

HOW TO WRITE A PAPER – THE BASICS

I. GETTING STARTED

Two of the biggest problems for student writers are **procrastination** and **disorganization**. Therefore, careful time management is one of the most important disciplines to develop during your graduate study. While you may never feel that you have a surplus of time, you can make your life easier (and your work more polished) by starting early.

The paper-writing process actually begins with the **reading** you have to do for your courses; keep up with the assignments and you won't have to devote precious writing time to catching up. Additionally, **take notes**, not only as a means to record and review what you have learned, but as a way of generating ideas. Try to find similarities, differences, or other connections in your material. Look at particular facts and textual details and consider how they are shaped by their context and how they might be linked to form an interpretative theory.

Also, an excellent way to prepare for writing a paper is to **read the directions for the assignment before you start the assigned reading**. As a result, you are more likely to read with a focused purpose, knowing that eventually you must understand and discuss certain points or ideas in the text(s).

Make sure you give yourself plenty of **time** to generate and refine your ideas. Thinking about your topic well ahead of time, even if subconsciously, often results in unexpected insights, and it is undoubtedly better to put your ideas together over the course of several days than several hours. The only thing worse than starting poorly is not starting at all. If you wait for perfect writing conditions to arrive before beginning your work, you will likely run out of time. No matter what your apprehensions are regarding the assignment, no matter how foolish or simple you think your initial ideas may be, start writing. Improvement can only come when you have something to improve.

II. GENERATING AND ORGANIZING IDEAS

Writers generally take one of two possible approaches to composing a paper: they are either *planners* who like everything to be organized from the outset, with a clear map—usually in the form of an outline—for moving forward, or they are *explorers* who adopt a more organic approach that enables them to discover what they think as they go along. Both stances are fine, and you shouldn't try to force yourself to be solely a planner when you are an explorer or vice versa, although some middle ground is always possible. However, whether you are a planner or explorer, you have to make a start somewhere, so here—apart from simply diving in and writing—are a couple of things you might consider to get you going.

A. Brainstorming

When brainstorming, put down anything and everything you can think of about your topic without stopping to edit or revise. The goal is to produce as diverse a mass of raw material as possible and to tap a stream of consciousness that might lead to a good thesis. Think of this as laying down a bed of manure in which ideas will germinate! You don't have to write connected prose—using single words is fine—or you can jot down a collection of quotations perhaps. Next, sort through this mass (or mess) of material, looking for common threads, promising insights, surprising connections, and so forth. Now you have something to work with.

Additionally, think about combining the essentials of brainstorming with other learning styles. Some people are more *visual* learners, so mapping the data you put down can be useful; or yet again, for aural/oral learners, try *talking* through the subject matter with other students. Our brains are well adapted to learning with others.

However, while these methods can often help you overcome writer's block—and perhaps are better liked by *explorers* than planners—they are not everyone's first choice as the material generated can be messy. So perhaps you might work better by composing a preliminary outline for your paper.

B. Outlining

There is certainly nothing like a good outline to point your writing in the right direction and to provide a sense of “doableness”—especially when facing a blank page or screen. However, before you can construct an outline, you need some idea of where you want to go and what ground you need to cover, which essentially means that you need some form of **thesis statement** (a statement that speaks about the topic you will be addressing and the view of the topic you will be arguing for).

For example, perhaps you are going to write a paper comparing stand-alone seminaries and divinity schools that exist within large universities. If you simply state, “Both stand-alone seminaries and divinity schools that exist within large universities offer theological programs of study,” you have articulated only *half* of what a thesis statement needs—you have simply issued a statement of fact and indicated your topic. In order to complete the thesis, you now have to add a point of view on the topic, a point of view that you will argue for and which is thus contestable: “While both stand-alone seminaries and university divinity schools offer theological programs of study, because the latter generally complement a sincere engagement with Christian practice with strong academic rigor, divinity schools offer a richer and more robust theological formation.”

Now you have a thesis statement, and to support it you can shape an outline.

Outlines can take a number of forms and range from the sloppy to the punctilious. A simple outline to support the above thesis might be:

1. Introduction
2. Spiritual formation
3. Academic training
4. Practical opportunities
5. Conclusion

No problem! This will keep you organized and give you a direction.

