

PART II: CRITICAL THINKING, STUDY AND RESEARCH SKILLS

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CRITICAL THINKING, STUDY AND RESEARCH SKILLS

This section will help you:

- To get the most out of lectures and seminars
- To make full use of the LRC resources
- To find and assess material from the internet
- To gain confidence in handling arguments
- To read critically and weigh up evidence
- To research, plan and write more effectively
- To reference your work correctly
- To improve your written work
- To become aware of the criteria for assessment
- To develop career skills
- To reflect on your experience of learning

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF LECTURES AND SEMINARS

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The Lecture

This is normally a formal session though our lecturing styles do differ. The function of the lecture is to provide a structure for the topic, personal commentary on a particular theme and to provide direction for your reading. Remember that during the hour or so that lectures last only a relatively patchy coverage of any subject is possible. You must supplement lecture notes with independent reading. Do not rely solely on the lecture notes.

Seminars

These are small group sessions of students who, with a tutor, discuss particular themes, problems or ideas that may have arisen during lectures. Topics are usually identified in advance via module booklets so that you have time to read and prepare.

Tutorials

This is a one-to-one contact with your tutor. It may involve consideration and analysis of a draft of an assignment or an essay that has been marked and it is a key feature in the preparation of long essays, particularly your third year dissertation. It is here that academic dialogue takes place between you and a member of staff, so come forearmed with factual knowledge and ideas about the topic area.

Independent Study

In all your modules the contact time with a tutor is only a small part of your study. We expect you to spend time in the library, reading books and articles, browsing the internet and using other forms of research. In addition you will be given specific tasks to do between taught classes. These are very important and should be a priority for your work.

Studying in Higher Education

Higher Education will be fun, challenging, sometimes uplifting and rewarding. It will also be demanding and at times overwhelming. You will have the opportunity to learn a huge amount and develop ideas which will change the way you think about the world and about who you are in relation to the world. In Theology and Religious Studies you will be bombarded by a whole new vocabulary of words which may be mysterious to you now but which will be second nature to you when you leave: eschatology; *kerygma*; hermeneutics; exegesis; *kairos*; heuristic; phenomenology and so on. Use a dictionary and learn the new vocabulary as quickly as you can.

In order to do well at university you must be prepared to question and to think critically. You must refuse to accept the claims of others (even lecturers!) without first seeking evidence or good reasons. You must move from a position of blind acceptance to investigative questioning. For this reason, higher education can be extremely stimulating.

Monitor and record the time you put into each module. Include your research, reading, practical work (if applicable), note-making, discussions with others, quiet reflections, writing up of essays, and so on. This should help you focus on time management, on prioritising your work schedule, on checking whether you are spending a disproportionate amount of time on any one module, and so on. It is revealing to reflect on the amount of time you have invested in each aspect of your studies.

Developing study skills

There is more to undertaking a module than simply the acquisition of information. A variety of skills is required to consistently produce high quality work during your time at St. Mary's (for example, do you work only to deadlines, or do you work to a set timetable of, say, 3 hours per day?) Many of these (transferable) skills will be considered attractive to future employers, and tutors will be prompted for your proficiency in them when completing references for you. Be aware of the skills you need to develop during your time at St. Mary's and be prepared to include some of them in your c.v.s. Consider your proficiency at the following:

Communication skills: writing essays, short responses or commentaries; delivering presentations; responding to questions in class; contributing to group discussions.

Information skills: using libraries; using encyclopaedias and dictionaries; searching the internet; handling information and its presentation; checking references.

Life skills: Organisation of time and resources; attendance; punctuality; co-operation in groups; leadership; management of tasks and projects.

Independence: Autonomy; self-motivation; self-reliance; interest in topics; initiative; confidence; judgement.

Basic skills: literacy; numeracy; computer literacy; typing skills; proof-reading skills.

Study skills: note-taking; reading; research; prioritising material and knowledge; revision techniques; exam technique.

Creating a module file

For each module you should keep a separate file to store your work. It will contain module handbook, lecture notes, hand-outs, photocopied articles, any assessment pieces or seminar preparation. It should be divided up into sections according to the topics being studied. When you produce revision notes and sample essays for the topics these can be inserted in the relevant section of your file.

Making lecture notes

Each lecturer has a different style of presentation. In some classes you will be expected virtually to copy down everything the lecturer says. In other classes you will receive fuller hand-outs and the lecturer will provide supplementary material. Others will require you to take notes from Power Point and so on. Similarly, you will develop your own style of note-taking. Some make very thorough notes, others brief bullet points. What follows is some general advice about note-taking.

