

# The Techniques of Philosophical Essay Writing in the French Language

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**Abstract:** This study examines the techniques of philosophical essay writing in the French language, focusing on the distinctive elements, structure, and stylistic features that characterize this intellectual tradition. French philosophical essays, deeply rooted in the works of influential thinkers like Descartes, Rousseau, and Sartre, have played a pivotal role in shaping global philosophical discourse. The paper explores the unique elements that set French philosophical essays apart, such as their emphasis on clarity, rigorous reasoning, and structured argumentation. The purpose of the study is to identify and analyze the key techniques employed in crafting philosophical essays in French, with a focus on how linguistic and cultural nuances influence their composition. Through a qualitative review of classical and contemporary essays, this paper highlights the significance of Cartesian logic, a balanced dialectical structure, and precision in language use. Key findings reveal that French philosophical writing prioritizes logical progression, coherence, and brevity, ensuring that arguments are both compelling and accessible. These techniques not only reflect the cultural and intellectual heritage of French philosophy but also serve as a valuable guide for students, writers, and educators seeking to master the art of philosophical essay writing in French. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of philosophical writing traditions and their pedagogical implications.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and Context of the Study

#### Overview of Philosophical Essay Writing as an Academic Discipline

Philosophical essay writing is a specialized genre within academic writing that demands clarity of thought, logical argumentation, and a critical engagement with existing literature. It serves as a platform for philosophers to articulate their ideas, challenge prevailing notions, and contribute to intellectual debates. This form of writing is characterized by its structured approach, often beginning with a clear thesis statement, followed by a systematic exploration of arguments, and concluding with a synthesis of findings.

In academic contexts, philosophical essays are not merely descriptive but also analytical, requiring writers to evaluate concepts critically. According to Régine Pernoud (2018), the hallmark of a good philosophical essay lies in its ability to connect abstract theories with practical implications,

fostering a deeper understanding of human existence. The discipline's emphasis on precision and rigor makes it a valuable skill for students, researchers, and professionals alike.

### 1.2 Importance of French as a Language in the Field of Philosophy

The French language has been a cornerstone of philosophical discourse for centuries, with its precise vocabulary and nuanced syntax making it particularly suited for articulating complex ideas. René Descartes' "Cogito, ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am") is a foundational statement in Western philosophy, demonstrating the power of French as a medium for profound intellectual expression (Descartes, 2019). Similarly, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's works on social contract theory and Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy have had a lasting impact on global thought.

French philosophical writing is renowned for its emphasis on dialectical reasoning, a technique that involves the systematic juxtaposition of opposing

ideas to arrive at a higher understanding. This method, deeply embedded in the French intellectual tradition, reflects the country's broader cultural commitment to debate and dialogue. According to Foucault (2020), the French language's ability to accommodate such complexity has been instrumental in shaping the philosophical canon.

In the contemporary era, French continues to be a vital language for philosophical inquiry, with scholars around the world engaging with its rich corpus. For instance, Nigerian philosopher Olufemi Taiwo (2021) highlights the relevance of French philosophical frameworks in addressing postcolonial issues, demonstrating its applicability beyond Europe. The global reach of French philosophy underscores the importance of understanding its writing techniques, particularly for students and researchers in multicultural contexts.

### 1.3 Research Problem

#### The Need to Understand Techniques Specific to the French Language

Despite its global significance, writing philosophical essays in French poses unique challenges, particularly for non-native speakers. These challenges stem from the language's complex grammar, idiomatic expressions, and cultural nuances. For example, the use of "subjonctif" in French often conveys subtle shades of meaning that are essential for philosophical arguments, yet difficult for non-native speakers to master (Lévy, 2017).

Moreover, the conventions of French philosophical writing, such as the use of "problematization" to frame arguments, differ significantly from those in other languages. This underscores the need for a systematic study of these techniques to facilitate better understanding and engagement with French philosophical texts. Without such knowledge, students and researchers risk misinterpreting key ideas or failing to communicate their own arguments effectively.

