

# Liminal Theological Seminary

## Basic Writing Guidelines

### I. Writing in the Online Environment

As your primary source of evaluation is your participation in the online course environment, writing becomes an important aspect of this. There are several things that I look for when evaluating course-based discussion responses.

1. Your responses coherently answer the discussion questions in a manner that *extends* beyond simply rephrasing what the book or journal article has stated. I look for depth and breadth of answering. This doesn't mean you have to write a novel each time you answer a question, but it does mean that I am looking for how you *think* about the questions and the material you have read. In this fashion, your responses should indicate that you have engaged with the text—questioned it, disagreed with it, critically explored it, and related it to personal or external experiences or information. Remember I have read the texts; therefore what I want to know is *what struck you* about the text. In general a good response post will be no less than 3 paragraphs in length for most classes unless otherwise noted (generally most students write longer to adequately express what they have internalized and processed in what they have read). It's important to remember that a paragraph is at least 3 sentences in length—but as graduate students, your paragraph should be much more than this.
2. Your discussion posts should be organized and focused. Consider the classroom as if it were a live class and what you would say in response to a question from the teacher and *who* is listening. Remember that your discussion posts are not just written for me, but for your other classmates as well. Your discussion posts are a critical part of creating the online environment. It doesn't mean that you have to “wow” your classmates with your intelligence or insights; rather that you participate enough of your *own* ideas about what you have read so that your classmates can *dialogue* with you or expand on their own ideas.
3. I generally recommend that you write your homework posts in MS Word or another comparable program and SAVE these to your hard drive for your own references. This allows you to spell and grammar check your posts, easily edit, and also maintain your homework for your records. Once you have it written in one of your editing programs than simply paste it to the discussion board. Just an added note—the discussion boards do not import paragraph indentations. **PLEASE put a line break between paragraphs.** It is easier for me to read if there are spaces between paragraphs.

4. **Have FUN** with your writing and posts. This is your opportunity to put your own mark on the class and the material. This is where you have an opportunity to express your own voice and ideas.

With that said, how do you structure a good discussion post? The key is organization. Depending on how you write, some of you might do well with a short outline others of you do better writing all your initial ideas down and then editing them into a concise post. Regardless of how you write, the key is to organize your thoughts. A good discussion post is structured no different than a scholarly paper, except much shorter. In this fashion, it has the following elements:

1. Your thesis or main point of view related to the discussion question. This is generally the topic of your introductory paragraph and addresses your overall answer to the question.
2. Your next paragraphs, known as *body* paragraphs, should take one main point of your thesis and develop it. Use the primary text to support your views or highlight something critical that you felt should be addressed. Consider using an outside reference, such as another book, a journal article, or a web site to support your ideas or add to the discussion question.
3. Your final paragraph should be your conclusion. Conclusions are not just summaries of what we have discussed, but rather look ahead to the possibilities created by our ideas and responses to the question. Here you might suggest another avenue that might be worth exploring but has not been addressed in the main question.

Structure allows those reading your posts to know where you are going and to evaluate whether you got there successfully. It also enables others to engage with your writing and question it or support it. Finally, a word on **Response Posts**...if these are required in your course.

Response posts are feedback posts where we critically examine the content of a fellow classmates post in a way that encourages greater understanding of the material. A response post does not criticize grammar nor does it say one sentence, but rather shows you have read the individual's primary post and considered their ideas. In this fashion a good response post illustrates how you feel their ideas resonate with your own ideas of the text—what are the similarities or differences, as well as questions you might have either about the individual's ideas or questions that further the discussion. Response posts are congenial and supportive.

## II. Writing a Scholarly or Personal Paper

A critical part of most graduate work is the never-ending process of churning out papers. Paperwriting is not everyone's forte and can be very daunting for most people. However, paper writing can also be an opportunity to have fun and to fully express your own ideas. The key to making any paper-writing process fun has several important steps:

1. **Selection.** Selecting a paper topic for any class means that that you are going to put several hours into reading and writing about one topic. If you hate the topic, chances are you're going to feel really frustrated and annoyed about the time you spend working on it

and your writing will likely reflect this. As such one of the most important first steps to writing a graduate paper that is fun is **selection**. Be sure to select a topic that you feel excited about and want to learn more.

