

Year 12 Philosophy Bridging Work 2026

A-level Philosophy is a popular subject which requires you to test your reasons for beliefs and attitudes through open debate and written argument. You will learn to reason in a logical, precise and coherent way. As most Y12 students have not studied the subject at GCSE, we have devised three tasks to help you gain a better understanding of the requirements of the course. In year 12 you will study Moral Philosophy and epistemology.

1. Read Sophie's World by J Gaarder. This is a great introduction into Philosophy in the form of a novel and complete the following questions.
 - A. *What is the author trying to get you as a reader to think about?*
 - B. *Pick one of the questions which the teacher asks Sophie (the one which most interests you). Why does it interest you and have a go at answering it.*
 - C. *Pick one of the philosophers mentioned in the novel and explain briefly what their contribution to philosophy was.*

2. Find ONE article from the broadsheet newspapers or use their websites which raise interesting philosophical questions.

3. Write down your response to this philosophical question; "Suppose Bill is a healthy man without family or loved ones. Would it be ok to painlessly kill him if his organs would save five people, one of whom needs a heart, another a kidney, and so on? If not, why not?"

4. Use the link below and listen to the following BBC Radio 4 podcast 'In our time.'
 - Utilitarianism
 - Empiricism

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05xhwqf>

Some people think of philosophy as an ivory-tower occupation with no application to the real world. They couldn't be more wrong. Philosophy lies behind every important decision we make and affects all aspects of our lives.

Philosophical thought has created our laws and our interpretations of religious texts. The way we treat criminals, how we structure our schools, the placing of CCTV cameras, the presence of GM ingredients in our foodstuffs, how much tax we pay, the availability of porn online, and whether we can have an organ transplant are all philosophical issues.

Thinking about ethical, political and metaphysical questions is enjoyable and empowering. It is essential if you want to develop informed views on the critical questions of modern life.

Philosophy will help you to work out what you think and why, and enable you to become the type of person you believe you should be. This doesn't mean fulfilling an ambition to become a film star or astronaut – it means knowing what is important to you and living your life by your own set of standards and priorities. There can be no more important or satisfying aim, no better work than person-building, and no better place to start than with yourself and your own brain.

Lots of questions – are there any answers?

If we want to know which of two mountains is taller, we can measure them both and compare the results. If we measure accurately, we will have a definitive answer.

Philosophy is not like that. If you say there is a God and I say there is not a God, we can both present our reasons for thinking as we do but there is no way an objective observer can be certain who is right.

We have no way of finding a universally 'true' answer to questions such as the morality of abortion, or whether democracy is the fairest form of government.

Philosophers traditionally drink too much alcohol and coffee, smoke too much and stress over the meaning of life.



'What I really lack is to be clear in my mind what I am to do ... the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die.'

Søren Kierkegaard, 1835

With no equivalent of the tape-measure-for-measuring-mountains, how can we test our ideas? We can work out through reasoned discussion which of two or more conflicting ideas is preferable. To gain anything, you must come to philosophy with an open mind and a desire to learn, to change or deepen your views. You may, in the end, find you still hold the same views but they will have a stronger foundation as they will be rooted in reason and supported by evidence.

Opinion vs truth

Because there are no definitive, external proofs, some people are inclined to think that philosophical questions are just a matter of opinion. But the lack of 'right' answers doesn't make a question a matter of opinion. Instead, philosophy consists of setting forth propositions and exploring or defending them through logic and

reasoned argument, refuting counter-arguments, and trying to edge towards the best possible answers.

These answers might well be overthrown by another argument – just as a theory in physics might later be replaced by a better theory. In physics, a preferred theory is one that better fits the observed phenomena and enables us to make predictions which turn out to be accurate. For an idea to be sound in philosophy, it must be consistent, without internal contradiction, inclusive, and, in many cases, universally applicable.

Is it ever true?

If we can't conclusively demonstrate the truth of a philosophical statement, does that mean we can't say there are philosophical truths? This is a question philosophers have asked, and – as you might expect – they have come up with different answers.



Few philosophers would argue that the murder of innocent civilians in times of war can ever be justified. Viewed from a modern perspective, the Austro-Hungarian army's summary execution of Serbs during World War I was clearly a war crime.

The question is not limited to philosophy: it is also asked of other disciplines, including physics. Are our discoveries in physics really discoveries of an objective truth, or are they just a convenient way of representing our observations of the world? It is possible that the truth is 'out there', but we can't be sure.

'Killing people is wrong'

Like science, philosophy tries to approach the truth. If we take the statement 'killing people is wrong', we can quickly come up with cases in which some people might not think it wrong – when a terminally ill person in pain asks for release, for example. This makes the proposition not universally applicable,

DANGER – PHILOSOPHERS AT WORK

The Ancient Greek philosopher Socrates wandered around Athens, teaching philosophy. His frequent debates with the aristocratic youth annoyed the city elders, who saw him making young people more troublesome and argumentative than they needed to be. He was eventually put on trial for corrupting the young and offending the gods. Offered the chance of a reprieve if he would give up philosophy, Socrates refused, further antagonizing the court. He was sentenced to death and took his own life under duress in 399BC by drinking hemlock, surrounded by his friends. He is considered the originator of Western philosophy.

Persecution is a perennial danger for philosophers. Totalitarian regimes often turn against the intellectuals in their midst. Mao's China, Pol Pot's Cambodia and Stalin's USSR all imprisoned and abused intellectuals because of their dangerous potential to encourage the populace to challenge the authorities. The same accusation had been levelled at Socrates 2,500 years previously. People who don't think are easy to govern and easy to oppress. Philosophers are the intellectual equivalent of arms dealers in the eyes of an unenlightened state.