Term paper draft: example topic and approach

Example title: What does mirror recognition tell us about self-awareness and the theory of mind?

Choose a title that identifies the topic and the scope of your paper.

Opening paragraphs (about one page):

In The Age of Empathy, de Waal describes an interesting test for self-recognition and empathy called the “mirror recognition test.” ...

Start by identifying the book you have chosen and the topic you have selected from the book and the reasons for your choice. Then outline the overall goals of your paper, the central ideas you will be addressing and the main components of the paper. This will serve as a roadmap for the rest of the paper.

If the topic is controversial, outline the different positions and provide a brief synopsis of the arguments. Provide the background to the problem and place it in historical perspective, perhaps reviewing the philosophical positions of earlier thinkers. This might be followed by a review of the empirical evidence.

The original studies of mirror recognition used great apes; subsequent studies have tested other species including dolphins, elephants, and monkeys. You could review these studies and consider why some species pass the test while others do not. Or you could consider how the discovery of “mirror neurons” relates to these behavioral findings. Or you could consider the broader question of how mirror recognition might be linked to empathy (or perhaps you might challenge that assumption).

Headers: Once you have identified the main topic of your paper, consider how you might divide it into several smaller parts or sub-topics. Use these as headers. For example:

1. Mirror recognition studies of different groups of animals
2. Relationship between mirror recognition and empathy
3. Neural correlates
4. Animals and humans

For the mirror image recognition topic, you could look at different aspects of the problem or different perspectives that have been taken by researchers. Or you might discuss examples from your own experience to illustrate a point.

Summary: Provide a final paragraph summing up the main points and provide some tentative conclusions.