However, you might want a more detailed outline:

- I. Introduction
 - a. general overview of topic
 - b. thesis
 - c. roadmap (points you will be raising)
- II. Spiritual formation
 - a. in seminaries
 - i. history
 - ii. importance in the curriculum
 - b. in divinity schools
 - i. history
 - ii. importance in curriculum
 - iii. academic dimensions
- III. Academics
 - a. in seminaries
 - i. faculty
 - ii. standards
 - b. in divinity schools
 - i. faculty
 - ii. standards
 - iii. impact of belonging to larger university . . . etc.

In addition to helping planners get going with their writing and making them feel comfortable, what else are the benefits of outlining?

1. Outlines make it easier to see the *shape* of the whole paper—and therefore whether the sub-topics you are covering are *connected* . . .
2. . . . and by extension, a more detailed outline can help you map out an *argument*, ensuring that your points hang together logically.

3. On the other hand, when something doesn't quite fit or when it jumps out at you, this might get you to rethink what you are saying. In the above example, by noting that a large university can have an impact on a divinity school, I began to wonder whether conforming to what might be a university's secular standards could be problematic—a point worthy of further consideration.
4. Finally, an outline allows you to draft a paper unsequentially—that is, if you happen to know more about one aspect of your topic, even if it is not to be addressed until the fourth paragraph, you can write it out and know where it will fit (although another draft will always be needed to make the writing seamless).

C. Reverse Outlining

The structure of a paper is important because it helps you to communicate clearly, logically, and in an organized way. For planners who use an outline from the outset, structure is inherent in their creative process. But as I noted above, explorers are less likely to be organized—at least, in the early stages; they will, nevertheless, have to become so as they redraft their paper. This is where a process called reverse outlining comes to our rescue and helps us make sense of the material we have generated.

Reverse outlining is a technique that can help you improve the organization and clarity of your paper.

Once you have a complete draft:

1. Map out the focus of each of the paragraphs you have written. You might use a single word to designate the focus, but if the paragraph has some degree of coherence, write a sentence summarizing its content. (Such sentences may look like **topic sentences**, which I highly recommend using as you write subsequent drafts.)
2. If you have difficulty coming up with a summary statement, this may be a sign that your paragraph lacks a clear focus and there are too many ideas present. You probably need to delete material or divide the paragraph into smaller ones. Revise it and try again to write a summary statement.
3. Ask yourself if the first sentence (topic sentence!) of each paragraph is similar to your summary statement. If not, yet again, consider revising. Readers should be able to read the beginning of each paragraph and know where they are headed.
4. Now look at the list of your summary statements. Does each statement play a role in supporting your thesis? If not, consider revising, moving, or deleting paragraphs in your paper so that they contribute to your argument.

- a. Revising. Sometimes a paragraph will contain all that you want to say, but the points are not structured sufficiently clearly to communicate well. Think about what is most important, what you want to emphasize to the reader, and make all that you have to say serve that goal.
 - b. Moving. Your reverse outline should clearly map your topics. Let's say you are writing a paper on an author and intertextuality. You have looked at Old and New Testament references used by the author, but unfortunately your paragraphs jump randomly between Old and New Testament material. Cluster like paragraphs with like.
 - c. Deleting. For many writers, deleting what might very well be interesting material is hard to do. However, if the material is not directly relevant to your topic and thesis, get rid of it. You can always put it in a separate file for possible use at a later date.
5. Finally, take another critical look at your summary statements and ask if they truly support your thesis. Sometimes rewriting and rearranging your material is not sufficient to produce a coherent paper. You may need to revise your thesis. And this can be true for both explorers and planners, for by the time you have drafted and redrafted your paper, you may no longer agree with your original working thesis. Sure, this will mean more work, but now you know what you truly think.

Finally, one bonus of understanding the process of reverse outlining is that it makes clear how effective authors write today—and this includes authors you may be reading for your classes. While those who composed Old and New Testament texts, as well as English Church writers, might not fit the mold, most of the authors of contemporary texts will, which means that if you read the first sentence of each paragraph in an article, you might have an excellent overview of what that writer is saying.

III. DRAFTING THE PAPER

A. Thesis Statements

Often students are confused about what constitutes a thesis. Is the thesis of a paper the same as its topic? Is a paper's thesis comparable to the argument the author makes?

