

Divinity Writing Tutor Handout

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Who uses the writing tutor?

Anyone who would like or needs help transitioning to or improving upon theological academic writing. This includes anyone referred by faculty or teaching fellows, anyone who finds that their writing is keeping them from the grade they would like, or those who want to bring their writing to the next level. This can include presentation communication, like scripts and slide text.

What is theology? (Let's go meta here for a moment)

St. Anselm – “faith seeking understanding” – *analytical writing with a constructive end-game*

South African theologian James Cochrane “reflection on faith in the world in order to make sense of reality”

Some God-centeredness is how theology is different from religious studies

Roach – “spirit-embodied dialogical process for community-discerned sustainable action” p. 6

Theology must be rooted in experience and practice, and must transform

Thomas Merton calls theological writing extremely difficult to do well, because it involves something we start out not knowing p. 9

What is theological writing?

Mechanics

Mechanics to avoid: Self-consciousness, generality, vagueness, abstractions, judgment, too much (irrelevant or imbalanced) self-disclosure, lack of appropriate citations, apologetic or “feely” writing, needless repetition, lack of signposting, hedging, racism, sexism, classism, homophobia/heterosexism

Mechanics to achieve: Clear arguments, economic word usage, specificity, efficient sign posting, academic structure, introductions, conclusions, generous and constructive criticism (internal and external); good blend of quotes, citations, paraphrase and original voice/argument; generally follow problem-warrant-solution model; **WHATEVER THE RUBRIC SAYS**

Content

Reading Notebooks/weekly papers, etc. often involve: Comprehension; highlight of impactful quotes; explication of impactful quotes; imagination, larger questions, what is missing, what could be added, knowledge of and facility of course material and concepts, thesis identification, main points, interesting points, points related to ministry; understanding/explaining how the parts relate to the whole; keep focus on central questions, but make sure to cover all aspects of assignment acc to syllabus and/or assignment rubric.

Writing Tutor Consult Instructions

General Office Hours Tuesday-Thursday 12-4 pm in G22-C

(4 Tuesdays this year will be pushed to Fridays-those will be posted in advance)

- a. Sign up on door, OR Email if you need something different
- b. Paper copies of what you want to review – easy to print at the library
- c. Read together your paper in print, figure out top three things to focus on, work through those—very much a process meant to put and keep you in the driver’s seat
- d. The University Writing Studio is also available for consultations: <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/writing/> with an online booking system and bios of all their undergraduate and graduate Writing Fellows.

Doing Theological Research: An Introductory Guide for Survival in Theological Education
by Robert Pazmiño (Wipf and Stock 2009)

Engages head, heart and hands

8 commandments of theological research

- 1) **If it is not theological, it is not deep** (digging up and examining our foundational assumptions and implicit theologies and anthropological theologies is key to learning)
- 2) **Wrestle with an angel** (engage something meaningful, which may be something that can wound you)
- 3) **Pick a prism** (you can't cover everything in one paper, so narrow topic, question, problem, issue)
- 4) **Tell the truth, warts and all** (don't avoid paradox and inconsistency, but charitably address them)
- 5) **Read, formulate, talk, read and reformulate** (ideas and articulation take time)
- 6) **Move from experience to expertise** (informed and examined expertise that then affects our praxis, connecting our experience to a community of dialogue or discourse, such as engagement with scripture or tradition)
- 7) **Examine your sources** (critical reading and writing skills, learn to look at scholars' footnotes for history of previous discourse)
- 8) **Discern Meaning in paradoxical combination of natural and supernatural:** Symbolics, empirics, aesthetics, synoetics (honors direct personal experience, intuition) , ethics, synoptics

Practical tips: 1) Start early, 2) Ask for help, 3) Share your work, 4) Let go with prayer, 5) Learn from feedback

From Topic to Thesis: A Guide to Theological Research by Michael Kibbe Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic 2016.