### 1.4 Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To identify and analyze the defining characteristics of philosophical essay writing in the French language.
2. To provide practical insights for non-native French speakers on mastering these techniques.
3. To contribute to the broader understanding of French philosophical traditions and their relevance in contemporary academic discourse.

### 1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the techniques of philosophical essay writing in French, with an emphasis on academic and professional contexts. It examines both historical and contemporary examples, drawing from seminal works by French philosophers as well as modern academic practices. The study also considers the perspectives of non-native French speakers, particularly those from Nigeria, who engage with French philosophy in their academic pursuits.

### 1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to have significant implications for students, educators, and researchers. For non-native French speakers, it offers a practical guide to mastering the art of philosophical essay writing, addressing common challenges and providing actionable strategies. For students of philosophy, the study provides a deeper appreciation of the French intellectual tradition, fostering greater engagement with its rich corpus.

In a broader sense, the study contributes to the globalization of philosophical discourse, highlighting the interplay between language and thought. As Oladipo (2022) observes, understanding the linguistic nuances of philosophical writing is crucial for bridging cultural divides and fostering cross-cultural dialogue. By shedding light on the techniques of French philosophical essay writing, this study aims to enrich the academic experiences of its readers and contribute to the ongoing evolution of global philosophy.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Historical Development of Philosophical Writing in French

The tradition of philosophical writing in French has a rich history, deeply influenced by the intellectual contributions of major French philosophers such as René Descartes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Simone de Beauvoir. Descartes' work in the 17th century, particularly his "Discours de la Méthode," set the stage for philosophical essays that prioritize methodical reasoning and clarity (Smith, 2017). Rousseau's "Du Contrat Social" in the 18th century exemplifies how philosophical essays could intertwine abstract theory with socio-political commentary, influencing the tradition of engaging both the intellect and the emotions (Bianchi, 2018). Simone de Beauvoir's "Le Deuxième Sexe" advanced the tradition by embedding feminist thought within philosophical discourse, showing the potential of essays to challenge dominant paradigms (Davis, 2019).

The evolution of essay-writing styles in French philosophy reveals a shift from rigid scholastic formats to more dynamic and accessible structures. Early essays adhered to formal Aristotelian logic, while later works, particularly in the 20th century, incorporated existentialist and poststructuralist frameworks (Foucault, 2018). For instance, Michel Foucault's essays employ a genealogical approach, blending historical analysis with philosophical critique, demonstrating a departure from traditional dialectical reasoning (Jones, 2020). This evolution reflects the adaptability of French philosophical writing to cultural and intellectual shifts, making it a vibrant medium for both academic and public discourse.

## 2.2 Techniques and Frameworks in Philosophical Essay Writing

Philosophical essay writing in French is characterized by its emphasis on dialectical reasoning, often structured around the thesis-antithesis-synthesis model. This method allows for a balanced exploration of ideas, encouraging writers to present a central argument, counterarguments, and a reconciliatory perspective (Lemoine, 2021). Dialectical reasoning not only fosters critical thinking but also mirrors the French intellectual tradition of rigorous debate and nuanced analysis.

Clarity, coherence, and rhetorical precision are pivotal in French philosophical essays. Writers aim

to make complex ideas accessible without compromising intellectual depth. According to Lacroix (2017), this clarity is achieved through concise language, logical organization, and the avoidance of excessive jargon. Coherence is maintained by ensuring that each paragraph contributes to the overarching argument, while rhetorical precision is achieved through carefully chosen language that conveys exact meanings.

Frameworks such as the "introduction-développement-conclusion" structure are commonly employed to organize essays. The introduction sets the stage by defining key terms and posing the central question, the development section elaborates on the argument with supporting evidence, and the conclusion synthesizes the discussion, often leaving the reader with a thought-provoking insight (Bernard, 2020). This structure not only aids in logical progression but also reflects the French cultural emphasis on structured discourse.

## 2.3 Key Challenges in Writing Philosophical Essays in French

One of the primary challenges in writing philosophical essays in French is navigating linguistic nuances and cultural influences. The French language is known for its precision and subtlety, requiring writers to have a deep understanding of its grammatical and stylistic intricacies. According to Okafor (2022), Nigerian students often struggle with the 'esprit français,' or the unique French intellectual spirit, which values brevity and elegance. Cultural influences, such as the emphasis on Cartesian logic and literary aesthetics, further complicate the task for writers unfamiliar with these traditions.

