A Wholly Reliable Guide to the Preparation & Submission of Academic Work

Wherein are to be found manifold and useful hints, tips & prudent counsel for those entering into the joys of the study of divinity

Prepared by certain members of the faculty of the Atlantic School of Theology, Philip G. Ziegler and Christopher Brittain, in the year of our Lord two-thousand and three

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Whatever errors, omissions, stupidities *etc., etc.* readers might meet in this text are, of course, the sole responsibility of the authors themselves.
Although it would be handy if they could be attributed to others, they cannot.

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1. Introductory Remarks

There are two things upon which all interpretation of scripture depends: the process of discovering what we need to learn, and the process of presenting what we have learnt.
—Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, I, i.

Theological studies aim to ground, orient and capacitate a better—which is to say, more faithful and deliberate—exercise of our manifold vocations. For all of us, the landscape of theological study is a vast undiscovered country, a 'Land of Unlikeness' where we will undoubtedly 'see rare beasts, and have unique adventures'.[1] Here, we will discover and dwell within the 'strange new world of the Bible'; here, we will traverse the dramatic, often difficult, paths of doctrinal and ecclesial traditions. Here too, we find ourselves confronted and concerned with discourses as different as psychology and history, pedagogy and politics.

As is the case with journeys abroad, sojourning through the lands of theological study requires us to learn a language, indeed a family of languages both ancient and modern. If we are not to pass through our studies unaffected, we must give ear to the voices of those whom we meet along the way, just as we learn to discern the 'lay of the land' so as to inhabit it well. Our first task, then, is to appreciate carefully and accurately what it is we encounter, however rare, however unlike that with which we are well familiar. The second task is to work at becoming competent contemporary speakers of these same languages ourselves, to be able to marshal them in the service of the needs of the moment, attuned to the diversity of their dialects and the often unintended effects of their cadences. Having first listened in on a conversation which has been afoot long before we arrived, we work away to the end that we too might contribute usefully, winsomely and decisively to advancing the common work of our tradition along its way in the world.

So, theological studies invite and commit those who undertake them to join in a corporate and sustained inquiry. It is an inquiry whose scope is vast and whose course is always unsettling. The skills and disciplines of inquiry, habits of mind and analytical tools required are themselves developed along the way. These may not come readily or easily, but they can and will come as inquisitiveness conspires with patience and perserverence. Much of what we will be about during your time here at the School is the cultivation of precisely such skills, disciplines, habits and tools. Varied assignments and forms of evaluation aim to help you acquire, exercise and sharpen capacities for careful and critical reading and reasoning, as well as for effective communication and convincing argument. A great deal of theological study, therefore, involves learning how to form considered judgments for which one can advocate cogently, passionately and eloquently, initially within the forum of your peers, but finally to the widest of possible audiences.

It is the wager of the enterprise of graduate theological education that the imagination and creativity needed for a discerning enactment of any vocation thrives best when embraced by the concourse of vigorous and dedicated minds. And it is in this hope that the School both covets and cultivates its community of inquiry into which you are invited as a significant contributing member.

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[1]W.H. Auden, 'For the Time Being. A Christmas Oratorio,' in *Collected Poems*, edited by Edward Mendelson (New York: Vintage, 1991), p. 400.

2. Something about Reading

When I have money, I buy books.
If I have money left over, I buy food or clothes.
—Erasmus

2.1 Staying afloat on the sea of words—Reading for comprehension

The Preacher once bemoaned that 'of the making of books there is no end' (Eccl 12:12). Whether we are agreed with him that this is an occasion for despair or not, the truth of the matter is that there are a great many books about, and that during your theological studies you will be required to swim about in a goodly sized sea of them. Christians are—as our Muslim sisters and brothers have it—'people of the Book'. Just so. And around *the* Book in question stands a long accumulated library of other texts related, more or less directly, some not at all really, to its message, mission and manner. Indeed, *the* Book is itself in fact a library of little books gathered together in a happy jostling conspiracy of witness to disquiet the church and console the world.