1. **There is no point making notes unless they are going to be of use to you in your studies.** If you cannot read your own writing you may do better just to record key words.
2. There are few people who remember the content of lectures! Most need to remind themselves of what went on by jotting down the main features or a skeleton of the lecture's structure.

3. Do not expect to be able to record everything the lecturer says. If you are frightened of missing something essential - because you cannot write fast enough, for example - then use a hand-held tape recorder (ask the lecturer's permission first).
4. When taking notes leave lots of space between remarks. This makes the notes easier to read and also allows you to add secondary comments later. Some people allow a wide margin next to their notes in order to insert comments later.
5. Some students make poor notes which are incomplete and of limited use. Be disciplined and prepared to spend time after class revising and completing lecture notes. The best note-takers are those who look at their notes as soon as the lecture is over. By doing this you can fill in the sections you failed to record while the content is still fresh in your mind. The next step would then be to incorporate some of your own reading into the notes to help flesh out the material. For example you can insert biblical references in full or look up the correct form of quotations which you did not catch in class, and so on.
6. Personal reading either before and/or after lectures helps to make sense of lectures and allows you to focus on the important sections of your notes.
7. At the end of each lecture write down in summary the three most important issues dealt with, or identify and record a few of the key words.

Getting the most out of seminars

Seminars vary in style between modules. Not all modules use the lecture-seminar format. Some are based on two hour long workshops in which the lines between lecture-based and seminar-based material is blurred. Generally, seminars consist of a small group of students. The format is more informal than the lecture. They are not so didactic and content-based. The idea is to allow you, the student, to interact with material in a way that you cannot do in lectures. This interaction will probably involve discussion based on initial questions or reading (sometimes prepared in advance) or video clips, for example. It allows the student to express views, engage with others with different views, test out arguments, try out new ideas, ask for clarification of issues raised in lectures and so on. Seminars allow the tutor to focus more deeply on a topic of interest and to explore questions of relevance for the assessment. In some modules there are marks for seminar participation.

Here are some typical worries that students often express about their seminars:

- I'm shy so I hardly ever say anything in seminars
- I wouldn't like to explain things to others in the group in case I am wrong
- I find it difficult to ask others in the group what is going on
- I find it hard to follow the discussion
- I'm not clear how the seminars relate to the other parts of the course
- I'm not sure what to do to prepare myself for the seminar
- I am never sure what to write down in the seminars
- I feel I can't argue with great thinkers and writers

If you lack confidence or feel embarrassed you are not on your own. You will often only have half-formed ideas; do not be afraid to express these. You will not always be able to communicate in the most lucid way. A chief aim of attending Higher Education is to 'find your voice'. Seminars are one way of achieving this. Do not be intimidated by those who speak out. It is not the quantity but the quality of participation that counts. University life is an attempt to prepare you for the sorts of encounters you will meet in the world of work too. The skills gained through attending and participating in seminars will be useful. It will take time and you may need to ask your tutor for help. Remember, the more you invest in your seminars, the more you will benefit. Do not try to be a passenger travelling for free.

MAKING FULL USE OF THE LRC RESOURCES FOR THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

The best way to learn how to use the LRC is to use it – regularly and with a clear outcome in mind. During the modules we will give you some tasks to complete in the LRC to help you practise but it is important that you also explore for yourself. Most of the books you will need are in the 200s of the cataloguing system and are on the ground floor to the left of the stairs.

You will also use the on-line research facilities. These are on the portal, including St Mary's Online, as well as on the internet. To begin with Gateways are very useful and you should begin with INTUTE <http://www.intute.ac.uk/religion/> . As well as good links that has a 'virtual training suite' which will help you to learn how to get the best out of the internet for research in Theology and Religious Studies. There is also a blog and other links. Some other useful gateways are:

- Humbul Humanities Hub www.humbul.ac.uk
- Virtual Religion Index www.rci.rutgers.edu/~religion/vri/index.html
- RDN Internet Philosopher www.vts.rdn.ac.uk/tutorial/philosophy/index.htm
- EBSCO Host service contains the full text of articles from several thousand periodicals. It is a very important source of information for a wide range of coursework especially at Level 2 and 3. Access that from the library pages.

Effective use of the LRC comes with practice and there will be opportunity during the course to develop these skills. Make use of the online catalogue, but once you have found a book, look at the surrounding books which should be on the same or a related topic. Note that books on similar topics might also be placed in different parts of the library. For this reason you should often go back to the catalogue and not simply browse in the areas of the library that you are familiar with.

Lots of help is available in the LRC. Don't be afraid to ask! Contact the IT Help Desk or the Library Counter or speak to Anne Hutchinson the Theology and Religious Studies librarian.

