



Paper Exegesis

An exegesis is the part of a philosophy essay in which you summarize and explain the viewpoint(s) you're engaging with. In short, this is the part of the essay in which you describe the ideas and arguments that are relevant to the present subject matter. Exegeses are immensely important to the ultimate success of any philosophy essay.

Generally speaking, your exegesis should follow your introductory paragraph. Considering that the argument of your essay is a conclusion that you have reached by engaging with the arguments of others, it is essential to explain these arguments. The reader is not going to be convinced by your argument if you haven't given them the tools to understand why it is compelling. Furthermore it is important that your exegesis should be noticeably distinct from the argument portion of your essay. Though it may be tempting to infuse bits of your argument into the exegesis, it is important to explain the viewpoint you are concerned with before you formulate *any* part of your argument. You need to prove to the reader that you understand the relevant material and can explain it charitably, or else they may assume that you are providing a distorted interpretation of the subject matter. Accordingly, it is essential to keep your exegesis distinct from your argument for the sake of the *integrity* of your essay.

Here are a few points to keep in mind while writing your exegesis:

- To write an exegesis, you should begin by reviewing the prompt of your essay. The prompt will provide some guidance on what is relevant to the assignment, and therefore what needs to be explained in the exegesis. Make a list of the concepts, arguments, and points that need to be explained.

- Once you have a general idea of what you will argue in your essay, outline the essential points that the exegesis needs to touch on in order to provide the reader with the tools to understand your argument.

*Note: this should **not** be a book (or article) review!* Your exegesis should be concise, and should leave out what is not pertinent to the subject matter at hand.

*Note: this does **not** mean that you are allowed to leave anything out that presents difficulties for your argument.* It means that your exegesis should consist only in what is necessary to understand the viewpoint in question.

- Your exegesis should have a structure. It should proceed from point to point; separate distinct ideas in the exegesis with paragraph breaks. This will make it easier for the reader to understand how the argument in question should be understood (with respect to each of its individual points).

- Use citations in your exegesis (unless instructed otherwise by your professor). The use of citations contributes to the integrity of your interpretation – it provides the reader with a means of confirming the accuracy of your explanation. However, do not rely on quotes from the text to do the work of the exegesis for you. To learn about the format of citations, ask your professor, TA, or a philosophy writing tutor.

Other helpful resources for your exegesis include:

- The PWC guide to writing charitably
- The PWC guide to citations