- A **topic** is simply the subject of your essay: for example, the Reformation in England.
- What you have to say about that topic is your **thesis**. As I mentioned above, a thesis is not merely a statement of fact, but rather a statement of fact and the view of the topic you will be arguing for. It is not—if you were writing a paper about Christianity, the church,

and sixteenth-century England— “Thomas More broke with Henry VIII,” but “Thomas More’s break with his king was the result of a personal and principled difference of opinion that mirrored contemporary conflicts over national and ecclesial allegiances.”

- Then the evidence you bring to support your thesis, together with the way in which you arrange it, is your **argument**. (You will hear the word “argument” a good deal in your courses at the Divinity School. You should not construe this term as meaning some sort of knock-down fight or even the advancement of a highly personal point of view—“I will argue that football team X sucks.” Rather, an argument is a form of writing that aims to persuade your reader that the thesis you are advancing is a convincing one and you have used your information in a compelling and logical way.)

1. Thesis Statements—*The Essentials*

Coming up with a thesis can be hard, but when all else fails, try turning a statement into a question and then provide a pithy answer to that question (thus “Thomas broke with Henry VIII” becomes “Why did Thomas break with Henry?” which in turn can generate a number of answers or theses—“Thomas owed more allegiance to the pope than his king and thus broke with Henry”; “Thomas attempted to resign his position because he felt both politically and religiously isolated”; and so on).

Although authors (especially those outside the academy) sometimes leave their thesis unstated, an academic essay is stronger when its thesis is explicit and up front. *The stronger and more interesting the thesis, the better the essay*. If your professor assigns a topic, take care not to merely echo it back to him or her as a thesis statement. Develop an angle.

Here are some templates for promising thesis statements:

- There are several problems with Barth’s argument that . . .
- Barth’s work is _____ because _____ . . .
- Scholars Flett and Stout claim that Barth’s theology of baptism is _____. But I would argue that Barth’s fundamental position is _____.
- Although Barth’s work might seem to be an example of _____, closer inspection reveals _____.
- In this paper, I am going to do *x*, by examining *y*. Doing this will give us a better understanding of *z*.¹

¹ For the idea of using templates to generate thesis statements, I am in debt to a wonderful book that I highly recommend by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein called “*They Say / I Say*”: *The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* (New York: Norton, 2006).

A thesis statement *should be neither too broad nor too narrow*. A thesis that is too broad will be unmanageable; you will not be able to adequately support and defend it—especially in a short paper. A thesis that is too narrow is likely to be facile or uninteresting and will leave you short on what to say.

2. *Complex Thesis Statements (and breaking down multi-faceted prompts)*

Thesis statements can be hard to compose because you have to go beyond simply summarizing and narrating. However, thesis statements are even more difficult to nail down when you are responding to a paper topic or prompt that has multiple parts. Below are some ideas for going about the task.

One of the problems with writing a thesis statement for a multi-faceted prompt is the difficulty of addressing a number of sub-topics that might not arrange themselves neatly. For example, how do you deal with a prompt containing points that seem transverse to each other? Let me begin with an easy illustration:

Prompt: Write a paper explaining how Duke Divinity School teaches theology in its courses on Bible, church history, and homiletics, and the impact not only of faculty teaching, but also of sundry sources of educational support, such as the library and tutoring centers, and field education.

The first thing to note is that you have two sets of foci:

- Bible
- Church History
- Homiletics
- Faculty Teaching
- Educational Support Services
- Field Education

Sorting multiple sub-topics into categories is the first step in analyzing your material and getting a handle on it. It demands that you step back from the *particulars* and do some thinking in larger categories (which in this case necessitates some classifying):

Now you have:

What is taught

How it is taught/learned

The next step won't be so hard—instead of *six* things to juggle, you will have *two*. Can I come up with a thesis statement that will envelope the above? Perhaps: *A rich engagement of theology must examine the subject in all its guises—as the study of Bible, church history, and preaching the word—but while academic knowledge is fundamental to the process, experience and practice also foster an understanding of theology as it is lived out in the world.*

Here's another example. I recently reread George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, a nineteenth-century novel that tells the story of Maggie Tulliver, a passionate and moral young woman, who does not easily live in a middle-class world that is stuffy, narrow, and materialistic. At one point she comes across Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ* and as a result attempts to repress her passions and eschew worldly things. Unfortunately, love eventually drives her to behave recklessly, although her strong sense of duty to those in her family ultimately triumphs.