FINDING AND ASSESSING MATERIAL FROM THE INTERNET

The internet is a source of a tremendous amount of material. Browsers such as Google (www.google.co.uk) can find sites and documents on many subjects. However, not all the information found on the web is accurate or up to date, and some sites are set up to further a particular agenda. Here are five simple criteria that you can use to evaluate websites or documents on the web

Questions to ask	Factors to check
<p>Accuracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Who is the author of the document? *Can you contact him or her? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Make sure you know the distinction between an author and a web editor
<p>Authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Who published the document? A person or organisation? *Is the author qualified to write this document? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Check the domain of the website. Make sure you know how to identify different kinds of domain name
<p>Objectivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Why does the document/website exist? *Who is it written for? *Are any opinions expressed? *Does it show bias? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Check for advertising on the website and determine how large a feature the advertising is. Is advertising really the entire aim of the site, even if it isn't obvious
<p>Currency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Is it up to date? *When was it last updated? *When was it produced? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Check for a statement about when the page was last updated. Broken links will indicate that it hasn't been maintained very well
<p>User friendliness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Is the website free? *Are graphics and advanced features over used? *Is the website presented clearly? *Are any links evaluated and/or described or is there merely a list of links? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Over use of graphics, frames etc can cause problems when viewing documents on older PCs or via a modem *Understand that older browsers aren't suitable for viewing some websites * Bear in mind people with special needs

HANDLING ARGUMENTS

What is an argument?

If someone says they have had an argument with someone, we usually think of a row or an angry disagreement. For the sake of peace many people try to avoid arguments of this sort. People who like arguments are either bad tempered or they are bullies. An argument is a battle with words that you win if you get your own way, or lose if you surrender to the other person.

There is, however, another meaning of argument. People who are studying at university should be concerned about arguments, not in the sense of angry exchanges, but in the sense of supporting a conclusion. Some truths are self evident or can be discovered easily - it is not difficult to find out whether or not it is raining outside. Other truths are much more difficult to establish. We need to build up a case to find the truth. An argument, in this sense is a **reasonable case in favour of a particular conclusion**.

Sometimes someone will make a statement without giving any supporting evidence or argument. This is an **assertion**.

Nuclear power stations are better for the environment than coal powered stations.

This assertion may be true or false, but no reasons are given to help us decide whether it is true or false. If we are to believe it, we need some reasons.

Nuclear power stations do not produce greenhouse gases, therefore they are better for the environment than coal powered stations.

The statement is now supported by an argument. The argument has two parts a **conclusion** and a supporting **reason**. For any argument we can ask: Is the reason given itself true? (In this case: is it true that power stations do not produce greenhouse gases) How do we know that it is true? (Is it obvious? How can we find out?) Does the reason support the conclusion? (In this case: is there a connection between producing greenhouses gases and being bad for the environment?) Is it relevant? Finally, are there other relevant considerations which would support the opposite conclusion?

In our example, the argument *does* tend to support the conclusion and it *is* based on something that is true. To this extent, it is a good reason to believe the statement. However, what also needs to be asked is whether there are other arguments to consider which might support the opposite view. Can you think of any?

The aim of argument should not be simply to persuade someone else – to “win” the argument - but should be to find the truth by finding which arguments are really the strongest. A valid argument is one where the conclusion does follow from the starting point (the **premise**). However a good argument will not always give a true conclusion unless the starting point is also true.

If the moon was made of cheese then astronauts would not need to bring their own food with them.

The conclusion follows from the premise. It is a good argument. However the premise is not true and the conclusion is not true. Astronauts who go to the moon do need to bring food with them.

On the other hand, it is also worth noting that an *invalid* argument may still have a true conclusion. The conclusion is not supported by the reasons which are given, but it might be true for other reasons.

All heads of state are kings or queens, therefore the head of state of the United Kingdom is either a king or a queen.

The conclusion is true – the United Kingdom does have a queen, but the reason given for this is false: many countries have presidents instead of kings or queens.

Studying at university will require assessing the strength of other people's arguments and the ability to build arguments of your own.

CRITICAL READING AND WEIGHING EVIDENCE

Single author books tend to be written from a particular viewpoint which may colour the material. The author will probably be taking a particular stance on a debated question rather than presenting 'facts'. Sometimes the view may be controversial or disputed and the author may not say so! Never assume that a book is impartial, accepted wisdom, or something that every scholar agrees on. This is one reason why a range of scholarly views should be sought. Ask yourself questions such as:

- What is the author's aim? Does he/she have an axe to grind?
- How does the particular point relate to the argument as a whole?