2. **Adequate Access to Research.** If your paper requires you to utilize outside references, then you want to make sure your topic idea has enough outside information to help you develop it. In this fashion take a few moments to type a keyword associated with your topic in Google Scholar or your local library's online journals and catalog. This can help you determine whether or not you'll have what you need.
3. **Writing Comfort.** If you haven't written a paper in a long time, then get your feet wet by reading a few papers from journals. The more you read, the easier writing becomes. While creative writing is often challenging and requires a certain degree of inspirational talent, scholarly and personal writing is more about knowledge and step-by-step self-expression. In this fashion, anyone can become a good scholarly writer.
4. Oh and above all **DON'T RUSH**. With no time lines for most work at OSC, there is no need to cram a paper into completion like some of you might have done in undergraduate work. Rushing doesn't lead to good papers and it typically doesn't help you learn the material. Graduate education is about learning, not grades or degrees. You are here to become an expert in your religious field of study. Take time to write a comprehensive well-thought out paper.

Once you are all set to write, you can begin to organize your paper. A graduate paper generally has four main sections: Introduction, Body, Conclusion, and References. Similar to what was noted above for discussion posts.

### **Introduction**

Your introduction is where you take the time to inform the reader your thesis or the main topic of your paper and your main ideas about it. A good introduction also helps situate your thesis within the context of the field you are exploring. Finally, an introduction recognizes that a reader may not have all the "back-story" to fully understand the thesis that you will elaborate on further and so you would include in your introduction any relevant background information and research. An introduction in a 25 to 30 page journal article is generally about 3 pages doublespaced.

### **Body/Content**

The bulk of all papers is the body or the main content. Your body may be broken down into several subsections, with each section specifically examining an aspect of your thesis. For example, if you were writing a paper about the Goddess Hecate, you might break your body of your paper down to explore her unique properties, such as the Queen of the Witches, the Goddess of the Crossroads, etc. Sections are important as they not only help you keep your paper organized and ensure that you have supported and fully fleshed out your ideas introduced in the introduction, but they improve readability for your readers. Your body is often where you locate the bulk of your primary resources that you have found in your research when applicable.

## Conclusion

Your conclusion is your closing statements. Here you tie everything together and demonstrate why your work does in fact further the field of knowledge you are writing in. It can also be relevant to put personal information within a conclusion, writing how your ideas impact your own life or those around you. Finally a conclusion is also the place where you note some ideas you did not explore and possible sources of exploration in the future. For example, if you wrote about Hecate and did not discuss say her potential meaning to women in antiquity, you might state that this is a source of future research and briefly note why this may be an important area for exploration. In conclusions, we humble ourselves somewhat—we are willing to state that we do not have all the answers and to explore the limitations of our research. It opens the door for other researchers to take the torch we have lit and continue the journey.

Over the years of teaching, editing, and also being a student I am often asked is there a good length for a paper. The truth is there isn't. A good paper can often be any length providing it is well-developed and clear. There are generally two sources of problems I have found with paper lengths. First, papers are too short to adequately address the topic (sometimes a topic is too broad to be achievable). Short papers (less than 10 pages double-spaced) have a tendency to only scan the surface of a topic; they may attempt to have too many ideas and not enough development. A good short paper gets to its point quickly (less information in the introduction) and is able to demonstrate appropriate development in the body (less information in the conclusion). Papers that are too long tend to run the risk of too many ideas that become difficult to keep linked together. In this fashion, short papers often risk not having enough development, while lengthy papers (usually 30+ pages double spaced) run a risk of having too many loose ends. Yet long and short papers can be equally good providing that all your ideas are sufficiently developed (I generally recommend a 5 paragraph minimum on each separate idea) and that they are all easily linked together (you can link each idea together within a 3 to 5 paragraph conclusion with no loose ends).