The book, because of its richness, easily calls for a complex prompt:

George Eliot, in The Mill on the Floss, provides a thick description of middle-class life and its codes of behavior in nineteenth-century England. However, Eliot also offers alternate models of behavior—from the Christian direction of Thomas à Kempis to the Romanticism of Stephen Guest. In your paper you should discuss the ethical systems presented in the novel, together with the role of religion in the community, and assess how Maggie Tulliver both conforms to and rebels against society.

That's a lot to do! But again, if you break the prompt into parts and discern some pattern in the relationships among the parts, it's not so difficult:

models of behavior →

middle-class life →

Maggie's behavior

So, putting sub-topics into categories and discerning patterns can be immensely useful. Here, now that I have identified a pattern in the prompt, I will play with the pattern in order to compose a thesis that spans and unites the three elements:

(Christian) models of behavior → profoundly influenced nineteenth-century middle-class life in England, which in turn → shaped the behavior of individuals. However, in The Mill on the Floss we meet a heroine who pushes back ← against the society in which she is raised, and for a period attempts to recover a truly Christian way of being in the world. Unfortunately, as a child of her time, society has left an imprint on her → and her embrace of Christianity is indelibly marked by its secularity →←.

Finally, here is a prompt that pertains to Church History (the original of which was written by a former Divinity School professor, Maria Doerfler):

Author A and Author B both speak to the relationship between the individual believer, the text of Scripture, and what might be called the narrative of Scripture: the grander story, extending from the beginning of creation through the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, and into the present. Your task in this essay will be to formulate an argument concerning the nature of this relationship, as expounded in each text, comparing and contrasting the two as you see fit. You will want to support your argument with ample references to the primary sources.

As you can see, there is a lot going on here:

- there are two authors/texts to work with
- in the texts, you must look at a relationship between three things:
 - individual believers
 - the text of Scripture
 - the narrative of Scripture (the grander story, extending from the beginning of creation through the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, and into the present)
- and in looking at this threefold relationship, you must
 - expound, and compare and contrast Polycarp's and Origen's view of the relationship

. . . and at the end of the day have a thesis statement that makes sense of what you have said.

As you work to formulate a thesis statement, you'll probably want to begin by discerning similarities and differences (a classifying task): *Both authors A and B look for scriptural models of martyrdom but vary in their views about the reasons individuals give for embracing martyrdom.*

This statement isn't yet a great thesis—it's pretty much just giving facts—but if we use the technique of taking a statement and turning it into a question, we might see a way forward:

Statement: *Authors A and B . . . vary in their views about the reasons individuals give for embracing martyrdom*

Question: *Why do they differ in their views about the reasons individuals give for embracing martyrdom?*

Answer/thesis: *While authors A and B agree that Scripture provides a model for martyrdom that we should emulate, author A, more concerned about the issue of self-glorification than B, shows human martyrdom can never be a pure act of obedience, prompted by love of God, as it was for Christ.*

Better. I'm not sure it is as yet fully commenting on the "narrative of Scripture," but perhaps the reference to Christ can be restated in terms of the "Christ story."

Takeways to make a prompt manageable and to compose a thesis that addresses all aspects of an assignment:

- break the prompt into parts
- sort multiple sub-topics into categories
- discern a pattern in the relationships among the parts/categories
- make a statement (regarding the parts), turn it into a question, and answer the question to get a thesis

Finally, if a prompt is complex and you are really not sure what you are being asked to do, don't be reluctant to ask for clarification from your professor or preceptor.

Finally, you may wonder how a thesis is different from a **statement of purpose**. In many ways, a thesis and a statement of purpose cover the same terrain, except the latter more explicitly states where you are going and how you intend to get there (as in the last bulleted example above).

As you work through your paper, your thesis will act as a thread to weave together the different parts. However, like introductions that often get written last, theses sometimes take time to emerge and can alter as you think through your arguments. Don't be surprised if your thesis doesn't fully appear until after you have written a first draft, or even that you have to change your original ideas.

B. Organization

The classic organization of a paper is into an introduction, body, and conclusion. However, although a paper must begin with an introduction, this is not necessarily the first thing you will always write.

1. Introductions (preliminary advice)

Once again, writers tend to fall into two groups when it comes to introductions: some absolutely must have one before they can proceed; others have no idea how to begin and so start with a body paragraph. However, whichever group you are in, you will inevitably find yourself writing the final version of your introduction *after* you have finished a complete draft of your paper. For how can you introduce something that has not yet come into being?

