Required Format For Both Opinion Papers

The controlled format below is designed to help you achieve the brevity and precision needed to describe a medical incident, situation or dilemma and defend an ethical opinion about it in only 1 ½ to 2 double-spaced typewritten pages. The medical situation can come from any source: newspapers, magazines, TV report, personal experience, or employment circumstance. The paper may be critical (negative) or approving (positive).

Please disregard in this assignment any previously learned literary essay techniques! Do not rearrange the required components of the format below, as this will diminish its logical progression. Your copy of this format should be consulted continuously as you write drafts of both papers.

Please do not include:
-- An extra title page
-- A report cover, no matter how slim
-- Footnotes or endnotes
-- Bibliography
-- Quotes from the text or an outside source any longer than a brief phrase
-- Library research
-- Any sentence that is not incident-specific, except in Assumption Section, Part 2
-- Any sentence referring to, or drawing conclusions about, all similar incidents
(This would be inappropriate generalization for a short, 2-page paper.)

References to the text must be confined to a simple page number in parentheses. Example: "My argument in this paper assumes Kant’s ends/means categorical imperative (p.16)." Again, no need to footnote. (If you use a source outside course-assigned materials, include a one-page photocopy rather than quoting extensively from that source.)

Your single medical incident may have more than one ethical stage. But a brief opinion paper is necessarily focused. Therefore seek to narrow your attention to just one part of an ethical situation or dilemma; do not attempt the frustrating task of ‘hitting all the high points’ in two short pages! Argue your opinion about one individual or moral agent in the situation; for example, the patient, the doctor, the family member, or hospital administrator, and so on.

Part 1: Opening Sentence

Paper 1: Open with a mini-statement of the opinion you plan to defend later on page 2. Required opening sentence: “In the situation below, I want to argue that_________.” Make sure the statement is worded to specifically cover the one incident to be discussed in the paper. (Save detailed ethical analysis of your opinion for part 4 below.) Goal: One short opinion sentence about one aspect of one incident or situation.

Paper 2: This opening sentence is just a simple identification of the most morally controlling, single fact inside the situation, unlike the mini-statement of your moral opinion in the first paper. Which piece of diagnostic data, actual event, stated declaration by someone in the situation, factual circumstance, or other ‘look and see’ empirical incident fact seems to control your chosen moral opinion? Seize that fact and identify it as the most morally relevant fact in your opening sentence. Required opening sentence: “In the following situation, I identify ______________ as the most morally relevant fact listed in Part 3 below.” Save all ethical analysis for Part 4. Make sure that your identified situation fact is not a disguised moral claim or opinion (!) This is an easy mistake to make! In other words, don’t call an apple an orange. Your grade on this second paper depends on knowing the difference between fact and opinion!
NOTE WELL: This second paper is the major portion of your second exam. Since a course's last exam must remain in my file for at least one semester, I cannot return second papers to students. (Please make a personal copy of your paper before submitting the original for grading.) If you would like to know your paper's grade, e-mail a request.

Part 2: Foundational Assumptions

Clearly state at least three foundational or grounding truths, concepts, or theories that your opinion will be based upon. Samples: "My argument assumes that an individual without full mental function can never be properly called a fully autonomous moral agent." Or, "My argument assumes that alcohol is a very strong, mood-altering drug." Or, "My argument assumes Pellegrino's virtuous physician theory." Or, "The stated diagnosis is assumed to be correct," simply because there is no known fact that suggests otherwise. Thus, your point of view may assume or presuppose these starting points as given, that is, 'taken for granted', not needing argument here. Recognized psychological syndromes, widely-accepted generalizations, etc. may be mentioned as 'foundation stones' to support your opinion on the next page. What you've taken for granted, you have no need to argue. So be careful not to declare a foundational assumption that is the same ethical opinion you plan to argue, as this will make your paper logically circular. For example, if you are going to argue that your focus person is a competent moral agent, you can't assume that there are no competence-compromising factors affecting this same person. (This assumption does all the paper's work and simply guarantees the truth of the opening opinion statement before you've even presented an argument for it!!!) A logical error like this will absolutely rule out an A grade on the paper. Ask for help, if necessary.

Part 3: Your Situation's Fact List

From your personally chosen, single medical incident, list only those facts ethically relevant to the situation. Do not narrate: story-telling is not the goal here. But do indeed put any important event facts in chronological order. This section should be very brief, and the listing can even be presented in a single paragraph, to save space on page 1. Avoid medical jargon or medical facts that are ethically irrelevant. (You're not writing on a patient's chart here...) For example, the age of the patient or focus individual is always ethically critical. But a numbers-quotation of a blood pressure should be left out, and noted as 'high, low, rising or falling rapidly', etc., and only if it's ethically important to the analysis which follows. Stick to 'look-and-see', scientifically verifiable facts. Save your opinion about these facts for the next section.