All of this means that theological study requires our continuous engagement with texts and the puzzles, promises and perils which attach to their handling.

Not only are the texts themselves widely various; so too are our purposes for reading. We sometimes read for entertainment, sometimes in deadly earnest; sometimes we read to glean readily applicable advice, sometimes to push into fields of knowledge for their own sake; sometimes we are in search of an answer to a specific question, sometimes simply hoping to get a flavour for the whole. Our intent can be to appreciate, to evaluate, to enjoy, to apply or some combination of all these things. In any event, just *why* it is that we take up a particular text will in many decide *how* it is we shall and should read it. Getting clear on the purpose for which a given text is being read in a course, for instance, can greatly assist you in reading it usefully and with effect.

Whatever else is afoot, as a theological student you will always be reading course materials at least with *comprehension* as your immediate purpose. A number of strategies can contribute to the ease and effectiveness with which you understand a text:

☙ *Start with the whole*—Read the book's preface, contents, introduction and the abstract on the back cover; browse the name and subject indices, noting what recurs frequently and what or who is absent. Be sure to look at the all the pictures, and other graphical materials too! In an article, check over the subtitles and divisions of the piece.

☙ *Scan for 'the gist'*—You can win a good sense of what is happening in a text by quickly reading through the opening and closing paragraphs of each chapter or section, as well as the first and final sentences of every paragraph. A well composed text will readily 'give itself away' to such tactical reading. Especially if you are scanning a large number of texts in the early stages of essay research, this can be a helpful, even crucial, practice.

☙ *Read specifically for the argument—Qua* printed text a book is static thing whose basic unit is the page, but its subject matter is dynamic, it is an argument or movement of thought whose basic unit is the paragraph. To read for comprehension thus involves catching sight of and keeping apace with a text's dynamic, something greatly facilitated by reading *by paragraphs*. Confronted with a paragraph, consider the following:

- ☙ *its* ***topic*** *or* ***point***—generally set out in the first and restated in the last sentences
- ☙ *where* ***transitions*** *occur*—these logical moves are commonly signalled by words such as 'but,' 'however,' 'next,' 'then,' 'thus' etc.
- ☙ *how its point is* ***supported***—what evidence or warrants are adduced for the point being made? What authorities are invoked?

2.2 Fire in the mind, pencil in the hand—Reading Critically

Reading critically *does not* mean fractious, combative reading; nor does it have as its aim to dismiss or conjure away asserted claims with which one might readily disagree. Rather, critical reading is careful, considered and analytical reading, that is to say, reading that aims to evaluate the argument of a given text and to arrive at reasoned judgments about its accuracy, cogency and utility. If the aim of comprehension is to discern what and how a text says what it says, then the aim of criticism is to discern *whether it is warranted to do so*. A critical reader follows and appraises those arguments by which an author makes a case for certain conclusions.

Several sorts of questions can assist in such evaluative reading. Here are some to consider:

- ☙ Are points of detail and substance important to the argument accurate and factual?
- ☙ Are the reasons and evidence marshalled relevant to the matter at hand?
- ☙ What constitutes 'argument' in this text? What authorizes the conclusions drawn?
- ☙ Is the pattern of reasoning consistent? Is the argument being made in more than one way?
- ☙ What seems to motivate this line of argument? To what end is the argument directed?
- ☙ What does the author presume about the question? about the reader? about the argument itself?
- ☙ Do the conclusions drawn follow from the argument, and if so, in what sense?
- ☙ Where is the case set out most clearly? Where do ambiguities and obscurities remain? What would be needed to clarify these?

> ☙ What relationship obtains between the identity of the author and your own? To what sorts of audiences would the argument of this text make sense and matter?

Beyond thinking over these are other related questions, your capacity for critical reading will likely also be improved by adopting the following practices as well:

☙ *Have a physical relation with your book*—Very few things can help you to consider and remember well what you read more than a pencil. A mind equipped with a pencil interacts with a text in very tactile, and for that reason very memorable ways. Also, in this way reading itself can become a conversation of sorts, as the ancient practice of penning glosses in the margins of texts attests. So, make a habit of underlining as you read—mark key terms, thesis statements and summaries, recurrent names and ideas. Work, however, to restrict your marking to only the most important information, say less than a fifth of the total text. Be sure to record your queries in the margins, as well as to cross reference other related passages in the text. If you're working with library books *do not underline them*. A combination of well-placed sticky-notes, and strategic photocopying of key passages can get the job done.