Therefore, if you are looking for detailed advice on how to write an introduction, scroll down to the end of this section on organization. Otherwise, what you need to know at this point is that it is perfectly acceptable to have a very rough introduction with simply a few signposts in it, and it

is also fine to skip the introduction completely. What you should not do is get so hung up on writing a polished piece of prose that you waste time and fail to advance to the body of your paper.

A caveat: Of course, some types of papers (particularly exegesis papers) have a method of construction that may not accord with the advice above. Your professors, preceptors, and writing tutors can give you more specific advice for tackling these assignments.

2. *Body Paragraphs*

The body of your paper will provide the main points that will support your argument. Each paragraph should center on a single topic, which should be clearly stated in a single sentence. If you are writing a longer paper, several paragraphs will support the same main point, but each paragraph should still have its own **focus**, its own contribution, which clearly sets it apart from the paragraphs around it. The best way to achieve this sort of clarity is to highlight the **topic sentence** of each paragraph as you revise your paper. Then read this list of highlighted sentences in sequence. Do they make sense as a series? Do they move consistently towards a conclusion or are you repeating yourself? Are there paragraphs that are perfectly valid but don't contribute to the overall argument? If so, get rid of them.

3. *Conclusions . . . and Introductions Again*

Your **conclusion** should not merely reiterate what you've said, although providing a brief overview or summary, taking care to link what you say explicitly to your thesis, is fine. A conclusion is, after all, your last chance to emphasize what is important and mention the significance of what you have done. What is the pay-off of your approach? What are its implications? What have you shown and why does it matter? *What does all what you have said mean and have you properly supported your thesis?* End on a strong note; don't just trail off.

Okay, now that you have a solid draft of your paper, you can go back to your *introduction* and rewrite it so that it truly introduces what you have written.

There is no need to make cosmic generalizations at the outset of your introduction (no "ever since humans ruled the earth" or "the Bible is the greatest work in the history of the world"), just explain what you're writing about and why. Of course, this can be easier said than done in a long essay, but one way to organize your introduction is to

- provide some **background**—but only give what is absolutely necessary to understand your paper ("In 1532 Henry VIII began the legal process of separating the English church from Rome . . .")

- **narrow your background and move to focus on your topic**—what part of the topic will you concentrate on and why (“Henry’s breach with Rome would be the source of Thomas More’s breach with the king, and it is the effects of these ruptures . . .”)—which will lead into
- your **thesis statement** (“Thomas More’s position ultimately represented a choice to put the Christian faith of the Catholic Church—and thus allegiance to the pope—over national and personal loves—to England and to the king . . .”)
- which will be followed by a **roadmap** that will explain (briefly) what you will do in the paper (what main points you will make and what you are doing—arguing, analyzing, etc.: “In this paper I will examine . . .”)

C. Argumentation and Analysis

As you will have gathered by now, many of your papers will demand that you create an argument in them and/or that you will be expected to analyze the texts you read. Of course, some assignments will demand other sorts of writing—reflection, summarizing, the narration of personal experiences, etc.—but these forms of writing are forms we generally have more experience with and can therefore do more easily. Here are some basic points to keep in mind when analyzing and creating an argument:

- go beneath the surface of the text. You will be expected to go beyond retelling what is at the surface and to consider *why* the author is writing (the occasion and purpose of the text), *how* s/he does so (what style, rhetorical devices, genre, strategies are used), the *context* for or *background* to what is written, and so on. Don’t just ask what a text says, consider what it *means*.
- the goal of argumentation is to convince your reader that the view you are advancing is a sound one. Therefore, your information should be solid and your reasoning sound. Check for inconsistencies. If there is a line of reasoning or data that does not fit with your own argument but is nevertheless important, it is fine to include this by signaling that it is a “counter-argument,” although hopefully one you can to some extent argue against by showing its weaknesses (you will be rebutting it). Often you will need to expose the *warrants* that underpin your argument. A warrant is a fundamental belief that informs the claims you make. For example, if you were to argue against euthanasia, one of your warrants might be the belief that God, not humankind, should determine the end of life.
- For more information on argumentation, see Joseph M. Williams and Gregory G. Columb, *The Craft of Argument* (New York: Longman, 2003).

IV. REVISION—“RE-SEEING” YOUR PAPER

Many writers think that revision is simply a matter of fixing small errors—typos, misspellings, mispunctuation, grammatical mistakes, improperly formatted notes—that spoil a paper. But revision should be more than this: it is an opportunity to look over what you have written with “new eyes.” Of course, this involves time, and time is something that is in short supply, but your paper can never truly be a polished piece of writing if you fail to revise.

