

CSC290: Communication for Computer Scientists
Assignment 3 (due Thursday, April 9th in lecture)

1 Writing an Essay

Write a short (1500-2000) word essay answering **one** of the following three questions:

1. Many special interest groups (and some academics) claim that legal Internet pornography (i.e., featuring consenting adults) is harmful to society. Briefly outline one such argument. Identify the argument's major premises and explain how those premises license the conclusion (i.e., the paper's thesis). Then undermine the argument by showing it is unsound (see the FAQ for instructions). Be sure to defend your answer with scholarly research. Think about how a critic might reply to your claim, and deal with her objections. In addition, you must address the following thought experiment: suppose you receive a summer job offer to work as the IT manager at a hardcore gay male website. Would you take the job? Explain with reference to your personal opinions on pornography and the arguments you evaluated. Your essay should include all of the following:

- A clear, accurate, and concise description of an argument against pornography that has been given by an academic or special interest group.
- A clear and thoughtful evaluation of their argument.
- A clear and thoughtful explanation of the best reply a critic might give to your evaluation.
- A clear and thoughtful rebuttal of the critic's reply.
- A clear and thoughtful answer to the thought experiment.

Your goal is to clearly answer each component of the essay question while giving a rigorous defense of your thesis. **Important:** You must write in complete and proper sentences. In addition, you are required to read your submission out loud to yourself or a friend before submitting it for grading. You must manually check the document for spelling and grammar (though you may also use automated tools). You will not receive a grade higher than a C- (62%) if there are sentences that could not reasonably be read aloud (i.e., are too awkward or mangled), or if there are spelling errors a typical university student would be expected to find.

2. Software and music companies typically describe piracy as theft. Undermine this claim by finding three salient differences between piracy and (ordinary) theft. Even if piracy isn't theft, it still seems as though piracy *causes* software and music companies to lose money. So suppose it does (**assume this — do not argue for it or cite financial data**). Does it follow that piracy is immoral? If so, explain why it is amoral for consumers to cause software companies to lose money in other ways (e.g., by abstaining from purchases or by buying items on sale). If not, explain what would be required for piracy to be immoral. Your arguments should make reference to at least one ethical theory (see the FAQ for links). Think about how a critic might reply to your arguments and deal with her objections. In addition, you must address the following thought experiment: suppose a close friend asks you to write a new P2P protocol that would (seemingly) guarantee its users' anonymity (e.g., when pirating music and software). Would you help her? Explain with reference to your personal opinions on piracy and the ethical theories you studied. Your essay should include all of the following:

- Clear, accurate, and concise descriptions of three differences between piracy and (ordinary) theft.
- A clear and thoughtful account of the morality of piracy that makes reference to at least one ethical theory.
- A clear and thoughtful explanation of the best reply a critic might give to your evaluation.
- A clear and thoughtful rebuttal of the critic's reply.
- A clear and thoughtful answer to the thought experiment.

Your goal is to clearly answer each component of the essay question while giving a rigorous defense of your thesis. **Important:** You must write in complete and proper sentences. In addition, you are required to read your submission out loud to yourself or a friend before submitting it for grading. You must manually check the document for spelling and grammar (though you may also use automated tools). You will not receive a grade higher than a C- (62%) if there are sentences that could not reasonably be read aloud (i.e., are too awkward or mangled), or if there are spelling errors a typical university student would be expected to find.

3. The Internet has several infamous hate sites. For example, www.stormfront.org is one of the most popular white supremacist websites; the operators of www.godhatesfags.com have recently gained notoriety for picketing the funerals of US soldiers, though some of their most inflammatory rhetoric (e.g., “Thank God for Katrina”) has been removed (with some research this material can be found elsewhere). Use published research to determine the extent of hate speech on the Internet. Are these isolated websites, or are they just part of a larger problem? Then consider the effects of hate speech. Does hate speech have any benefits and, if so, do they outweigh the harms? Be sure to defend your answer with scholarly research. Think about how a critic might reply to your arguments and deal with her objections. In addition, you must address the following thought experiment: suppose you are asked to join a top-secret project at Bell to develop an Internet filter to shield Bell subscribers from hate sites, the list of which is generated by Bell’s CEO. Would you join the project? Explain with reference to your personal opinions on censorship and your research on the effects of hate speech. Your essay should include all of the following:

- A clear and accurate account of the state of hate speech on the Internet.
- A clear and well-researched account of the effects of hate speech.
- A clear and thoughtful evaluation of hate speech’s pros and cons.
- A clear and thoughtful explanation of the best reply a critic might give to your evaluation.
- A clear and thoughtful rebuttal of the critic’s reply.
- A clear and thoughtful answer to the thought experiment.

Your goal is to clearly answer each component of the essay question while giving a rigorous defense of your thesis. **Important:** You must write in complete and proper sentences. In addition, you are required to read your submission out loud to yourself or a friend before submitting it for grading. You must manually check the document for spelling and grammar (though you may also use automated tools). You will not receive a grade higher than a C- (62%) if there are sentences that could not reasonably be read aloud (i.e., are too awkward or mangled), or if there are spelling errors a typical university student would be expected to find.

2 Questions and Answers

Question: Should I use sections?