### *To outline or not to outline...*

Outlines are highly subjective and often problematic for the new writer. Many individuals create outlines that are too dense that you end up simply writing the paper or they are too empty to provide enough structure. A good outline has your thesis (your main goal for the paper and what your paper is trying to say overall) in a clear and concise sentence. For example, *This paper explores the historical and spiritual meanings of Hecate as a Triple Goddess*. This is a clear and simple statement that will guide your outline for your paper. Once you have your thesis I generally recommend you identify what components are necessary to elucidate or explain your proposition. In our example this might be asking yourself the following questions:

1. Why is this thesis important—what do I hope to convey to my readers? (Introduction material)
2. What background information do readers need to know to fully understand my thesis and what *inspired* me to develop this focus? (Introductory material)
3. What is the first point of exploration for my thesis (Body section 1)? This might be providing detailed information on who is Hecate.

4. What is the second point of exploration for my thesis (Body section 2)? This might be Hecate's location in antiquity
5. What is the third point of exploration for my thesis (Body section 3)? This might be Hecate's spiritual associations
6. What is my conclusion—what are my final thoughts that I want readers to take away with them? What are areas of research that I didn't explore but could be relevant? What are my personal experiences with the goddess or perhaps how is Hecate seen in contemporary culture?

You can answer these questions in an outline format or simply jot them down as you organize your research information. The key with any outline is that it serves to help you organize and think about your topic, rather than becomes a waste of time.

### III. References

Writing papers can be intimidating when you have to include references. Yet references bring about important benefits. First they immediately convey to the reader that you are not plagiarizing, that is taking the words or ideas of others and conveying it as your own. Second, they also convey to the reader that you are an expert in your topic. You have taken the time to look at what others have written on the topic and have found a new way to utilize this information. Third, using references can also help in your own growth and knowledge and help you clarify your writing. Yet incorporating references within a paper can be a source of confusion, so here are some guidelines. References occur in two ways in papers:

1. Within-text citations (some use endnotes or footnotes, but this can be a hassle with computers and can be difficult for readers. General rule of thumb work it into the text when possible, cut it, or place it as an endnote).
2. Reference list at the very end of your paper—generally the final section.

### Citations

Citing a text means you are identifying a statement or a collection of statements with a specific reference source noted in your reference page. There are two types of citations utilized in scholarly papers:

1. citing an idea or restating of a quote in your own words
2. citing a direct quote

General citation rules:

1. Generally all citations are made within the sentence they are referring to, that is you put the citation information *before* the concluding punctuation. The ***only*** exception to this is when you're citation refers to a whole paragraph preceding the citation note.
2. Also, you ***always*** cite the full citation the ***first time*** it occurs in each ***new*** paragraph. A full citation includes the author(s) last name and the year of publication (MacDowell, 2007) for example. Citations thereafter only need to use the author(s) last name (see exceptions below) without the year.

3. Up to 2 authors always cite both authors in your reference, for example (MacDowell & MacDowell, 2007) or when you are beginning a sentence or directing to the reference in your text itself *MacDowell and MacDowell (2007) noted that ...*
4. Three to Five authors always cite all authors the *first time they occur in your entire paper*, for example (*Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995*). Thereafter use the first author's last name with *et al.* after (*Roszak et al.*).
5. Six or more authors cite the first author's last name followed by *et al.* in *all* entries. For example (*MacDowell et al., 2007*) or *MacDowell et al. (2007) stated...*

### Citing an idea or summation of a direct quote

Most papers use citations to identify ideas that are not their own or summarized quotes more often than incorporating direct quotes. When citing an idea that is not your own use the following citation guideline. You can note a citation within text in two ways:

1. Writing the author(s) name(s) within the text.
2. Using parenthesis to identify the author(s) name(s).

An example of the first with 1 author would be:

*Research conducted by MacDowell (2007) indicated that individuals experience greater cardiovascular benefits with pet ownership.*

An example of the first with 2 to 5 authors would be:

*Research conducted by MacDowell, Jones, McDuff, Shakespeare, and Striker (2007) indicated that individuals experience greater cardiovascular benefits with pet ownership. **Note:** after the first full citation of **3 or more authors**, you can abbreviate by writing *MacDowell et al. (2007)*.*

An example of the first with 6 or more authors would be:

*Research conducted by MacDowell et al. (2007) indicated that individuals experience greater cardiovascular benefits with pet ownership.*

When using parenthetical citations use the following examples:

1. One author, citation follows statement it refers to: *Mongolian shamanism was stigmatized during Communism (Sarangerel, 2000).*
2. A statement that uses multiple sources for each separate point: *Mongolian shamanism is experiencing a renewed growth since the end of communism (Sarangerel, 2000), which is similar to its previous role in society during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Eliade, 2004).*
3. A statement that uses more than one reference to support one statement: *Shamanism comes from an Evenk word (Eliade, 2004; Sarangerel, 2000) **Note the semi-colon is used to separate two distinct references and references are arranged alphabetically.*** If you have already cited the date of one or more separate references in your paragraph that you are not using here, simply cite (*Eliade; Sarangerel*).