You might find it helpful as you go to gather up larger questions that emerge as you read on the blank pages at the end of a book, or on the final page of a copied article. This way, when you return to these texts in the future, you can recall with great ease your earlier engagements with its arguments.

☙ *Make notes*—In a similar vein, use the same pencil to make notes as you go. Record for yourself a list of important terms and recurring names as well as unfamiliar ones to be looked up later. When you encounter particularly sharp, controversial or memorable quotations, take a moment to record them. You might also find it a useful discipline to write a single paragraph summary of a text when you reach its end, or in the case of a larger work, the end of the chapter. Some people find it helpful to keep a single 'reading journal' for such purposes; others will find that certain computer programmes provide convenient ways of recording such notes for future access. Whatever you do, take the time to order your notes so you can in fact find them when you need them in the future.

3. Something about Writing

Language, it's a virus, oooh.
—Laurie Anderson

. . . problems arise when language goes on a holiday.
—Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §38

3.1 Clarity, the Closest Thing to Godliness—The Happy Discipline of Writing

The fact is that writing is hard work—it simply takes time and attention to compose good prose. The effort involved in making a compelling theological argument, unfolding a stirring vision of another, better future, or delineating the difficult details of a pastoral encounter will, quite frankly, make you sweat, at least mentally. And although the proper work of writing cannot be avoided, what *can* be avoided is the unnecessary suffering that befalls us when we fall into bad writing habits. Most of us, at least from time to time, find ourselves in the thrall of particular ways of thinking about writing, and actual practices of writing, that terrorize the soul, becloud the mind, and 'ramp up' all sorts of anxieties, often to the point of paralysis. Although aware of these habits and their effects, most of us do not really know how to break off with them; indeed, we often and almost neurotically seem to want to embrace them, perhaps for no other reason than to provide an easy hook upon which to hang our nagging dissatisfaction with the quality of our work.

More nefarious still, is the way in which the poor writing to which such habits inevitably give rise can become a kind of *double-speak*. Such prose is usually slathered thick with jargon, cluttered with catchphrases and as evasive as a highly caffeinated Jackie Chan. It aims to obscure obvious disjunctions in our thinking, and to distract attention from the awkward and embarrassing fact of our real or perceived ignorance of what it is we ought to be writing about. Of course, neither goal is ever actually achieved (much to the detriment of many final grades). Such poor prose would be laughable, if not for the way in which the truth suffers endlessly under it, whether in the form of meaningless cant, or pernicious propaganda.[2] Is it too much to say then, that the happy discipline of writing well is thrust upon us because, as theological (!) students we are dedicated to the pursuit of truth?

Whatever else theological and pastoral existence is, it is inevitably *literary* existence concerned with truth. And so, bettering our capacity to write, and in fact coming to write well, is no marginal matter. This humble, though reliable, guide cannot diagnose and cure every ill that besets the practice of writing. It can, however, recommend some modest balms for certain problems associated with academic writing that commonly, and unneccesarily, bring students to grief.

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[2] In addition to any edition of daily news, and the annual reports of any number of major corporations, government departments, and church courts, see also George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to meet this wicked phenomenon face to face, and his now classic essay on "Politics and the English Language" to help understand it.

There are a number of obvious things to do in order to improve your capacity to write clearly, cogently and convincingly. Here are just a few to consider:

☙ *Give yourself enough time*—Perhaps the most pervasive cause of bad writing on the planet is failing to set aside the time it takes to write well. You schedule time for writing with no less rigour than you schedule any other part of your existence. This means beginning writing projects sufficiently early, and being realistic about just how long you need to compose and edit your text.