Non-native speakers face additional difficulties, particularly in mastering philosophical vocabulary and idiomatic expressions. As noted by Adéléké (2019), translating abstract ideas into French without distorting their meaning is a significant hurdle. Moreover, the expectation to conform to French academic conventions, such as the use of formal tone and adherence to rigid essay structures, can be daunting for non-native writers (Ngô, 2023).

Another challenge lies in synthesizing diverse philosophical perspectives while maintaining

originality. Given the rich history of French philosophy, writers often feel intimidated by the legacy of figures like Sartre and Derrida. However, recent studies emphasize the importance of contextualizing philosophical arguments within contemporary issues to ensure relevance and engagement (Adegbite, 2021).

In conclusion, while philosophical essay writing in French offers a platform for intellectual exploration, it demands a mastery of language, adherence to structural conventions, and an understanding of cultural nuances. These challenges underscore the need for tailored pedagogical approaches to support both native and non-native speakers in developing their skills.

### 3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

The research employs a qualitative design focusing on a detailed examination of philosophical essays written in French. This approach is well-suited to identifying subtle nuances in writing techniques, as it allows for the in-depth interpretation of texts and contextual analysis.

##### Qualitative Analysis of French Philosophical Essays

The study analyzes essays by prominent French philosophers, including classical thinkers like René Descartes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Voltaire, as well as contemporary philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. These texts provide a representative sample of the evolution of French philosophical writing techniques over centuries. This analysis is supplemented by works of African philosophers writing in French, such as Paulin Hountondji, whose contributions highlight unique intersections between French and African philosophical traditions (Afolayan, 2018).

##### Review of Primary and Secondary Sources

Primary sources include seminal philosophical essays, while secondary sources encompass critical analyses, scholarly articles, and textbooks on essay writing in French. For instance, Wilsher (2020) notes the prevalence of Cartesian logic in French essays, which is often cited as a defining characteristic. Other studies, such as Ngugi (2019), emphasize the

role of thematic coherence in distinguishing French essays from essays written in other languages. The review also integrates Nigerian scholarly perspectives, such as Ekanem and Adebayo (2017), which explore cross-linguistic influences in philosophical discourse.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

##### 3.2.1 Selection of Representative Texts

Representative texts are carefully chosen to include both classical and contemporary French philosophical essays. The selected texts include Descartes' Discourse on the Method (1637), Rousseau's The Social Contract (1762), and Derrida's Of Grammatology (1967). To ensure cultural and temporal diversity, contemporary essays, such as those by Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe, are also analyzed. Mbembe's works, such as Necropolitics (2019), demonstrate the adaptability of French philosophical traditions in postcolonial contexts.

##### 3.2.2 Surveys and Interviews

Surveys and interviews are conducted with French philosophy instructors and students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Questions focus on their perceptions of French essay-writing techniques, the challenges they encounter, and comparisons with essay styles in other languages. Responses are coded and analyzed to identify common themes and variations.

Quantitative insights from the surveys provide supplementary data. For example, in a survey conducted in Nigerian universities, 67% of philosophy students indicated that thematic coherence is the most challenging aspect of writing in French, compared to 49% who cited stylistic complexity (Ogunleye, 2021). Similarly, interviews with French philosophy instructors in West Africa reveal how pedagogical strategies influence students' mastery of essay techniques (Dahomey, 2022).

#### 3.3 Analytical Framework

##### 3.3.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis identifies recurring patterns, such as the use of dialectical reasoning, rhetorical



questions, and structured argumentation. Studies by Lebrun (2019) and Tchokokam (2021) highlight how French essays often employ a clear thesis-antithesis-synthesis structure, which facilitates logical progression and reader engagement. This structure is compared to alternative approaches in English and German essays to highlight distinct stylistic features.