One way to understand this process is with a metaphor from wood-working. Inexperienced writers give their creation a quick buff with fine-grain sandpaper and think they are through. But you have to work on the larger structure first, working your way from the coarser elements to fine detail.

Ask yourself, is the overall focus of your paper clear? Is your thesis astute? Have you adequately supported your argument? Is your reasoning logical? Is your organization coherent? Are your points comprehensible or have you obscured the real gist of what you are trying to say by surrounding it with generalizations and needless flowery phrases? Have you eliminated redundant and repetitive material? Are you being wordy? Is your introduction effective? Is your conclusion thoughtful and thought-provoking?

Here are **some elements of good prose** you should think about as you revise:

- **Clarity:** Good writing communicates clearly. Although, no doubt, you may have read scholarly prose that is hard to follow, and which seems to want to convey how clever the author may be, do know that this is *not* good writing. Yes, some ideas are difficult to understand and are hard to communicate, but your job is to try your best to make what you say be clear. Keep in mind that when you are writing a paper for an instructor, *your reader needs to understand what you are saying in order to determine whether you yourself have understood the material*. Therefore, always keep your reader in mind and the goal of the assignment.
- **Conciseness:** Two of the most common attributes of bad writing are wordiness and repetition: you use unnecessary words to make a point (“He was a *tall* man of great *height* who liked to find and court women who also were very tall” = He was a tall man who liked to court tall women!), and/or you repeat the point(s) you make unnecessarily (“God ordered them to travel into Egypt. He said they were to leave their land and go to another place”).

If you know you are wordy, simply challenge yourself to make a statement in as few words as possible. Such challenges can pay off! Also, try **sentence combining** (search for “Purdue Owl sentence combining” on the internet to take you to a good source of instruction). For example: “Ignatius wanted to be a martyr. Ignatius was eager to

experience life everlasting and be with God. He also thought of himself as a true Christian.” Ugh! Try “Ignatius, a true Christian, was eager to be with God and so embraced martyrdom.”

- **Coherence:** Coherence refers not only to whether your essay makes sense, but to whether you weave together the points you make both in and across sections of your paper. If you simply lay out facts, quotations, ideas, etc., and don’t *connect* them, your essay will be hard to follow and less than ideal. Here’s an example: I may want to tell you about recent events in England and so write: “*Many British people are proud of their country. Britain recently voted to leave the European Union. Many young people feel betrayed.*” I am, undoubtedly, making solid observations, but I’m not really connecting the dots. However, when I rewrite thus—“*Many older residents of Britain look back to a time when their country seemed to be ‘Great’ and yearn for such greatness to return. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the recent referendum decision to leave the European Union was largely supported by older citizens*”—I am trying to make connections and explain my line of thinking to the reader.
 - One way to strengthen the coherence of a paper is to pay attention to your **organization**. If this is a problem for you, take another look at the earlier section on outlining and reverse outlining.
- **Cogency:** If your writing is cogent, then everything is working to make it logical and convincing. In other words, the analysis or argument you present will persuade your reader that your point of view is valid. When your instructors ask you to formulate an argument in a paper, a large part of what they are asking you to do is to write cogently and to bring your points together in a seamless and compelling way.
- **Content:** While good writing should possess the attributes I’ve noted above, good writing should—ideally—be interesting. You should have something to say. This means having solid content and, in your longer papers, having a point of view that goes beyond the mere regurgitation of facts.

(Also keep in mind that the ultimate goal of a good paper should not be a grade but a better understanding of your subject and intellectual growth—both for you and your reader.)

V. FINAL DETAILS—EDITING AND DOCUMENTING

When you are completely finished revising your paper, check it for errors. Although word processing programs identify many typos, misspellings, and ungrammatical elements, they also miss a great deal. You may have typed “mien” for “mine,” but “mien” is a word and won’t be

identified as incorrect. Similarly, “She decide to go home” won’t be caught for incorrect spelling (it should be “decided”).

Finally, **you must properly document your sources**. If you have used quotations, check that they are correct and their sources are given (in foot- or endnotes or with parenthetical citations), and that you have provided a Works Cited page or Bibliography. Ideas that are not your own should be similarly documented. Failure to properly document the sources you use may lead to a charge of **PLAGIARISM—a violation of the School’s honor code**.

