas in the subject outline (i.e. Ethics, Epistemology, or Metaphysic) not from Aesthetics or Political Philosophy
* ensured that the topic question gave scope for the student to explain and analyse a number of philosophical positions and the arguments for and against those positions
* focused on the philosophical ideas and positions as they related to the question, and didn’t provide biographical information on the philosophers
* ensured the philosophical discussion was interwoven as an argument rather than a series of paragraphs outlining many different philosophers’ points of view
* provided a detailed, perceptive critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the philosophical positions and arguments discussed
* clearly expressed their position in relation to their question and provided a coherent, argued defence of it
* referenced appropriately and presented a bibliography accurately and correctly.

The less successful responses commonly:

* had a general topic rather than a specific question
* used rhetorical questions
* lacked a clear structure
* did not reach a clearly articulated position in relation to their question
* were unable to provide a critical analysis of philosophical positions and arguments
* were vague in their analysis of positions and arguments
* presented a sociological, economic or psychological study and/or approach rather than a philosophical study
* were an investigation into a particular philosopher rather than a probing study of a philosophical issue
* communicated their ideas competently, but not consistently clearly, coherently or fluently
* did not adhere to the requirements of the assessment type in the subject outline.