

Philosophy Tripos 2021 Revised arrangements

The University is planning on the basis that it may not be possible for all Tripos exams to be invigilated in exam halls next summer. We have therefore drawn up a revised plan according to which almost all our exams will be conducted online. It should be stressed, however, that what follows is a plan, not a prediction. Some elements of the plan may have to be revised later, and the Faculty will issue more detailed guidance in due course.

Normal arrangements

The exams prescribed in the ordinances are approximately as follows:

Part IA: Four 3-hour subject papers (3 essays per paper) and one 2-hour Formal Methods exam.

Part IB: Four 3-hour subject papers (3 essays per paper) and one 3-hour General Paper (1 essay), except that (a) students may replace one subject paper with 2 extended essays (3000-4000 words) and (b) students doing Experimental Psychology do not do the General Paper.

Part II: Four 3-hour subject papers (3 essays per paper) and one 3-hour General Paper (1 essay), except that (a) students may replace one subject paper with 2 extended essays (3000-4000 words) and (b) they may replace the General Paper with a Dissertation (6000-8000 words).

Revised arrangements

Extended essays and Dissertations will go ahead unchanged. For other papers (with two exceptions--see below) we will set an exam paper on our conventional model, but to be done online in a 6-hour window during the Easter Term exam period, with a word limit of 2000 words for subject paper essays and 4000 words for general paper essays.

Open-book versus closed-book

In a normal year all our 3-hour papers aim to test both students' knowledge of a topic and their ability to deploy that knowledge in philosophical arguments. Open-book exams can test the latter, but struggle with the former. We therefore have a preference for closed-book exams. However, we do not yet know whether the University will be in a position to provide a scheme of online invigilation that will enable us to enforce this. We will therefore defer until later in the year the decision on whether the exams will be open-book and, if so, what forms of consultation during the exams will be permitted.

Special cases

Part II Mediaeval. The exam paper has previously had a section of gobbets which had to be closed-book. This year the gobbets section will be removed. A sample paper to illustrate the revised format will be available shortly.

Part II Mathematical Logic. Because of the difficulties involved in examining this paper remotely, it will be a conventional 3-hour closed-book in-person exam with invigilation.

Part IA Formal Methods. For similar reasons, this will be a conventional 2-hour closed-book exam with invigilation as in a non-covid year.

Borrowed papers

Students doing borrowed papers from Experimental Psychology, HPS and Classics will be informed in due course of the assessment methods being used by these departments.

Michael Potter
Chair of Examiners for the Philosophy Tripos
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