Reading is not just about obtaining new information; it is about expanding your own thinking. Key questions to ask yourself include:

- What point is the author trying to make? (subject content)
- Can I present this argument in my own words? Could I explain this to my little sister?
- Do I agree with the author's view or argument? Do different views exist?

Many of the questions asked when reading information on the web can also be asked about books or articles. Who published the material? Is it a journal where articles have to be "peer reviewed" before being published? Is the author qualified to write about the topic? When was it written? A book written many years ago may have become a classic, and may still be worth reading, but it would also have to be compared with the best contemporary writing. Always remember that even a scholarly author may have a hidden agenda and you should look for evidence and argument and also think what might be missing from what is being said.

RESEARCHING, PLANNING AND WRITING ESSAYS

KEY ASSIGNMENT AND EXAMINATION WORDS:

ASSESS	Weigh up the evidence and arguments for and against something
COMPARE	Look for similarities and differences between two or more things
CONTRAST	Deliberately single out and emphasise the differences
CRITICISE	Give your assessment of the evidence, explore its implications
DEFEND	Set out the arguments and evidence for something, taking into account any problems or objections to this view
DEFINE	Set down the precise meaning/s of something
DESCRIBE	Give a detailed account of something
DISCUSS	Investigate and examine by argument, explore the implications, debate and possibly consider the alternatives
EVALUATE	Weigh something up (maybe pros and cons) and make an appraisal of the worth of something
EXAMINE	Describe the problem or situation, analyse the main issues or questions and how they might be answered
EXPLAIN	Make clear, account for something
ILLUSTRATE	Use examples to explain something
INTERPRET	Explain the meaning or significance of something, make it clear
JUSTIFY	Give adequate reasons or grounds for a claim or conclusion, and address any objections to it
OUTLINE	Give the main features or general principles of a subject, leave out minor details and emphasise the structure or arrangement
RELATE	(a) Show how things are connected or affect each other (b) Tell the story of something
REVIEW	Make a survey of, examine the subject critically
STATE	Present in brief, clear form
SUMMARISE	Give a brief account of the main points, omitting details or examples
TRACE	Describe the development or history

Here are a few examples of assignment tasks:

Example 1

Characterize ***the prophet Amos*** and relate him to the ***prophetic tradition in Israel***.

The prophet Amos is the main subject; the prophetic tradition of Israel is a secondary topic which should narrow the focus of your study of Amos.

Example 2

Is ***Rahner's*** or ***Moltmann's*** account of the ***doctrine of the Trinity*** to be preferred?

The topic is the doctrine of the Trinity in two versions: Rahner and Moltmann. Both must be described, assessed, compared.

Example 3

What might ***count as evidence*** for belief in ***life after death***?

This question about life after death is not asking for whether you believe in life after death. Neither is it asking you to simply give any evidence you may have to hand. The question is asking you to analyse the problems of, for example, considering the experiences people have to be accurate and reliable evidence.

Generate ideas and plan your answer

Spend time 'mind mapping' by jotting down everything that comes into your mind of relevance to the topic; do this in list form initially. Only later develop and refine your reflections into a 'flow chart', boxing key ideas and connecting related ideas by linking boxes into a string or network of thoughts. Write down issues you see contained in the question, key scholars, questions you may have, things you need to check up on and so on. Do not try to be organized or logical at this stage. Do not try to criticize what comes to mind. When you run out of ideas you may need to do some research.

Research and reading

Use the bibliography given in the module handbook to gather relevant material and notes. Gear this to your own needs and interests using your mind mapping ideas. There are two kinds of reading: the first is fast skimming of texts. Use this scanning technique to decide whether material is of relevance to your essay task and to get a feeling for the material in terms of its subject matter. You can then decide whether you need to make a second, more detailed, reading. This takes time. You may need to re-read small sections of writing. This is especially true of encyclopaedia and dictionary entries. You will have to master complex ideas; you will need to analyse complex arguments.

Encyclopaedia and dictionary entries will be of great use to you since they aim to give information as objectively and as fully as possible. However, check the year of publication to ensure that the material is not outdated and remember that the writing tends to be dense and concise and therefore harder to read.

You will need to consult several sources in order to write your essay, but you will not necessarily need to read a whole book in its entirety. Learn how to 'gut' a book. Use the table of contents or index at the back to decide which pages are of most relevance. The preface, foreword or back page often gives a short statement of the author's viewpoint and the content of each chapter. The first or last paragraph of each chapter usually summarises

the chapter's content. Academic texts are not like detective stories - you are allowed to read the ending first to see if the beginning is worth reading.

