Both Socrates and Descartes seem to agree: “I can exist without my body”. For instance, in the Phaedo, pages 21-22 Crito asks Socrates how he wants to be buried and Socrates points out to Crito that the body he will bury is not Socrates, for Socrates will have departed to “go to the joys of the blessed.”

Descartes also believes he can exist without his body. His argument for this conclusion goes something like this:

(1) I can imagine a situation where I exist without my body (for instance, I can imagine an evil demon deceiving me)

(2) If I can imagine a situation, then that situation is possible.

(3) It is possible for me to exist without my body.

In what follows, I will sometimes say that an argument is “strong” or “weak” or that a premise is “strong” or “weak”. Here is what I mean by those words:

- To say that a premise is strong means that it is likely to be true.
- To say that a premise is weak means that it is likely to be false.
- To say that an argument is strong means that the argument is probably sound.
- To say that an argument is weak is to say that the argument is probably not sound.

(Recall that a “sound” argument is a valid argument whose premises are all true. So the conclusion of a sound argument is always true. Since the argument above IS valid, anyone who thinks its conclusion is false, you will have to think that at least one of its premises is false.)

The FIRST step in writing your draft is to answer this question: Do you think Descartes is correct that he can exist without his body? You must settle on either a “yes” or a “no” answer to this question. If you need help deciding what you think, feel free to come talk to me, either after class or at my office hours. Or you can send me an email.

The SECOND step in writing your draft is to answer this question: Is Descartes’s argument strong? If you answered “no” to the first question, then your answer to this second question will also be “no”. However, if your answer to the first question was yes, your answer to the second question could be either “yes” or “no”. For example, you might agree with Descartes’s conclusion, but still think that his argument is weak. Again, contact me if you need help deciding what you think.
The THIRD step in writing your draft is to follow the instructions for either version A or version B.

• If you answered “yes” to the second question (that is, if you think Descartes’s argument is strong, and his conclusion is most likely true) then you will follow the instructions for version A.

• If you answered “no” to the second question (that is, if you think Descartes’s argument is weak) then you will follow the instructions for version B.

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR VERSION A
Your paper draft will have four sections. These parts must be clearly distinguished. If you like, you may number the sections to make this clear. Here are the five sections you should have:

1. State what you are going to argue in the paper: That Descartes’s argument that he can exist without his body is a strong argument (i.e. that it is probably sound). You should do this in one sentence.

2. In your own words summarize Descartes’s argument in ordinary language. Don’t just list the premises, but explain what each of those premises mean as clearly as you can. This should take no more than two paragraphs.

3. Say which premise of the argument is the weakest (that is, the most likely to be false). This should take one sentence.

4. Give what you think is the strongest argument in favor of the premise you chose in 3. In other words, give an argument that the premise is true. The argument should be expressed in your own words. The idea here is that you are helping Descartes out by bolstering the weakest point in his argument. This should take no more than two paragraphs.

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR VERSION B

Your paper draft will have four sections. These parts must be clearly distinguished. If you like, you may number the sections to make this clear. Here are the five sections you should have:

1. State what you are going to argue in the paper: That Descartes’s argument that he can exist without his body is not a strong argument (i.e. is probably not sound). You should do this in one sentence.

2. In your own words summarize Descartes’s argument in ordinary language. Don’t just list the premises, but explain what each of those premises mean as clearly as you can. This should take no more than two paragraphs.

3. Say which premise of the argument is the weakest (that is, the most likely to be false). This should take one sentence.

4. Give what you think is the strongest argument against the premise you chose in 3. In other words, give an argument that the premise is false. The argument should be expressed in your own words. The idea here is that you are trying to show that Descartes’s argument is not sound by showing that one of his premises is false (attacking him at his weakest point). This should take no more than two paragraphs.

Some Guidelines for Writing the Draft

• Introduction and Conclusion
Your introduction will be one sentence (that’s section 1 of the paper). There should be no conclusion. I’m only interested in the quality of your ideas and the clarity with which you express them for this assignment. In the final version you’ll have a (very short) conclusion.

• The writing style for philosophy papers
Feel free to use “I” and write more or less the way that you speak. However, rather than saying things like “in my opinion...” or “I feel that...” say “I believe that...” or “I think that...”. Also, make what you say as clear as possible. Try giving your paper to someone who is not in the class and see if they can follow your reasoning. If they can, that is a good sign that your paper is clear.

• Defining terms
If you use a word whose meaning might be unclear take a moment (in this short draft, one sentence will do) to state what you mean by that word. This is very important in any philosophy paper. It helps to make your arguments clearer and sharper.
• Argue for what you believe
  In the papers you write for this class you should argue for what you really believe. Don’t just defend the argument that you think is easiest to write a paper about, but the one you think is true.

• No need to consult outside sources
  For this paper you should not need to use any sources other than the texts we have read and our class discussions. However, if you do use any outside sources you must cite them clearly (the format of the citation does not matter, so long as it is clear).

• Collaboration
  I encourage you to discuss your arguments with others. You may even have others read your paper and give you suggestions. Whenever I write a philosophical paper, I always have two or three (or four or five) people look at what I’ve written before it is finished, to help me make it better.

  The final product must be your own. If someone gives you a suggestion or an idea that didn’t come from you but that you want to use in your paper, you must indicate this in a footnote. For example: “Thanks to Suzie Smith for suggesting this line of argument,” or “This idea came from discussions with Bill Murphy and Maria Gonzalez.”

  Philosophy is better when it is done in community. So as long as you say where you got your ideas, it is okay to get ideas from other people. However, those ideas must be expressed in your own words. So even if you get ideas from others, you must make them your own and write them into your paper yourself. You may not use any text from anyone else’s paper (or from any other source, without quoting and citing it). And you must write your entire paper yourself.

• Grading
  The rough draft for this first paper is graded pass/fail. As long as you turn in a complete rough draft and as long as it is clear that you made a sincere effort on it, you will get a pass. I will give each of you comments on your rough draft to help you with revising it into a final draft. Even though the rough draft is not graded, the more effort you put into your rough draft, the easier it will be to do a good job on your final draft.

  On the day the rough draft is due, I will hand out a “grading rubric” that will explain how the final draft will be graded. In general, I will grade your papers on:
  - The clarity of your arguments
  - The strength of your arguments
  - Whether your arguments show independent thinking. In other words, whether they show that you have thought carefully about the question and come up with an answer that goes beyond just what was said in class.