PLAGIARISM

Duke University describes plagiarism as follows:

Plagiarism occurs when a student, with intent to deceive or with reckless disregard for proper scholarly procedures, presents any information, ideas or phrasing of another as if they were his/her own and/or does not give appropriate credit to the original source. Proper scholarly procedures require that all quoted material be identified by quotation marks or indentation on the page, and the source of information and ideas, if from another, must be identified and be attributed to that source. Students are responsible for learning proper scholarly procedures. (Excerpted from *The Duke Community Standard*)

Further information about plagiarism—and forms of **cheating**, such as using another student’s paper, paying an agency to write a paper for you, etc.—can be found on the Duke Library web site at <http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism/>

If you have any doubts about whether you are adequately documenting your sources, feel free to consult the director of or tutors at the Writing Center.

DOCUMENTING AND FORMATTING

(Above you will see a page number and a sample header. The easiest way to insert this information is to go to the bar at the top of your document, select “Insert,” then click “Page Number.” Next, click your cursor to the left of the page number and type your name, etc. Then click on the “X” to close the header.)

Centered Boldface Title

Indented vs. Block Paragraphs

There are two customary ways to format paragraphs: they can either be indented or appear as blocks. Block paragraphs do not have their first lines indented and are separated from each other by white space (usually produced by hitting “Enter” twice, although you can alter the amount of white space between paragraphs by going to “Home,” opening “Paragraph,” and then selecting the spacing in the “Before” and “After” spacing boxes [try experimenting]. If you preset the spacing, then you need only hit “Enter” once between paragraphs—the program will do the rest).

There are three ways to indent your paragraphs:

1. Hit tab.
2. Place your cursor where you want a new paragraph to begin and then move the upper tab on the ruler (if it is displayed) at the top of your document to the half-inch position.
3. Place your cursor where you want a new paragraph to begin, go to “Home” on the bar at the top of your document, open the box marked “Paragraph,” then in the box labeled “Special,” select “First line.”

Do not create an indent by hitting your space bar repeatedly! Your formatting will be unstable.

Once you have set up a format, Word will use that format until you issue another set of instructions. (Be aware that if you set an indented format for an entire document and then decide to *center* titles/sub-titles, these will need adjusting.)

If you are using indented paragraphs, then you don't need extra white space between your paragraphs (as you do with block paragraphing). One variation you may see in the use of indented paragraphs is first paragraphs in separate sections that are not indented. This format is optional.

CREATING A WORKS CITED PAGE (using *Chicago Manual of Style*)

Here are the initial essentials:

- entries should be **alphabetized** by each author's last name. If an entry doesn't have an author's name (for example, some websites have no stated author), then whatever information is placed first in your entry should be alphabetized (but ignore "the" and "an" when alphabetizing).

Word has an alphabetizing function. Select all your entries, go to "Home," then "Paragraph," and then hit the icon labeled "AZ↓" and "OK" (Word presets the selection to "ascending" order—that is, A to Z). However, if one of your entries doesn't have an author and is a title in quote marks—"Theology . . ."—you will have to manually move this entry in the list as Word will read the quote marks and place it at the top of your list

- entries should be formatted with a hanging indent—**and this should not be created by using "Enter/Return" and/or hitting the space bar!** So, before you start entering your information, place your cursor where your first entry will be, go to "Home," then "Paragraph," and then under "Special," select "Hanging." Voilà!

A sample Works Cited page appears on the next page (and if you are viewing this document online, the page can be used as a working template for your own papers—you just need to delete the individual entries).

For types of references I have not covered, consult *The Chicago Manual of Style*, which is available online through Duke University Libraries. Go to <http://library.duke.edu/> and type in *Chicago Manual of Style*.

Works Cited

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- Lamb, Matthew L., and Matthew Levering, eds. *The Reception of Vatican II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.
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- Mary Mother of God Mission Society. "Sponsor a Seminarian." <http://vladmission.org/>.
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- Strohl, Jane E. "Luther's Spiritual Journey." In *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, edited by Donald K. McKim, 149–64. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
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FOOTNOTES AND PARENTHETICAL REFERENCES

Creating a footnote in Word is easy: Place your cursor where you want to insert your footnote number, then go to “References” on the bar at the top of your document and simply click on “Insert Footnote.” Your cursor will then jump down to the bottom of your page and there you can type the information you want in your note. To delete a complete note, delete the footnote number in the body of your paper. Do you want to change your footnotes to endnotes? If you expand the “Footnotes” box on your bar, you can then make changes to how you want your notes to appear.