Note-taking

The best way to remember what you have read is to make notes on the material. However, do not make notes unconsciously and forget to read the text. Neither should you make notes on material you are never going to need. The best strategy is firstly to read carefully the whole article or section. Secondly, make thorough notes on the relevant sections. This consolidates what you have read and allows you to decide which aspects of the material are important. Be sure not to misrepresent the author by substituting words which distort the intended meaning. For example, if the author states "Based on the available evidence I would tentatively suggest..." do not write "MacKenzie strongly argues for..."

Make a detailed plan of the essay

Only at this stage begin to order your thoughts into a structure. Use your previous notes and ideas to develop an organized plan. Having planned the structure of the essay as a whole, in outline, be clear what each paragraph is intended to communicate.

The **introduction** should be short. Aim to include some or all of the following:

- Set the scene, by outlining the context of the discussion and preparing the ground for the material you are going to present.
- Analyse the essay question (re-state what it is requiring of you).
- Define or explain any key terms.
- Set out the scope of your essay (what it will do, what it will not do). For example, "In discussing the topic of life after death, I shall confine myself to philosophical arguments and exclude from consideration evidence based on medical criteria."
- Outline the key issues in a concise but clear format.

The **main body** of the essay contains around 80% of your word count. According to the type of question set, it should contain:

- Description.
- Information
- Analysis.
- Views of others
- Your assessment of all of these.

The **conclusion** will be about 15% of the essay. It may:

- Present or summarize your findings (it is OK to repeat yourself).
- Provide a final assessment of the situation.
- Relate the previous discussion to the question set.
- Discuss the wider implications or future prospects etc.

Discuss your research with your tutor

This need not take long. You may simply want to clarify an area you are not sure of, or ask a question. It may consist of a brief verbal explanation of the approach you intend to take in the hope that your approach will be approved. It may consist in showing a plan or draft piece of writing to your tutor. Tutors can give feedback on draft essays. This stage may seem like an ordeal but it will lead to improved work and should build your confidence. All students

who go to see their tutor obtain higher marks as a result. Remember, if you submit work to a tutor always retain a copy for yourself.

Evaluation and re-writing

Leave your essay for a few days and return to it with fresh eyes. Ask someone else to read it for you. Does it make sense? Have you answered the question set? Have you covered all the main aspects; Have you gone into enough depth or is the work shallow and superficial? Is all the content of relevance? Is all of the material accurate? Is there a logical order? Have you distinguished clearly between your ideas and those of others? Is the essay the correct length? Have you proof-read thoroughly?

Finally, use the Essay Writing Checklist – see below – to make sure that everything is correct

Theology and Religious Studies Essay writing checklist – Level 4

When you have finished your essay go through the checklist and circle the appropriate response for each item. You should be able to circle 'yes' for every item and if you can't go back to the essay and make the necessary changes. Include this checklist at the front of your essay.

I have:

Writing Skills

Proof read my work for spelling and grammatical errors yes/no

Used formal English (not, for example, 'doesn't' or you're) yes/no

Used **s** to indicate a plural and '**s** to indicate ownership (for example 'Christians believe that ...' or 'the Christian's beliefs ...' **NB 'it's' indicates 'it is', not ownership** yes/no

Italicised all book titles and foreign words except names and places yes/no

Written the full title at the beginning yes/no

Written an introduction to my essay setting out clearly what it does yes/no

Bibliography and Referencing

Checked that my references are in Harvard style and follow the instructions in the Student Handbook yes/no

Checked that all quotations are referenced and have inverted commas around them unless they are indented yes/no

Included references for the sources of my information yes/no

Checked that my bibliography is in alphabetical order yes/no

Given **full** details of any websites used and numbered these yes/no

Regnum Date

Theology and Religious Studies

Essay writing checklist – Level 5 and 6

When you have finished your essay go through the checklist and circle the appropriate response for each item. You should be able to circle 'yes' for every item and if you can't go back to the essay and make the necessary changes. Include this checklist at the front of your essay.

I have:

Writing Skills

- Proof read my work for spelling and grammatical errors yes/no
- Used formal English (not, for example, 'doesn't' or you're) yes/no
- Used **s** to indicate a plural and '**s** to indicate ownership (for example 'Christians believe that ...' or 'the Christian's beliefs ...' **NB 'it's' indicates 'it is', not ownership** yes/no
- Italicised* all book titles and foreign words except names and places yes/no
- Written the full title at the beginning yes/no
- Maintained clear focus on the question or title throughout yes/no
- Argued a case and not just provided information yes/no
- Written an introduction to my essay setting out clearly what it does and a well rounded conclusion yes/no