Answer: Your paper should have sections, though they needn't be explicit. Either way, your paper should have an introduction, a body, a conclusion, and a reference list.

Question: Where do I discuss the thought experiment?

Answer: An A-level paper will incorporate the thought experiment into the argument. For example, you might use the result of your thought experiment to support your claims. However you can still receive a good grade for simply tacking it on as a final section.

Question: What are arguments? What are premises and conclusions?

Answer: These are terms you should have learned in your logic courses. You can review the basics at <http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/arg/arg>. Most of the papers you read (and anything published in a scholarly journal) will advance one argument. The argument's conclusion is the paper's thesis. The argument's premises are the claims and evidence the author gives in the body of the paper.

Question: When is an argument unsound?

Answer: An argument is unsound if either not all of its premises are true, or it is invalid. An argument is invalid if the truth of its premises do not guarantee the truth of its conclusion. The easiest way to show that an argument is unsound is to identify a false premise. For example, one premise of van Schewick's argument is that "discrimination restricts users' ability to choose the application and content they want to use." One could attack this premise by arguing that choice is preserved in other ways; e.g., by switching ISPs.

Question: Do I need a thesis?

Answer: Yes! If you answer question 1, your thesis will look something like this: (so-and-so)'s argument against pornography fails because it is false that (the premise you're challenging); rather, (your conclusion).

If you answer question 2, your thesis will look something like this: arguments holding that piracy is theft fail because (summarize your three reasons). However, it (does/doesn't) follow that piracy is immoral: (your conclusion).

If you answer question 3, your thesis will look something like this: Hate speech is [not] widespread: (summarize your evidence). This is (good or bad) because (summarize your reasons).

These are not templates — they are intended to give you a rough idea of how to write an appropriate thesis. Do not copy & paste them into your paper. Talk to the TA if you don't understand why a thesis needs to look this way.

Question: When do I use a citation?

Answer: Anytime you write down somebody else's work — be it a quotation or an idea — you need to put a citation in your paper, making clear exactly what part of your writing is theirs. Once you're done your paper you must compile a reference list and attach it to the end. The reference list is like a bibliography, but it should **only** list the sources that you've cited in the paper: if a particular source has nothing worth citing in your paper then it's not the kind of paper you should direct your readers to.

Question: How do I cite a source?

Answer: See <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

Question: Where can I learn about ethical theories?

Answer: Read (at least) section 2 of <http://www.iep.utm.edu/e/ethics.htm>, (at least) sections 1 & 2 of <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/>, and (at least) sections 1 & 2 of <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-deontological/>.

Question: If I have additional questions, who do I contact?

Answer: Contact Phil Serchuk, at phil.serchuk@utoronto.ca.

3 Grading

There is no grading sheet for this exercise: papers will be graded holistically. You will receive a letter grade (e.g., A+, A, A-, ...). The grader will be looking for many of the same things that were required in previous exercises. For example, all papers will need an **introduction** containing

- A clear and concise introduction to any (and only) relevant aspects of the topic. For example, don't give me detailed data on pornography's economic benefits if you are arguing that pornography is harmful to women.
- A clear and concise thesis statement.
- A brief overview of the document's goal — i.e., what it is you are going to argue.
- A brief outline of the argument that follows — i.e., how you will support your thesis.
- Absolutely no unimportant or irrelevant information.

It is crucial that your paper is **well-organized and well-written**. This can be done by having

- A well-structured paper that follows a logical ordering.
- Continuity between sentences, paragraphs, and, if applicable, sections.
- Correct spelling (e.g., 'there' \neq 'their' \neq 'they're') and proper English (i.e., no clichés, slang, or txt msgs).
- A well-written paper that is concise, avoids rambling, and is of appropriate length.

It is crucial that you do a good job **defending your thesis**. You can do this by having

- Persuasive and relevant justifications given in support of the thesis.
- Scholarly research used in all but exceptional cases.
- Originality.
- No logical fallacies.

Your paper must have a **conclusion** containing

- A brief summary of the paper's arguments.
- An explanation of why those arguments support the thesis.
- An explanation of why your opinion is important.

Finally, your paper must make good use of **references**. This requires

- Properly cited references.
- A correctly formatted list of references at the end of the paper.
- The use of reputable (i.e., scholarly) research in all but exceptional cases.
- The correct use of quotation marks and block quotations.

4 Tips

- Discuss your ideas with friends and colleagues. Your ideas become stronger each time they are revised in response to a criticism.
- Don't use sexist language — 'he' is not gender-neutral and 'man' does not refer to all humans. When a gender-neutral pronoun is not appropriate, use 'she'.
- Don't write needless, flowery sentences. Humanity has not been wrestling with issues of *your topic* for thousands of years.
- You should focus on keeping each sentence as short as possible to ensure your paper isn't wordy and confusing. Your paper will be better if you use shorter sentences. Keep your sentences short.
- Understand the difference between 'their', 'there', and 'they're', and 'its' and 'it's'.
- Understand the difference between possessives and plurals.
- Avoid rhetorical questions. If your work raises interesting questions you shouldn't need to explicitly ask them of your reader.
- Don't plagiarize. You'll learn nothing, get caught, waste everybody's time, your money, and ultimately wish you just earned a low mark.