

The Philosophy of Knowledge Assignment

MRes, MMUBS

An Essay Entitled: A discussion of epistemological issues relevant to my research

Length: 5000 words, use your word processor to obtain a word count and *put the number of words at the end of the essay.*

Deadline: to arrive by or be handed in by 3pm on the announced day

What: 2 stapled hard copies (from a word-processed text)

Where: to the Research Degrees Administrator (in the faculty office)

Along with: a completed submission form

Assessed: using the criteria listed on the structured feedback form (see next page). In summary, a successful assignment could develop into a section of the your PhD Thesis.

Guidelines to help you in writing the assignment

(These are *not compulsory* but are supposed to provide useful hints if you need them)

- **Read** Chalmers and some of the texts on the reading list (<http://cfpm.org/mres>)
- Read any papers in your field that touch upon philosophical background/positions
- **Try to sort out the ideas in your head** – work out what you think about these issues
- Start with a short section introducing the area/problem you intend to research for your PhD, including any aspects of it that are relevant to the following discussion. **You should not spend more than a page on this bit.**
- Describe what you think are the main philosophical issues/divides relevant to your research
- Try to make **arguments** for the philosophical approach/position you have decided upon
- Do not worry that you might change your mind later, this is just the start of the journey – make your best guess at a position you think is right.
- Review the philosophical issues/critiques/positions/methods that have been presented to you or you have read and decide which are relevant to you research and why. *If several of them are relevant*, do not bother with the rest. If you decide none are relevant, say why they are not relevant – careful, this is a hard position to defend!
- Consider any philosophical criticisms that may be made **against** your position and arguments and defend it against them or say why they are not fatal to your position.
- Be careful about assuming “straw men”, if you characterise and argue against a position, make sure you have understood what those arguing for that position would say.
- Refer specifically to some of the texts you have read and the positions/arguments by name.
- Consistently use a standard referencing style.
- **Relate what you say to your own proposed research** – give specific brief examples from your research ‘domain’ where possible.
- Be **critical** of your own position – a reflexive awareness of the difficulties of any approach/position is more important (in this assignment) than trying to defend any particular position.
- Demark, acknowledge and reference any quoted text.
- Make sure the text has a logical structure and does not repeat itself.
- Check the clarity, grammar and spelling of your essay. Read it to yourself or someone else to see if it makes sense.
- If you have any difficulties contact me *as early as possible* – and certainly before the weekend before the deadline.

For further advice, contact:

Bruce Edmonds, email: b.edmonds@mmu.ac.uk, tel: (0161) 247 6479, Room: nbs2.11

STRUCTURED FEEDBACK ON PHILOSOPHY OF KNOWLEDGE ASSIGNMENT

Understanding of Relevant Philosophy

Are the philosophical positions relevant to the field of study correctly identified? Are the subtleties of the positions understood? Are the difficulties and issues with the positions described or recognised? Are terms used in a standard way in their field or, if not, clearly defined?

Relevance to Field of Study

Are the philosophical issues identified important to the proposed research of the candidate? Do the philosophical positions described bear on the nature of knowledge in the candidate's field of study? To what extent do the arguments in the essay relate to the area of study?

Quality of Argument

Is the essay well argued? Are the arguments sound and carefully worded? Would the arguments be defensible (or even persuasive) to others in their field? Are there obvious and unacknowledged weaknesses in the argument? Are assumptions identified and explicated?

Evidence of Self-Reflection and Independent Critique

Is there any evidence of awareness of the difficulties, weaknesses and issues of the candidate's chosen position? Does the candidate show an independent critical stance towards the accepted "truths" in their field, making up their own mind and questioning assumptions?

Style and Clarity

Is the essay easy to read? Is it in a style that would be accessible to academics in their chosen field? Is it written in a professional style? If written in a style that deviates from the norms of their field is this justified and appropriate?

General Quality

Would this essay (suitably edited) be of a quality to form a part of the candidate's PhD? Is it of a standard and style that would be acceptable or even of interest to other academics in the field? Does it show evidence of having mastered the issues in a way relevant to the field of study? Are all sources clearly acknowledged?

Signature:

Percentage:

White copy to candidate, Yellow retained by Lecturer, Green to Office