Bibliography and Referencing

- Checked that my references are in Harvard style and follow the instructions in the Student Handbook yes/no
- Checked that all quotations are referenced and have inverted commas around them unless they are indented yes/no
- Included references for the sources of my information and the ideas of an author yes/no
- Checked the bibliography is in alphabetical order and that it includes the author and article/chapter title from a journal or edited book yes/no
- Given **full** details of any websites used and numbered them yes/no

Regnum Date

Common problems with essay writing

"I always find it hard to start off my essay"

If you develop a block in planning do not fear. Try attacking the question without a plan to see if that kick-starts you into action. You can look at the structure or re-order material or develop a plan at a later stage. If you are still stuck it may be because of information overload. Try talking to another person about your reading and your ideas. Speaking out loud often helps you to articulate your ideas in simple language. It sometimes helps to imagine having to give a class to sixth formers on the essay topic. How would you choose to get the main message across? What strategy would you choose? How would you grab their interest? If you cannot answer the question out loud, you will not succeed when writing an answer. Keep the sentences short and simple. Do not try to achieve too much.

When you put pen to paper ask yourself:

- What am I trying to say?
- Can I express myself more clearly?
- What basic points do I need to include?
- Am I communicating to the reader?

“I find it hard to write enough”

Try making more detailed notes. Check to see you are not omitting important points or assuming material that needs to be spelt out. Remember you have to explain fully the points you are trying to get across. Illustrate your argument through the use of more examples. Do not be vague. Give more attention to how your points link up with one another.

“I find I have too much material; it always go over the word count”

If you do not know what to leave out you need to be more brutal at the organizing stage. Are you including waffle or too much preamble in the introduction? Have you included an aside that can be omitted? Are you being unnecessarily ponderous in your writing style and labouring points too much?

You might like to explore how footnotes can be used in academic writing to include interesting and related material that is not necessary for your main argument.

CORRECT REFERENCING

Coursework must be **your own** work. However, academic research involves reading, digesting and commenting upon relevant scholarly work and it is expected that, at undergraduate level, your work will rely heavily upon discussing and analysing ideas from these sources. It is important that you do not just string together fine-sounding phrases, but you will want to use **relevant** quotations, paraphrases and ideas from others to support the argument you are building in your essay. The important thing is to **acknowledge** where you have used **others scholars' words or ideas** by proper referencing. It should be possible for the person marking your work to locate the exact page or paragraph that you have used, whether from book, journal article, periodical, encyclopaedia or internet website. An impressive piece of coursework often contains a great many references to such sources and it is important to learn this skill, using the recommended system.

Plagiarism

Be **very** careful to avoid plagiarism in written work of any kind. Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's words or ideas as though they were your own. If detected, plagiarism results in automatic failure for that piece of work. Whilst it is perfectly acceptable to paraphrase the wisdom of others or quote verbatim, you must acknowledge the author (i.e.: reference with name, date and page number where applicable). This includes material found on the Internet. Finally, the quality that is likely to gain most essay marks is original thought.

The School's Guide to Academic Misconduct can be found on page 55.

Referencing procedure

Proper referencing involves giving the author, date, title, place and publisher of the source you are quoting, paraphrasing or referring to in your essay. The two most important things about referencing are clarity and consistency. The idea of referencing is to provide the reader with all the information necessary to locate the exact page or paragraph of the work to which you are referring.

In this programme, the recommended system is the **Harvard System** (otherwise known as the Social Scientific Style or Author-Date system). This should be used both for citing sources within your essay and for your bibliography.

The Harvard System in General

What does it look like?

Basically at the end of the passage in your essay where you have alluded or referred to an author in support of your argument, you put in brackets the author's surname and the year of publication e.g. (Jones 2009). Then and only then do you add your little old full stop! If you have quoted a particular statement that appears say on page 100 then the reference might become (Jones 2009:100).

What about Footnotes?

Footnotes can be used to expand on a point you make in the body of a text but the Harvard system enables you to dispense with footnotes as a form of referencing quotations or

support for your argument. It presumes full details will be at the end of your paper but keeps the main text nice and short.

What about Scripture Quotes?

These should always be book, chapter and verse. 'And God said: "Let there be light!" and there was light.' (Genesis 1:3). If there is more than one book of the same title, this is indicated by a Roman numeral e.g. Josiah's reform is described in both II Kings 23:1-27 and in II Chronicles 34:8-35:19. Always include in the bibliography the particular translation of the Bible you are using.

What are Primary Sources?

Basically, a Primary source is a key original document, book or piece of information that 'other authors have written books about.' To some extent the 'primary source' for an essay depends on the question. For example, in a Scripture essay especially but in Theology in general, the Bible is a classic 'primary source.' Other 'primary sources' in Theology would include documents from Christian councils such as Nicea, Chalcedon and Papal documents up until the present day. In Philosophy though, an essay on Plato would mean that quotations from his famous work *The Republic* would be citations from a primary source.