4. A statement that has more than 1 author: *Ecopsychology is an interdisciplinary field exploring the psychological relationship to the earth* (Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995). **Note the ampersand (the “And” sign) is used to link two or more authors together.** A follow-up statement by them in the same paragraph or subsequent paragraphs would be noted as follows: *Ecopsychology remains a critical, yet unexplored avenue for the environmental movement* (Roszak et al.). Add the year if the reference is used in a new paragraph.
5. Citing a quotation, example 1: *Eliade (2004) writes “Since the beginning of the century, ethnologists have fallen into the habit of using the terms 'shaman,' 'medicine man,' 'sorcerer,' and 'magician' interchangeably to designate certain individuals possessing magico-religious powers and found in all 'primitive' societies” (p. 3).* If you cite a quote that spans more than one page, cite all the pages, for example: **(pp. 1–3)**. That little line between 1 and 3 is called an EN dash and it is used when linking a compound adjective to an adjective (*boiling-hot–red turtle*), two nouns together (*child–parent organization*), and when linking numbers to show span. In your Word program this little grammar dash may be found in your Insert menu, Symbols and then click Special Characters.
6. Citing a quotation, example 2: It has been said that “many Siberian tribes also have a tradition of making animal *ongons*, usually horses or reindeer” (p. 62, Sarangerel, 2000).
7. If you cite a quote that is **longer** than 40 words, it is generally accepted that you create a block quote with this. Blockquotes are indented 0.5 marks from your main margin with no quotation marks utilized, for example:
 

*Once mastered, however, these strong spirits are potent protectors and powerful helper spirits for shamans because they are then allowed to make a positive contribution to human life, which they may not have been able to do before their death (p. 27, Sarangerel, 2000).*

They are generally not preferred unless the quotes are absolutely essential to your paper and you cannot summarize them in your own words and cite them like other text.

Exceptions...there are always a few snags to any rule just to confuse you.

Remember that citations are designed to indicate to the reader that you are using someone else’s ideas and to direct the reader to a corresponding reference located on your reference page. Because of this, there are times (albeit rare) when you might need to adjust how you cite to ensure the reader is directed to the correct reference. The main instance when this is necessary is when you have authors with the same last name or are using multiple texts by an author. Here’s an example:

*Sarangerel noted that Mongolian shamanism is reemerging as a state religion in the past two decades since the fall of communism. She notes in particular that this rise appears to be linked to growing nationalist pride and identity. However, she also suggests that Mongolian shamanism is not solely for the Mongol, but may be accessible to other individuals.*

These statements actually blend information from two books by Sarangerel; however you wouldn't know that as I haven't indicated which books inform which statements. All you know is the author I am referring to. In this fashion, I need to rewrite my paragraph to inform the reader what references I am using of her work, I do this by using the publication year as both of her texts have *different* publication years:

*Sarangerel (2000) noted that Mongolian shamanism is reemerging as a state religion in the past two decades since the fall of communism. She notes in particular that this rise appears to be linked to growing nationalist pride and identity. However, she (2001) also suggests Mongolian shamanism is not solely for the Mongol, but may be accessible to other individuals.*

Here you know that the first two statements come from her 2000 book, while the last statement comes from her 2001 text. In this fashion, you would always use the *year* as your first way of distinguishing authors with the same last name (even different authors). You would *always* cite the reference with the year throughout your paper.