☙ *Make space for writing*—To the degree that you can, set aside a place in which to work which is free of clutter and distractions; nothing conspires against the concentration needed to write well than the enticing pile of magazines, knitting needles, cell phone, remote controls, half-read novels and power tools that stands within reach of the keyboard. . .

☙ *Come prepared to write*—Be sure to have a copy of the writing assignment itself, your outline, as well as all your easy-to-access notes and other key sources at hand when you sit down to write. Time invested in taking good, usable notes, reflecting on the tasks, scope and nature of the assignment itself, and preparing an outline will pay dividends higher, and certainly more lasting than those paid out during the high-tech bubble market of the late 1990s. It is also a good idea to keep your regular reference materials (dictionary, thesaurus, perhaps even this humble yet wholly reliable writing guide, etc.) close by.

☙ *Allow yourself to compose*—The great majority of people get all tied up in knots while writing because they try to do two things at once: *compose* and *edit*. Both these tasks are obviously crucial to writing, and perhaps less obviously, they war with each other. Composition builds up, lengthens, looks and presses forward. Editing tears down, shortens, glances and reaches backward. Composition creates and plants, editing prunes, even destroys. How often does the first phrase of a sentence get written, and erased, written and erased, written and erased? How often does the forward edge of a paragraph run into the sand because the author's eye has fled back up the page to tinker with something else? Some of the simplest advice about writing is also the most difficult to heed: *give yourself time and freedom to compose*. This means making a covenant with yourself not to edit until a certain point and time—perhaps at the end of every page or two; perhaps, when the egg timer goes off at the end of fifteen or twenty minutes. Embrace the freedom that this decision brings; you can compose freely, quickly and even fancifully, knowing that everything will meet the editor in due course. For more concrete advice on this score, read Section 4 below.

☙ *Write regularly*—Although writing is a bit like riding a bicycle, the ease and happiness with which you can write will expand greatly if you make writing something you do regularly, perhaps even daily. Think about ending every afternoon spent in the library with twenty minutes of writing on the themes and ideas that have preoccupied you during that time. Round out the time you set aside to prepare for any given class with several minutes to compose something, anything, inspired by what you've just read. Couple your daily devotions together with a chance to sit and write for several minutes. However you are able to do it, disciplining yourself to write in a regular way will do much to keep your literary limbs limber for the next time you have a paper to put together, and you really need to give them a work out. Avoid linguistic sprains, sore expressions and worse by working out regularly!

If the *act* of writing requires adequate preparation and order for it to flourish, the same is true all the more for the *content* of what is written. Whatever else might hold true in other arenas, in the case of writing, and especially scholarly writing, creativity and good order do not compete with each other, neither do they rule each other out. Creativity of thought and expression thrive, and are communicated to readers more readily and powerfully when set forth within a clearly ordered framework. With this in mind, consider the following advice:

☙ *Work up and from an outline*— Producing an outline will be an essential step in clarifying and organizing your evidence, ideas and judgments. Writing with and within an outline will also do much to communicate the logic of your judgments to your readers, i.e., the very way in which you structure a paper communicates something important about its content. The outline is the shorthand expression of the logic, or argument, of your paper. The organization that an outline brings also helps to forestall unhelpful repetition as well as digression when you are actually writing.

☙ *Have, and state, a clear and concise thesis*—What's the point? The answer to this question should be set forth clearly in the early moments of any paper. The thesis is that from which all things flow and towards which all things tend. It is the hook upon which readers hang their attention and interest in your essay. Without it, everything comes unhinged, and readers encounter merely a series of remarks, the point of which they are left to construe for themselves.

One approach, is to start with a somewhat mechanical thesis statement that can be rephrased more gracefully upon revision. Here are some examples of clear thesis statements:

☙ There are several problems with Ratzinger's comment that . . . .
☙ Crossan's work is _______ because ________ . . . .
☙ In this paper, I am going to do *x*, by examining *y*. Doing this will give us abetter understanding of *z*.
☙ Critics Algernon and Lucky argue that McFague's work is ____. But I would argue that McFague actually does _______.
☙ Although Augustine's work might seem to be an example of ____, closer inspection reveals _____.