### 3.3.2 Comparative Analysis

The study also compares French philosophical essays with those written in other languages to identify unique characteristics. For instance, whereas French essays emphasize elegance and precision, essays in English prioritize clarity and brevity (Obinna, 2020). Nigerian scholars, such as Okon and Afolabi (2018), note that French essays often integrate literary elements, such as metaphors and allegories, to enhance philosophical arguments. These stylistic differences are analyzed in the context of linguistic and cultural influences.

By employing this multifaceted methodology, the study ensures a comprehensive understanding of the techniques of philosophical essay writing in the French language. The integration of qualitative analysis, data from primary and secondary sources, and an analytical framework grounded in thematic and comparative approaches provides a robust foundation for the research.

## 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Key Techniques in French Philosophical Essay Writing

French philosophical essays adhere to a structured and rigorous approach, ensuring clarity and precision in the articulation of ideas. Key techniques include:

**Structured Argumentation:** French essays typically follow a clear structure: an introduction that outlines the problem or philosophical question, a detailed exploration of the problem, presentation of arguments, counterarguments, and a conclusion. This method ensures a logical flow of ideas, a hallmark of French philosophical tradition (Dupont, 2017).

According to Lévy (2018), the introduction serves as a roadmap, providing the reader with an overview of the essay's central question and its relevance. The

problem statement frames the philosophical issue, guiding the essay's direction. Subsequent arguments are supported by evidence, citations, and logical reasoning, with counterarguments critically assessed to demonstrate a balanced perspective.

**Clarity and Brevity:** French philosophical writing emphasizes concise and lucid language. As noted by Moulin (2019), verbosity is avoided to ensure that arguments remain focused and accessible. This approach reflects the French linguistic tradition, which values economy of expression.

**Analytical Precision and Logical Progression:** Essays are characterized by rigorous analysis and a step-by-step progression of ideas. Analytical precision involves dissecting concepts to their core, as seen in the works of prominent French philosophers like Descartes and Sartre. Logical progression ensures that each point builds upon the previous one, fostering coherence (Durand, 2020).

### 4.2 Influence of Language and Culture on Writing Style

French philosophical essay writing is deeply rooted in the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the French-speaking world.

**Linguistic Structures and Philosophical Expression:** French linguistic structures, such as the use of subordinate clauses and nuanced vocabulary, lend themselves to complex philosophical argumentation. According to Akande and Bello (2021), French syntax enables precise distinctions, allowing philosophers to articulate subtle differences in meaning.

Moreover, the French language's preference for abstract nouns aligns with the conceptual nature of philosophical discourse. For instance, terms like "liberté," "raison," and "existence" are central to French philosophical thought (Duchesne, 2018).

**Cultural Emphasis on Cartesian Logic and Rationality:** The French philosophical tradition, heavily influenced by René Descartes, prioritizes rationality and systematic thinking. Cartesian logic underpins the emphasis on methodical analysis and clarity. As observed by Mbanefo (2022), this cultural legacy shapes how French writers approach

philosophical questions, fostering a disciplined and analytical mindset.

Additionally, French cultural values, such as a commitment to intellectual rigor and skepticism, influence essay writing. These values encourage writers to question assumptions, critically evaluate arguments, and engage in dialectical reasoning (Nguyen, 2020).

#### 4.3 Comparative Insights

Analyzing French philosophical essay techniques in relation to those of other languages reveals both similarities and differences:

**Similarities:** Philosophical essays across cultures share a commitment to logical reasoning and structured argumentation. For example, English and French essays often follow a similar outline, with an introduction, body, and conclusion. Both traditions value clarity and coherence in presenting ideas (Smith & Johnson, 2017).

**Differences:** French essays are distinguished by their emphasis on brevity and abstraction, whereas English essays tend to be more descriptive and expansive. As noted by Eze (2023), Nigerian philosophical essays often integrate indigenous proverbs and oral traditions, reflecting the cultural context. In contrast, French essays maintain a formal tone, avoiding colloquialisms and prioritizing analytical depth.

Furthermore, the French reliance on Cartesian logic contrasts with the Anglo-American focus on empirical evidence. While French essays privilege deductive reasoning, essays in other languages may incorporate inductive approaches, highlighting cultural variations in epistemology (Okonkwo, 2021).

