

**In all but my advanced courses, I use a “levels” system for paper writing.**

**“The Levels” (33.3% of final grade).** Except for the last paper you write in this course (see below), all other papers will be part of what I call my “levels system”. The levels system is modeled on *video game mechanics*. There are three *levels* of papers for you to progress through, and you are allowed to progress to the next level only after you have completed the previous level. **Just as with levels in video games, the idea here is to insure that you are always working on a task that is challenging enough to be interesting, but not so challenging that it is frustrating.** The levels will prepare you to write the final paper for the course, which is itself a complete philosophy paper.

Your “levels grade” is determined by how far you progress through the levels. You have exactly *five attempts* at the levels, each due on a specific day (see schedule). After attempting a level, you will receive one of four evaluations: “not much progress”, “good effort”, “almost”, or “complete”. Each attempt must be written on one of the readings covered since the last attempt was due (hence, each attempt will be on a *new* topic—you will not be rewriting the previous attempt). Your levels grade will be determined by how far through the levels you progress, and which evaluation you get on the last level you attempt, according to the following scale.

- Level 3.* Complete = A, Almost = A-, Good Effort = B+, Not much progress = B
- Level 2.* Complete = B-, Almost = C+, Good Effort = C, Not much progress = C-
- Level 1.* Complete = D, Almost = D-, Good Effort = F, Not much progress = F

The complete instructions for each level are as follows:

*Level 1.* Expository paper, between 150 and 300 words. Choose one particular *argument* from the readings and explain that argument in a very short paper. We will be doing some exercises during the first couple of weeks of class that will prepare you to write this paper.<sup>1</sup>

*Level 2.* Expository paper, between 400 and 600 words. This paper will be just like level 1, except that you will explain two arguments from the reading that have some important relationship to one another. For example, you might choose to discuss an argument and then another argument that is an *objection to the first*. Alternatively, you might choose a second argument that *builds on* the first argument. There are other possibilities as well—the only requirement is that the two came from the readings and have some interesting relationship to one another. (When you write your paper, you should make it clear just what the relationship is.) As this paper now has a bit of complexity, make sure to include an introductory paragraph that briefly explains what your paper is going to be about and how it will proceed.

*Level 3.* Expository and critical paper, between 700 and 1000 words. This will be just like level 2, except that you will *also* argue that one of the arguments you discuss is unsound (i.e., that it either has a false premise or a bad inference). Your criticism here must be *original*, and you should be sure to defend your criticism against potential objections.

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<sup>1</sup> In other disciplines, the term ‘argument’ is sometimes used in a broader way than it is used in philosophy. For example, some professors might use the term ‘argument’ to refer to a *thesis, view, or theory*. Philosophers, however, reserve the term ‘argument’ to refer to a *reason to believe something*. Any argument can in principle be put in premise/conclusion form, the premises being the *reason*, the conclusion being the *something*. When writing your papers, you should make a habit of writing the argument out in premise/conclusion form in your notes. This will help you to make sure you understand exactly how the argument goes, and exactly where in the argument you are criticizing.