

WINNING ADVICE FOR THE REZENDES ETHICS ESSAY COMPETITION

from Gwendolyn Beacham, Seth Toothaker, Nicole Mercier, & John Bell

Since the competition began in 2001, first prize winners have been men and women from: Food Sciences and Human Nutrition, Women's Studies/Nursing, Philosophy, Chemistry, Business, New Media, Psychology/Philosophy, English/Botany, Biology/Philosophy, Journalism and Molecular and Cellular Biology. Read winning essays at the Thomson Honors Center or online at: <http://www.honors.umaine.edu/traditions/john-m-rezendes-ethics-initiative>

Pick your topic passionately.

The most important part of all is having passion about your topic. The reader can see it, and it will make your writing much more personal. You'll want to give more **respect** to your own arguments and support them the best you can.

Writing this essay takes a lot of time and it requires a lot of reading and writing about the subject, so it helps a lot if it's a topic you're interested in and passionate about!

Don't just say something like, "Abortion is probably the most heated ethical issue in the nation today, I think I'll write about that." Picking something at random can produce a well structured and supported paper, **but** it will lack passion and drive.

Use your time wisely!

Don't jam your writing into the last day before the deadline: This is standard advice, but it always applies. For an essay like this I recommend writing it well in advance and setting aside some time every week to work on it. Let it sit untouched for a week once you're done, then go back over it again. Not only is this good for finding ways to strengthen your argument, but it also helps find all the little typos and awkward sentences that you'll gloss over if you edit right after writing. **Quality of prose has a big impact on how well your audience receives your argument.**

Do your research.

Read literature about your topic before you start writing your essay. Be familiar with well known philosophers and ethicists' position on the topic you're writing about, their viewpoints are priceless--you don't have to agree with them, but knowing them will help.

You may have already read up on your topic. For books you haven't read, you should be able to find the most important passages supporting your views- I believe I checked out about 10 books from the library. Finding books shouldn't be too hard. Just goes with the start early aspect: **give yourself time to read the material before starting to write.**

Use books, good internet-accessible and reliable sources, attend events and lectures to gather information, and **keep your essay in mind.** You never know where inspiration will come from.

Think about your ethical framing.

Research many ethical theories before choosing the one you want to use for your essay. Once you begin your essay, keep that framing in mind. Think about how every point you make fits with that theory. Make this clear through your writing.

Don't panic, particularly over the length.

You're discussing ethics, which means there are a couple thousand years of writings in western culture alone to draw on. Odds are you aren't the first person to ever give thought to the topic, and referencing other peoples' work makes your essay *stronger*, not weaker.

Any major ethical issue that one can think of probably has entire books written about it. I had trouble keeping mine the length it was. But as pertaining to the length, my advice about that is start early, and don't be afraid to start over.

Try not to feel limited by length requirements: the nature of the paper and the data should be sufficient to fill the pages. The limit serves to inform the writer of the depth expected, but it should only be considered during brainstorming for topics and areas/arguments to cover, not while the words are pouring out.

Keep the writing important and concise, not superfluous.

Don't make it up as you go along.

Plan both the structure and content of your arguments, where you will draw supporting evidence from, and the general rhetorical tone you want to take before you start writing. That doesn't mean you have to sit down and write a 12 page outline for a 10 page paper (I hated it when people told me to do that) but you at least need to have the picture be clear in your mind.

Don't be the only one to look at your essay.

Ask at least two people to look at it, one who knows your subject area and one who doesn't. You'll get different feedback from each. Listen to both.

Revise, revise, revise.

Revision is the key to presenting a good essay. Personally I can't even count the amount of times I changed my paper. Eventually, it was the changing of **single words**, but sometimes a single word substitution can make a sentence much more powerful.

Evaluation Procedure

A committee of faculty members from the University of Maine will judge the essays based on the following criteria:

- The quality of the writing;
- Adherence to theme (2014 Theme: The Ethics of Discovery);
- The clarity with which the problem to be addressed has been defined and presented;
- The cogency of the arguments used to defend the author's position on the problem;
- The strength and relevance of the objections considered;
- The care with which the author responds to these objections;

The accuracy of any factual information in the essay, including proper documentation of source materials.

*Authors of the top three papers will be interviewed; while decisions will be based primarily on the written work, the interview will be a formal factor.

Submissions should be: 8-10 pages typewritten in 12 pt font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins, and stapled. Include a references page and proper in-text source documentation. Submit a cover page with name, title, local address, email, phone number, year in school, and major. The title, and NOT the author's name, should appear on the first page of the essay itself.