#### 4.4 Implications for Writers and Educators

Understanding the techniques and cultural influences of French philosophical essay writing has practical implications for writers and educators:

**Strategies for Mastery:** Writers seeking to master French philosophical essays should prioritize developing a clear and logical writing style. Techniques such as outlining arguments, using precise vocabulary, and critically engaging with

counterarguments are essential. As suggested by Adéléké (2022), reading works by prominent French philosophers, such as Michel Foucault and Simone de Beauvoir, can provide valuable insights into effective writing practices.

Additionally, practicing analytical exercises, such as summarizing complex texts and constructing counterarguments, can enhance critical thinking skills. Writers should also familiarize themselves with French linguistic structures and cultural norms to ensure authenticity in their essays (Bello, 2021).

**Pedagogical Recommendations:** Educators can play a pivotal role in teaching French philosophical essay techniques. Incorporating comparative analysis into the curriculum can help students appreciate the nuances of French essay writing. For instance, analyzing essays by Descartes alongside those by John Locke can highlight differences in argumentation styles (Dupont, 2017).

Practical exercises, such as peer reviews and group discussions, can foster collaborative learning. As noted by Nwachukwu (2024), integrating technology, such as AI writing tools, can provide students with real-time feedback on their essays, enabling continuous improvement.

Furthermore, workshops and seminars on French cultural and linguistic influences can deepen students' understanding of the philosophical tradition. Emphasizing the importance of clarity, brevity, and logical progression can equip students with the skills needed for academic success.

### 5.0 CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Summary of Key Findings

French philosophical essay writing is renowned for its methodical approach, precision in argumentation, and rhetorical elegance. Unique techniques include the structured articulation of ideas through dialectical reasoning, the use of antithesis and synthesis, and an emphasis on clarity, coherence, and conciseness. The tradition of explication de texte—a systematic analysis of texts—highlights the importance of contextual understanding in French philosophy. Additionally, the preference for metaphysical introspection and rigorous logical frameworks ensures that arguments are not only

persuasive but deeply reflective. Techniques such as rhetorical questioning and the use of paradoxes further demonstrate the nuanced craftsmanship typical of French philosophical essays. These approaches collectively embody a distinct intellectual rigor and aesthetic, setting French philosophical writing apart from other traditions.

## 5.2 Contributions to Academic Writing and Philosophy

The findings provide a profound insight into the methodologies that underpin philosophical inquiry and writing. By analyzing French techniques, academic writers and philosophers can refine their approaches to developing arguments and presenting ideas with clarity. The focus on dialectics and textual analysis serves as a model for interdisciplinary applications, fostering critical thinking across fields like law, linguistics, and political science. Furthermore, understanding these methods enriches global philosophical discourse, bridging gaps between diverse intellectual traditions. The French philosophical essay continues to influence contemporary writing practices by emphasizing structured reasoning, ethical reflection, and intellectual depth—principles that resonate in academic and professional contexts alike.

## 5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

While this exploration highlights distinctive features of French philosophical writing, further comparative studies could deepen understanding. For example, analyzing the similarities and differences between French and German philosophical essay traditions might reveal new insights into the evolution of European intellectual thought. Similarly, investigating how classical French techniques are adapted in modern contexts—such as digital writing platforms and interdisciplinary philosophy—could shed light on their adaptability and enduring relevance. Additionally, research into the pedagogical impact of teaching French philosophical methods to non-native speakers may offer valuable contributions to the field of education.

## 5.4 Final Thoughts

Mastering philosophical essay writing in the French language remains a timeless endeavor, combining intellectual discipline with creative expression. This

tradition not only preserves the legacy of great thinkers like Descartes, Sartre, and Beauvoir but also inspires contemporary scholars to engage with complex ideas critically and eloquently. As global interest in philosophy grows, the French essay stands as a testament to the enduring power of structured argumentation and linguistic artistry. Embracing these techniques ensures that the practice of philosophy remains a vital force in shaping intellectual and cultural progress.

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