What is Secondary Literature?

These are the works by authors you have consulted to develop your ideas. They should enrich your understanding of the topic but not prevent you from engaging with your main text or primary source. In general you should try not to quote a primary source through a secondary work – it is best if you can, to look up the original. So if the author of a book quotes Thomas Aquinas, do try and look at what Aquinas actually says, rather than take Joe Bloggs' word for it.

What is a Bibliography

In the next section there is an explanation of how to set out a bibliography. When you are using the Harvard method it is necessary to always end your essay with a bibliography. This should be in alphabetical order based on the authors' surnames.

Harvard Referencing – some details

Body of essay

Full bibliographical details must then be put in your bibliography. If an author has published more than one book or article in the same year, you can distinguish these in your citations and bibliography as (for example) Hayes 1999a and Hayes 1999b. You must cite the source of any ideas that are not your own, as well as **quotations** or **paraphrases** that you have used.

Examples of how these might appear in the body of your essay are as follows:

Direct quotation

It is said that, 'The Old Testament is a collection of holy writings, gathered together by the Jerusalem community of the last centuries BC as the embodiment of its sacred traditions' (Coggins 1990:101).

Or you might introduce the quotation and put a shorter reference in brackets:

Coggins states that, 'The Old Testament is a collection of holy writings, gathered together by the Jerusalem community of the last centuries BC as the embodiment of its sacred traditions' (1990:101).

If it is a longer quotation please indent and single space the material e.g. Smith remarked:

Theology has always been and will always be the greatest of all sciences. It seeks to understand not just the visible but the invisible, not just man but creation, not just individuals but societies, not just cults but cultures, not just incidents but epochs, not just justice but injustice and the meaning of all life, however great or small (2008:11)

NB: Whilst reading one source you may wish to quote another source found in it. This secondary source (unless you have seen it yourself) should be referenced as follows:

‘...sufficient artefact material has been excavated from the regions of the two petty states of Israel and Judah to support the notion that the populace revered more than just the single deity’ (Handy 1995:27-8 in Mills 1998:24).

Paraphrase

Coggins explains that the writings of the Old Testament are a collection that was put together during the last centuries BC by the Jerusalem community, who saw them as embodying their sacred traditions (1990:101).

Use of ideas

We have to realize that the Old Testament is not just one book; the texts were put together over several centuries by those living in Jerusalem (Coggins 1990:101).

How (and Why) to Set Out a Bibliography

Bibliographies sometimes feel like the very *last* thing you want to be bothering with. In fact, they should be one of the very *first*! When you sit down to do your essay, write the title at the top, then the ‘Bibliography’ heading. You can then write your essay ‘in between’, filling out the bibliography as you go along. While this may seem like a distracting chore, there are very good reasons to take time and care over your bibliography:

Positive reasons ☺!

1. **It is good academic practice.** One of the reasons you come to university is to learn to be *scholars*, and giving accurate and formally set-out references and bibliographies is part and parcel of this.
2. **Your readers need to know where all your wonderful, painstaking research has come from.** This requires not only knowing the title of the book/article, but also the precise publisher and date, etc..
3. **It will help your own revision.** When you look back on your old essays, it will help you immensely if you know *where exactly* you originally found the information you’ve cited.
4. **A good bibliography is a joy to behold!** Just as you lovingly arrange photos of cherished friends and family members into albums... so too a bibliography records the happy moments you’ve shared with your primary and secondary sources.

Negative reasons ☹!

5. **You lose marks if you don’t.** This isn’t just us being mean or pedantic, for the positive reasons 1 and 2 listed above.
6. **Fraud is a criminal offence.** Seriously though, when you submit an essay you sign a statement (on the green form) *confirming* that you ‘have included a full bibliography and/or reference list as required’...

Your bibliography should be organized **alphabetically, by author surname**. If you are using more than one source from a specific author, list their publications in date order. If there are two or more from the same year, designate them as (say) 1999a, 1999b, etc. The way the information is presented varies slightly depending on the kind of text it is. For example:

Monographs (i.e. a 'normal' book)

Titles and subtitles appear in *italics*.

Tyler, P., 1997. *The Way of Ecstasy: Learning to Pray with Teresa of Avila*. Norwich: Canterbury Press.

Edited volumes

If there is more than one editor, only initials of the first follow the surname.

Fry, H., R. Montagu and L. Scholefield (eds) 2005. *Women's Voices: New Perspectives for the Christian-Jewish Dialogue*. London: SCM Press.