Now let’s look at examples of formatted footnotes.

Your first citation is going to be to a **book with one author**. If you want to cite a particular page, change the final period to a comma and add the page number(s). Using “p.” is optional, so you might see any of the following: 103, 120-34 or p. 103, pp. 120-34.

¹ Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

Your second citation is to a **book with editors**:

² Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering, eds., *The Reception of Vatican II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Next, an **essay—or any extracted piece of writing—in an edited book**:

³ Ignatius, “To the Magnesians,” in *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. and trans. Cyril C. Richardson, (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 94–97.

Next, an **article in a scholarly journal**:

⁴ Paul Chung, “Karl Barth’s Theology of Reconciliation in Dialogue with a Theology of Religions,” *Mission Studies* 25.2 (2008): 211–28.

An **article in a magazine or newspaper** (today most of us access articles online, so I have included the necessary online reference below. If you are citing an actual newspaper, obviously you don’t need the http information):

⁵ John Corry, “‘Gospel and Guatemala’ A Look at Proselytizing,” *The New York Times*, March 28, 1985, <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/03/28/movies/gospel-and-guatemala-a-look-at-proselytizing.html> (accessed Feb. 14, 2017).

Citing **material posted on Sakai** for a class paper. Your professor may provide complete bibliographical information for the material posted on Sakai, but if s/he hasn't, it is fine to simply cite the basic information you do know:

⁶ Jane Doe, "Old Testament Exegeses" (Sakai). **Or**, for example: Jane Doe, "Old Testament Exegeses" (Sakai: OLDTESTAMENT.752.001.F16).

However, in certain circumstances (if your paper is going to be submitted outside the Divinity School), it might be necessary to track down the complete information. A good source of reliable information is the WorldCat site at <https://www.worldcat.org/>.

Want to cite **lectures notes**?

⁷ Susan Eastman, "The Gospel of Luke" (lecture, Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC, April 10, 2009).

Internet references. Given the variety of internet sources we can access and the fact that sites do not always provide complete identifying information, citing an internet source of information can be tricky. Nevertheless, at the very least you should be able to provide a description of a site (e.g., Methodism in the Philippines Today website) or a title for what is posted (see note 9 below), a web address, and a date when you accessed the site:

⁸ Pew Research Center, "What Prison Chaplains Do . . . And What They Think They Should Do," *Pew Research Center – Religion and Public Life*, March 22, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/03/22/prison-chaplains-what-they-do/> (accessed Feb. 15, 2017).

⁹ "Blessing of the Animals," <http://seasonofcreation.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/liturgya-usa-blessing-of-animals-sunday-1.pdf> (accessed Feb. 15, 2017).

In some of your papers you may choose to use **parenthetical references**—and you will certainly use them for citing biblical passages. How should these be formatted? Here are the basics:

- include the author's last name and the date of publication of the book or document you are citing (Tanner 2005)
- if you want to cite a particular page (Tanner 2005, 118)
- if you have already mentioned the author's name in the sentence, then you don't need to include it in the parenthetical citation: "As Tanner (2005) notes . . ." or "As Tanner states, 'Quote . . .' (2005, 118).

And for citing the Bible:

- (Gen 1:1-10) or (Gen 1:1-10, NRSV) (It is customary to note which translation you are using, but if you are citing only a single translation, after you have stipulated which one you are using, you don't need to repeat the information)
- If you have named the biblical book in a sentence, then you can usually drop the name in parenthesis: "As we see in Genesis, the Lord . . . (1:1-19)."
- When punctuating a parenthetical reference, place the punctuation **after** the closing parenthesis: (1:1-19), (1:1-19); (1:1-19): (1:1-19)— (1:1-19). (1:1-19)! etc.

The standard format for biblical studies is found in *The SBL Handbook of Style* published by the Society for Biblical Literature (copies can be found in the library, but a student supplement for using SBL can be found online at <https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/SBLHSsupp2015-02.pdf>). However, note that faculty at the Divinity School who teach courses on the Old Testament and New Testament may differ in how they would like you to cite *secondary sources*. Some will want you to use footnotes; others parenthetical references. Note what the professor stipulates in his or her syllabus and, if in doubt, simply ask.