Part 4: Ethical Analysis

Now explain how or why you have arrived at your ethical point of view. Debate with yourself about competing or opposite opinions which you think do not handle the case as well as yours. Include a sentence like, "Some may argue to the contrary that_______," but always return to your chosen opinion and give yourself the 'last word'. The ethical 'meat' of the paper is found here on the second page of the paper. Say clearly what factors in the case determine your ethical position and connect them to each of your earlier-assumed moral principles, theories, and concepts from Part 2. All wordings and sentences in this section must remain situation-specific. Absolutely resist the urge to generalize or make conclusions beyond your own single incident.

Continued below
Part 5: Last Sentence

Briefly and in the most specific language of the paper, restate and reword in one good sentence your opening opinion or fact identification, (depending on whether you’re writing the first or second position paper, respectively). **Make sure that the adjectives that you use for this section are the best qualifiers you can select. This last sentence should conceptually match your opening sentence.** Paper 1: Do not conclude about more than your opening opinion. Remember: A conclusion sentence is not a summary; re-listing the steps in your argument in a long, run-on sentence is not appropriate here. **Paper 2:** Restate your opening fact identification without getting back into the ethical opinion you’ve just defended in the ethical analysis (Part 4).

You have a chance for a better paper if:

a) **You analyze a situation straightforwardly and clearly.** Also, an ethical dilemma usually has more than one ethically arguable solution. Choosing between two cases, the simpler case, expertly handled, can yield a higher grade than a more complicated one that is bungled.

b) All or most of your adjectives and adverbs are **ethical ones.** Some ethical adjectives and adverbs are: ‘autonomous’ (instead of ‘lucid’), ‘beneficent’ (instead of ‘well-meaning’), ‘competent’ (instead of ‘normal’), etc. Write, in other words, in the language of ethics along with everyday language. Also, give me LOTS of adjectives and NO ‘naked’ nouns. Be specific.

c) **Your sentences are not too long. Break them up with periods and capital letters to start a new sentence.** Never join two sentences with just a comma! Long sentences cause your reader to lose your logical train of thought.

d) Always keep in mind that **your reader has never seen your work before.** You are close to your work and thus understand it well, but points that are clear to you may not be clear to the reader because of something you haven’t said. Don’t expect crystal-ball expertise from this reader! Have you left out an important feature?

e) **Give your paper to at least two other readers who are not in the class.** Have them circle anything that is not clear. Proofread! Then proofread again for punctuation, proper word-usage, spelling and sentence order. **Improve your grade with the touch of a word-processor’s spellcheck, grammar check, or rough draft revising at the campus Writing Center.** If writing is always difficult for you, get a rough draft done early enough to get help fine-tuning the last draft. Fractured syntax, endless sentences with no commas, clumsy, garbled word combinations, and ‘lost’ sentences placed out of correct logical order will disrupt the smooth flow of your argument and lower the paper’s grade.

f) **Scour your paper for anything that even sounds like a contradiction.** Confusing language can have contradictions lurking inside. Reword for clarity. Be careful using words like ‘therefore’ and ‘thus’. They require what follows them to be logically related to what came before! (This is the same as using logic to ‘smooth out the wrinkles.’) **Word choice is more critical than you think, and often is responsible for the difference between a B+ and an A-!**

g) **Get rid of any repetition** of words, phrases, proper names, etc. Do not repeat the same thoughts over and over, just to fill up space. **Brevity should not be feared but rather desired.**
h) Write a **rough draft** of your paper and **test it against the comments I include on the feedback code sheet**. Edit your paper to eliminate in advance of the final draft the kinds of problems I cite on the feedback sheet. *(I cannot review whole rough drafts for you. Please do not send a whole paper to me, but rather only specific questions about specific problems. Paste your questions into an e-mail message rather than sending an attachment.)*

i) **Avoid writing the paper in a heavy-handed tone**, that is, admitting of no legitimate disagreement with your point of view. Be humble enough to mention that others might disagree and still make ethical sense. **Avoid harsh word choice**, as it ironically lessens the persuasiveness of the paper instead of strengthening it.

m) **Hold off printing the final copy of your paper until just before it’s due, no matter how early you may feel that it is finished.** *(A paper is really never ‘finished’, as there is always a more specific word or phrase to make it even better, including after publication!!)* Something mentioned by another student or in class can always ‘season’ in your mind and become an insightful comment when added specifically to your own incident’s analysis.

n) **The key to this little paper’s challenge is to get the right thing in the right place.** New incident facts shouldn’t suddenly show up anywhere on the second page, for example. They should all be gathered in Part 3’s listing before the ethical analysis even starts. Don’t cram ethical analysis sentences (Part 4 stuff) into the foundational assumptions in Part 2. Likewise, don’t surprise your reader by using a brand-new foundational assumption in Part 4 (ethical analysis) that wasn’t included initially in Part 2. In other words, neither suspense nor surprise has any place in this assignment. The papers must structurally proceed from part to part in an organized manner. **Don’t hesitate to move text around when you’re proofing the rough draft!!**

o) **HAVE FUN ‘BUILDING’ THIS PAPER!**