Articles in journals

Article/essay title is in inverted commas. Italics used for title of book itself. Page numbers of the specific article/essay itself are given. You must also give the issue and/or volume number of the journal its in.

Towey, A. 2009. 'Dei Verbum: Fit for Purpose?', *New Blackfriars* 90/1026 (March), pp. 206-218

Articles/essays in edited volumes

Article/essay title is in inverted commas. Italics used for title of book itself. Page numbers of the specific article/essay itself are given.

Bullivant, S., 2010. 'The New Atheism and Sociology: Why Here? Why Now? What Next?', in A. Amarasingam (ed.), *Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal* (Leiden: Brill), pp. 86-102

Primary sources where editor's comments are cited

Wansbrough, H. 1990. 'The Deuteronomistic History' in *New Jerusalem Bible* (Study edition) London: Darton, Longman & Todd, p. 197.

Referencing Sacred Texts

Biblical books are spelled out in full, except when chapter and verse number(s) are given; thus Genesis 11, Genesis 11-12, but Gen. 11.1. When quoting from the Qur'an, give the Sura and verse number, i.e. Sura 65.3.

Ancient Sources

References to books and chapters (etc.) in ancient authors, such as those of the early Church Fathers, Aristotle, Plato, Josephus, Philo, etc., should always be in arabic numbers with a full stop between, e.g. Homer, *Iliad* 20.3.17; Josephus, *Ant.* 5.223. Note the comma after the author's name (*not* to be abbreviated) but not after the title. Titles of ancient works (except for the biblical, apocryphal and Qumran writing) are in italics.

Other Documents

One example might be the Roman Catholic document *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, where the reference in the body of your essay might appear as (1994:n.874).

Websites

Most importantly, you must give a **full URL** of the specific webpage you are citing, *and* the date you visited the site. It is also important to include some information of the nature of the source, the kind of material that it is. Give references in the text as 'Internet Source 1', 'Internet Source 2'. These should then be listed in order under a separate heading in your bibliography.

Internet Source 1: McCarthy, G., 2004. 'Interview: Theologian and Social Activist Mary Grey', *The Social Edge*, 02/02/10 <<http://webzine.thesocialedge.com/interviews/the-social-edge-interview-theologian-and-social-activist-mary-grey/>>

IMPROVING YOUR WRITTEN WORK

General Presentation

The quality of essay presentation is important. You must word process your work and third year dissertations must be bound. Develop a style of presentation that looks immaculate and which is easy to read – font size 12 and one and a half line spacing is ideal. This booklet is in Helvetica 11 with single spacing to make it more compact. The right hand margins have been justified as well as the left hand ones. Decide what works for you and stick to it!

Writing Essays

An essay is your chance to demonstrate your knowledge and ability and to some extent to use your creativity and imagination. Although this guide will offer advice, there is much scope for developing your own individual style of essay writing. However, there are certain principles that you will do well to remember.

Style and grammar

Always argue from the general to the specific, that is make general statements first then give examples and evidence to support the generalisations. If you include diagrams make sure that they are titled, referenced, and referred to in the text of the essay. Do not waste words with waffle. Keep your sentences short and clear. Check your work using the checklist on page 40-41.

Title and Content

Usually you will be given a specific essay title but sometimes you will be set an assignment which allows you freedom to choose your own title within certain boundaries.

Often the most difficult dilemma when essay writing is deciding what information to leave out. Select only the most relevant material and make sure you relate it clearly to the essay title

Word limits

All coursework will have a word limit associated with it. Although we do not count the words, you are expected to keep within $\pm 10\%$ of this word limit, by being selective in the information you include and writing concisely. It is never a good idea to be under the word length. Students are required to provide a word count at the end of the work. You will be penalised if your work is too long or too short .

Submission of coursework

Coursework should be handed in to F201 or the box during the designated time. Your name must not appear on any piece of work. Only your REGNUM number entered on the assessment form should identify your work.

Structure

In addition to the structure of the essay as a whole, ensure the reader can follow the sequence of thought from one paragraph to the next. Each paragraph should have an internal structure to it too and should only deal with one idea or issue. The first sentence of each should indicate the content of the paragraph. In order to make the ideas flow within and between paragraphs you will need to use a variety of **transitional words** that indicate how things link together. Assist the reader in following your argument by clearly highlighting your intentions through the use of “**signposts**”. This helps the reader to recognize your aims.

For example:

“Having looked at the strengths of this, one must now consider the weaknesses.”

“While this point of view has its advantages, Moltmann’s view is also worth considering.”

“Having dealt with Rahner, we must now consider Moltmann’s understanding of the Trinity.”

“As we have seen in the previous section...”

“To summarize...”

“In short...”