Sometimes, however, you have either multiple works by the same author with the same year of publication or different authors with the same last name in the same year of publication. To handle this situation you would:

1. For identical authors publishing the same year, *if they have no other authors listed in the study*, you would cite the title of the study in your text; for example:

*Gergen (Realities and Relationships, 1994) wrote that researchers cannot fully remove themselves from bias, while noting that bias is a social constructed function ("Constructivist Psychology," 1994).*

2. *If there are different authors*, cite the second author listed for all citations followed by et al. (Remember you are always citing the last name of each author when it is only 2 authors). For example: *Gergen, Walsh et al. (1994) and Gergen, Jones et al. (1994) all suggest that...*

3. For different authors with the same last name, first cite the next author listed in an article with multiple authors, for example: *Gergen, Marshall, Timmons et al. (1994) and Gergen, Marshall, Jones et al. (1994).*

Above all, don't let referencing work scare you. When you are writing get into the habit of noting the author and the year after the statements associated with their ideas. During your edit, clean up the formatting to ensure that your citations are as correct as you can be without hiring an editor ☺.

The Reference Page



A final reference page allows the reader of your work to look at the articles and books you used. I can tell you from personal experience as a reader of numerous books and journals that the reference page is sometimes the most valuable information I get as it can direct me to primary articles I need for my own knowledge and research. In fact I often learn about more books for Ocean Seminary classes from student papers who reference material I haven't read. A reference page should be clear and *always* contain every author/work you note in your paper. In other words, for every *new citation you make in your text, you should have the complete book/article information on your reference page.*

General Rules for a reference page:

1. It is arranged alphabetically by author. I like to type all my information in then select all the authors and use the AtoZ sort option located on the Table Menu to alphabetize my list.
2. Most papers have their references structured in what is known as a “hanging indent”, this means the second and additional lines of any one reference is indented 0.5 from the margin. For example:  
MacDowell, K. (2007). An examination of stigmatized social identities within the world of work framed through the emancipation communitarian theory with special examination of visible and invisible characteristics. *Journal Name, Volume*, pp. 1–30.

Basic Guidelines for Referencing Different Types of Work:

1. Non-edited Book

Author's Last Name, First Initial. (Publication Year). *Title*. City, State: Publisher.

**Examples:**

Eliade, M. (2004). *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

***if it is translated...***

Eliade, M. (2004). *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy* (trans. W. R. Trask). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

***if it is a reprint from an original source...***

Eliade, M. (2004). *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (Original publication 1964).

2. An edited book

Chapter Author's Last Name, First Initial. (Year Publication). Chapter title. In Editors's first initial last name, next editor etc., & last editor (Eds.), *Name of Book* (pp. page numbers for the chapter). City, State: Publisher.

**Examples**

O'Connor, T. (1995). Therapy for a dying planet. In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind* (pp. 149–155). San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books.

Collard, B., & Gelatt, H. B. (2000). Beyond balance to life quality: The integration of work and life. In J. M. Kummerow (Ed.), *New Directions in Career Planning and the Workforce (2nd Ed)* (pp. 197–225). Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.

### 3. A Journal or Magazine Article

Author(s) Last Name, First Initial (Year). Title. *Name of Journal*, *Volume Number*, page numbers the article is found on.

#### **Examples:**

Clair, J. A., Beatty, J. E., & MacLean, T. L. (2005). Out of sight but not out of mind: Managing invisible social identities in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review*, *30*, 78–95.

Fouad, N. A. (2002). Cross-cultural differences in vocational interests: Between-groups differences on the Strong Interest Inventory. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *49*, 283–289.

### 4. An Internet Site

More and more of individuals are utilizing internet articles for references, while not the best source for accurate information, it can be helpful. To reference an internet page it would like the following:

Anonymous. (n.d.). Hecate. Retrieved on August 27, 2007, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hecate>.

If you know the author and the date of publication you would place that in the appropriate spot as previously noted in the other references. “n.d.” means “no date”.

## IV. For Further Information

American Psychological Association (2009). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th Ed). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Strunk, W., White, E. B., & Angell, R. (2000). *The Elements of Style* (4th Edition) Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon

University of Chicago Press Staff. (2003). *The Chicago Manual of Style* (15th Ed). Chicago: Chicago University Press.

<http://4teachers.homestead.com/writing.html> : Step-by-step lessons

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/about.shtml>

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/resources.html>

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/>

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>

<http://www.apastyle.org/previousstips.html> <http://www.englishplus.com/grammar/>

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/>