Topic – a set of information about a particular thing Thesis – argument about that set of information p. 15

Research process – moving from identifying that particular set of information to making an argument about that set of information which involves selecting which conversation partners to focus on, how to translate the set of information p. 15

“Every research paper is like a persuasive speech” p. 15

Understanding that scholarship is participating in an ongoing conversation that has been going on for quite some time p. 16-17

Goal of research is new knowledge (but it doesn't have to be new to everyone, for your papers, it refers to knowledge that is new to you) p. 23

Some unique subject matter—God, ongoing revelation in Holy Spirit, unknowableness of God, question of authority, questions of consequences p. 27-29

Primary, secondary and tertiary sources p. 33-39

Research Process: 1) Finding direction, 2) Gathering Sources, 3) Understanding Issues, 4) Entering Discussion (when and how to enter, how your thesis relates to the discussion), 5) Establishing position p. 43-44

Research and argumentation takes time

Expressing Theology: A Guide to Writing Theology that Readers Want to Read
by Jonathan C Roach and Gricel Dominguez (Cascade 2015)

Bad theological writing: poor writing skills, shallow writing, fear

Shallow writing: putting words on a page without explanation, connection, without having done the preparation to write (reading, thinking, outlining, talking), doing nothing more than summarizing one source after another (I feel like I am doing that right now as I write my dissertation, but this is draft, not final product)

Fear-based: feel they have nothing (important) to add to the conversation, many dense, verbatim quotes with little of their own writing in between

Discussion questions

How does your definition of theology impact the way you might write here?

Earliest memory of writing? Negative and positive experiences? (think, pair, share)

Farming metaphor – growing good words, going back and tilling the ground of thought and articulation R 5

Learning to write within a set of rules will make you a better writer – it will be a challenge R 17

To own theology requires a grounded sense of yourself and your sources for content R. 20 and owning your own power R 30-33

Don't pretend to be neutral (R 27) but do practice generousness and charitability

Value of group discernment and feedback – no one with good writing writes entirely alone R 35-37

Interpretation and seeing through ordinary blindness

**Correlating – the process of bringing two or more entities into mutual conversation with each other
__HUGE IN RPC all about how we correlate religion and psychology**

Reading tradition, reading Bible (layers upon layers of content)

Reading experience (what is the one thing in your life that you have always wanted to write about?)

Reading research – good research is easy to scan and understand (why we stress it so much in YOUR writing)

Writing for your audience (your professors and TAs- intelligent generalist level to show that you know to define, use and apply class terms, facts, concepts)

Concept of pre-writing (can it be done and can I do it? – Annie Dillard) (what are your strategies for keeping your writing from getting out of control?)

Create a plan, draft, revise and edit, (get feedback and revise and edit again, and submit/"publish")

Resources for theological and academic writing

Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills. John M. Swales and Christine B. Feak. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 3rd ed. 2012.

The Craft of Research. Wayne C., Booth, Gregory G. Colomb and Joseph M. Williams. 4th ed. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials. Andrew Delano Abbott. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Discovering Arguments: An Introduction to Critical Thinking, Writing and Style. 4th ed., Prentice Hall, 2011.

Doing Theological Research: An Introductory Guide for Survival in Theological Education. Robert W. Pazmiño. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2009.

Expressing Theology: A Guide to Writing Theology that Readers Want to Read. Jonathan C. Roach. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2015

From Topic to Thesis: A Guide to Theological Research. Michael Kibbe. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2016.

The Structure of Argument. Annette T. Rottenberg and Donna Haisty Winchell. 8th ed. New York: Bedford Books/St. Martin's, 2014.

Success with Graduate and Scholarly Writing: A Guide for Non-Native Writers of English. Sheryl Holt. Burnsville, MN: Aspen Productions, 2004.

"They Say/I Say": The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing. Gerald Graff. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006.

The Transition to College Writing. Keith Hjortchoj. 2nd ed. New York: Bedford Books/St. Martin's. 2009.

Writing Methods in Theological Reflection. Heather Walton. London: SCM Press, 2014.

Writing Theology Well: A Rhetoric for Theological and Biblical Writers. Lucretia B. Yaghjian. New York: Continuum, 2006.

Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2009.

Non-Academic, but theological writing

At a Journal Workshop: Writing to Access the Power of the Unconscious and Evoke Creative Ability. Ira Progoff. Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher. 1992.

How to Keep a Spiritual Journal: A Guide to Journal Keeping for Inner Growth and Personal Discovery. Ron Klug. Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2002.

Journaling as a Spiritual Practice: Encountering God through Attentive Writing. Helen Cepero. Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 2008.

The Soul Tells a Story: Engaging Creativity with Spirituality in the Writing Life. Vinitia Hampton Wright. Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 2005.

Writing the Sacred Journey: The Art and Practice of Spiritual Memoir. Elizabeth Andrew. Boston: Skinner House Books, 2005.