

## PHILOSOPHY TRIPOS EXAMS 2022-3

Thank you very much to those of you who shared your thoughts on the exam process. Following wide consultation, the Philosophy Faculty Board has decided that the format of exams will now return to the standard pre-pandemic arrangements.

That means that this academic year, 2022-23, **all Philosophy Tripos exams (apart from coursework) will be closed-book 2- or 3-hour handwritten papers, and students will sit all exams in a hall with invigilators present throughout.** Students with special requirements (e.g. to accommodate disability or for medical reasons) will have other arrangements: for details you should contact your College Tutor.

Arrangements for submitted coursework will be the same as in previous years: for details please consult your Director of Studies or see the relevant section of the [Guide to Courses](#).

We appreciate that handwritten in-person exams are not ideal for all students, and we sympathize with concerns that some students raised. In particular, we understand that:

- Many of our current students have little experience of sitting handwritten exams. Third year students, in particular, may be concerned about having to develop this skill from scratch.
- Handwriting makes it harder to edit answers.
- Some students prefer to sit exams in a familiar environment rather than an exam hall.

But there are also serious concerns about 5-hour online open-book exams, which is the only alternative available to us this year:

- The Disability Resource Centre has advised that 5-hour exams create special difficulties for disabled students: once extra time is added, the exam becomes so lengthy that fatigue becomes a serious problem.
- In an online exam it is very easy to write answers by consulting or copy-and-pasting supervision essays, including supervisor's comments, online lecture materials, or lecture notes, without having to internalize (or understand) them. Online exams therefore impact on the supervision system, discouraging supervisors from offering the full feedback and guidance on written work which is the hallmark of the one-to-one Cambridge Philosophy supervision. Online exams also impact on lecturers, who are faced with the bizarre and counter-productive task of delivering lectures and handouts that are not too helpful for exams.
- There are serious concerns about the vulnerability of online exams to cheating, plagiarism, and external collaboration. In the online system there is no realistic way to safeguard against this. The effect of this is that we cannot guarantee the integrity of the examinations, devaluing the degrees awarded to all students.

We have taken the view that these concerns—in particular, our determination to defend the integrity and reputation of a Cambridge philosophy degree, and to protect the Cambridge supervision system—override the reasonable concerns that many students will have about adapting to an unfamiliar exam format. Oxford philosophy has already reverted to handwritten exams, as elsewhere in the humanities at Oxford, in large part in response to the same concerns over the integrity of the exams.

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The Philosophy Faculty Board does not regard this solution as ideal. In our view, the best arrangement would be invigilated closed-book exams in which students could type answers. Despite repeated requests, the University has only permitted a few Faculties (not including Philosophy) to offer this. We will continue to press the University, urgently and as a matter of priority, to make in-person typed exams available to our students.

In the meantime, we expect that examinations will be hand-written, and over the coming year you should prepare for exams accordingly. (Again, students with special requirements might have alternative arrangements in place, and should consult their College Tutor.)

We are confident that, given a full year to prepare, students will have time to accustom themselves to the handwritten format. For instance, pre-pandemic it was common for students to choose to handwrite all notes and essays during the Easter term, completing practice essays under timed closed-book conditions. At the end of Lent Term, Prof. Chambers will offer a special lecture to all students on Revision and Exam Technique, in which she will specifically address how to prepare for this year's exams format.

While handwritten in-person exams are new to some of you, they have been used by Cambridge Philosophy for decades. The Faculty is experienced in supporting students so that they can perform at their best in this format. We are confident that a return to in-person exams best enables us to assess you fairly while maintaining the value of a Cambridge degree.

Arif Ahmed, Chair of Examiners

Alexander Bird, Chair of Faculty Board

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