☙ *Ensure your essays have an evident structure*—In longer pieces of writing, it can often be useful to divide the text up into sections and subsections. Even when you do not use headings and sub-headings, it is still helpful to think of your text in terms of its natural divisions. How many steps, stages or parts are there to the body of my argument? How do I signal this to my readers? How many points are made in support of any one judgment? Are these clearly delineated?

☙ *Begin and end*—Really, do this. Your readers need to be introduced to what it is they are getting themselves into when they start to read your paper. What can they expect? How will things unfold? Why ought they to press through to the end? Similarly, be sure to conclude your papers quite intentionally by recalling to mind where you've taken your readers, and why. Just what ought they to take away with them?

☙ *Communicate directly and plainly*—The power of your evidence and judgments to convince is best served by clear and uncomplicated prose. Contrariwise, nothing will undercut your case more readily than ambiguities and obscurities within the text itself. Sloppy use of key terms, misuse of technical or other vocabulary, oddities of expression and sentence structures that

resist deciphering—these are but some of the ways to sabotage your work from within. Avoid them.

3.2 You are what you eat—Some tools and techniques of theological research

Ad fontes!
—16th century humanist toast

Don't go blaming the tool box, you need the right tool for the job.
—Bob the Builder

Taking responsibility for your own course of theological education means, among other things, ensuring that you know where and how to 'get fed'. And this is no less so as regards study and research than any other aspect of the programme. A good deal of the materials with which you will want and need to concern yourself during your studies will come to you in the form of lectures, textbooks, classroom conversation, and experiences in the field. But engaging with all of this fully and deeply will inevitably drive you to search out other materials in order to clarify, expand or challenge lines of inquiry opened up for you by various courses. In fact, a good number of your courses will require large scale research and writing projects from you. The ability to do research is thus no small part of the bundle of skills demanded of a theological existence, particularly at the level of graduate studies.

With this in mind, perhaps just a few preliminary suggestions about 'getting the goods' as a novice theological researcher might be allowed:

☙ *Haunt the library*—Although osmosis is not really an effective strategy for theological learning, there are few things more likely to improve your capacity for theological research than simply spending time in the library.

> ☙ *Learn to use the research tools at hand*—There are several extraordinarily useful research tools available to you in the library at the School. As soon as you can, make yourself a proficient user of the electronic services provided by *Novanet*, the *ATLA periodical database*, and *WorldCat*. Find the *card catalogue,* and find your way around it. Locate the *Reference* and *Periodical Areas* and see what is on the shelf there. Talk to a librarian about how to arrange for *Novanet* and *Inter-Library Loans*. While you're at it, find the washrooms too...
>
> ☙ *Keep up with what's new*—Take a regular stroll through the periodicals to see what's new on the shelves. Over time you should develop a list of journals and magazines to 'keep up with'. Also, keep an eye out for new books on display near the reference desk.
>
> ☙ *'Just browsing'*—When your research sends you into a particular corner of the library stacks, don't just grab the one title you need and flee; take a couple of minutes to browse around the section you're in. It can be an education to thumb the books that lie to the left and right of the one you came in for.
>
> ☙ *Poke around the library's Novanet catalogue from time to time.* Look up authors to whom you have recently been introduced to see what else they've written. Find out what other titles

there are in the series in which the book you're currently reading was published. Be sure to learn how to use the Library of Congress Subjects to search out materials related to your current or favourite topics and themes.

ଓ *Visit other libraries*—Do yourself a favour and physically explore the other Halifax libraries once in a while. It is amazing what a combination of curiousity and serendipity can generate on such visits. Be sure in particular to check out the reference and periodical sections of these other libraries. There are often materials to be found here that are not easy to get at from our School library, even through *Novanet*. *Novanet* lists the holdings of the libraries of ten universities throughout Nova Scotia. Your library card allows you to borrow from all of these libraries, in person or *via* the *Novanet Express* delivery service. Collections of special interest to theology students may be found at King's College, Saint Mary's, and St. Francis Xavier in particular. When you have questions, be sure to ask for help from at the reference desk of any of these libraries.

Do note that electronic periodicals in particular, can often only be accessed on-site at the library that holds the subscription.

ଓ *Get a carrel*—Check and see if you're eligible to sign up for a carrel in the library itself. If so, think about securing one for your use during the year. Very few things can help discipline your work habits more than having a regular and dedicated place to work at right in the midst of all the library's resources.

ଓ *Librarians are your friends*—There is nothing a librarian loves more than to help researchers or students find what they need. Ask for help! Get directions! Take in relevant workshops when they're offered, and arrange for personal tutorials when you need them.

ଓ *Keep a notebook of 'things to read'*—Being able to take ready note of names, articles or books mentioned in conversations, classroom discussions, or that you might come across in your own reading, is an invaluable practice. Try to keep one or more little notebooks in which you make lists of these things for future exploration. You might also keep a glossary of terms that are new to you when you first hear them, then look them up in the standard reference works. Make sure your notes are detailed; nothing is more irritating and time consuming than having to search out again what you were refering to when you wrote down 'Smith, page 567' two months earlier!

ଓ *Always read footnotes and browse bibliographies*—Notes and bibliographies are the best places to get hints and directions for further reading on certain themes or points of argument. Even a very general book or article on a theme can open a world of further reading and inquiry if it is well referenced. Frequently, in the notes you will meet who or what an author is arguing against, as well as the evidence and judgments she herself is reliant upon. So, following up on such leads can be crucial to making fair and judicious judgments about a work.

ଓ *Get suggestions from your professors*—Interested in some particular topic? Seek out a professor whose own research and teaching covers it, and get some advice about what's new and/or essential to read.

3.3 Getting with the programme—Varieties of writing in theological study

High thoughts must have high language.
—Aristophanes

In the course of your theological education, you will encounter a great variety of different written assignments. Although the form, style, and size may vary considerably, depending upon the course of study, the importance of quality, thoughtfulness and clarity does not. As these varied forms of assignments serve to assist a student to exercise and hone different reading, evaluative and communication skills, it is important to attend carefully to the intention and expectations of these assignments as they are specified by the course's syllabus and instructor. The following offers a brief outline of different forms of written assignments common to theological education.

I. REFLECTION PAPER: *How to write oneself out of a paper-bag*

Reflection papers are generally shorter written assignments that respond to a specific question or topic, the answer of which does not require detailed research or further reading beyond that found within the exisiting course requirements.

The great peril to avoid: the great danger involved in writing a reflection paper is that the student will take the name of this assignment too literally, so that it becomes merely a re-flection—i.e., a repetition, or, in hockey terms, a rebound—of ideas already expressed by the course instructor or the reading material under consideration. A reflection on a chapter of a book, for example, does not amount to a mere summary of what is said in its pages. Nor does a transcripted description of a conversation in a hospital room amount to a *reflection* on a pastoral experience. An articulate *reflection* involves analysis and developed thought. It uncovers something not readily apparent to a casual reader or observer that the writer's sustained attention has uncovered and is now communicatng.

A reflection paper will, therefore, express primarily the writer's own opinion. It is not focused on summarizing the view or research of others. Although the writer should demonstrate a clear grasp of the material/event under discussion, the primary task to provide evidence of having deepened one's appreciation and understanding of the issue being considered. Simply repeating what one initially knows or assumes does not demonstrate *reflection*; it is rather when one entertains the possibility that one's initial framework or assumptions might benefit from revision or analysis that a process of *reflection* has begun.

II. BOOK REVIEW: *On not judging a book by its cover. . . .*

An academic *book review* is often referred to more specifically as a 'critical book review.' The word 'critical' is not meant to signify a hostile, negative, or unappreciative attitude, but simply underscores the fact that, unlike a book advertisement or movie trailer, the purpose of this piece of writing is to not 'sell' what is under consideration to readers. A book review intends, rather, to offer a thoughful evaluation and analysis of a given text.

A book review should outline the particular perspective or position that the book's author develops on the subject under consideration, but the reviewer's task is not primarily to summarize what the book says. The principal task is to furnish an evaluation of the relative merits of the book. It aims to provide a careful analysis of the overall argument developed in the book and its distinctive claims. It is important to illustrate such observations by making specific reference to the text being considered.

Some points to bear in mind when beginning to read the book to be reviewed:

> ☙ *Pay particular attention to introductory and concluding paragraphs*—Often an author summarizes the view to be expressed here, and may also identify assumptions or methods employed later in the text.
>
> ☙ *Seek to determine how different parts of a chapter relate to the whole*
>
> ☙ *Discern which passage or section of the book is most relevant to understanding the work as a whole*—Write short summary notes of these sections as you proceed.

Some further considerations that might be entertained when writing a book review:

> ☙ *evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of the book*—This is done on the basis of a clear indication of the standards by which such judgment is made: i.e., is it an exemplary example of exegesis, historical research, or philosophical insight? It is notable for its rhetorical power or clarity and elegance?
>
> ☙ *examine the different component parts of the book*—Attend to how each element of the argument relates to the overall shape and aim of the book.
>
> ☙ *analyze the book's primary arguments*—Such an analytical examination is carried out by attending to any evident predetermined assumptions, values, or critieria.

III. EXPOSITORY ESSAY: *Getting to the 'heart of the matter'*

'*To exposit*' a text means to set forth the meaning or purpose of that text. The task of an expository essay, therefore, is to give a concise account of the significance of a given passage within the context of the whole of the work in question. The exposition should address and argue for answers to questions of the following sort:

- ☙ What is the material 'heart' of the passage, and how might it be summarized or restated? What are the key categories and relations at play in it?
- ☙ What place does the passage occupy in the course of the overall argument of the text? What argumentative 'work' does the passage do? How does it work to 'convince' you as a reader?
- ☙ In what sense, if any, could it be said that the passage is crucial to the text as a whole? If so, why? If not, why not?
- ☙ From your reading in the course, what wider theological debates and developments are being engaged or at issue in the passage?

As the descriptions of the previous types of writing assignments highlight, it is important to note that an *exposition* differs significantly from a *summary*. Simply redescribing what the passage says does not represent an exposition of the meaning and purpose of the text.

3.4 On not getting it right the first time—The necessity of editing

All writing should be selection in order to drop every deadword . . . . If a man would learn to read his own manuscript severely—becoming really a third person, & search only for what interested him. . . how every page would gain! Then all the words will be sprightly, & every sentence a surprise.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Only the hand that erases can write the true thing.
— Meister Eckhart

Once the writer has laboured through the research process, has finally vanquished writer's block and produced a written text, the essayist must now confront one great final temptation: the desire to consider her work complete. Alas, it is not. As all good writers lament: one never gets writing quite right the first time. Therefore, the faithful Christian scholar will endevour to resist the great temptation to mistake a draft for a completed essay, and will convert the initial euphoria over completing this draft, into a renewed effort at editing.

Editing involves a careful re-reading of the drafted work. When writing an essay the first time through, you focus on organizing thoughts and research material, and on struggling against the challenges of strangled articulation. The attention this demands often makes the writer blind to many small errors or omissions along the way. This the process if editing will now correct.

As you re-read your draft, be attentive to the flow of the argument. Does your paper make sense? Does it say what you intended it to? Are there spelling mistakes or missing words? Below are two lists of questions that you should consider when editing:

I. Do it with Style...

Style matters in graduate level academic writing. Problematic sentences can confuse your reader and prevent them from recognizing the thought and research you have put into your essay. So, it is vital that you edit your written drafts for stylistic errors and omissions. Read the draft through carefully, or—even better—have someone read through it for you and offer comments. Do the sentences and paragraphs make sense? Are they clear? Does what you wrote resemble what you were trying to say? The following list some common stylistic problems for which to be on the look out:

- run on sentences
- sentences which lack a subject or a verb
- sentences in which the subjects and verbs do not agree
- paragraphs that contain too many diverse thoughts
- gender-exclusive language

- a first-person, overly casual or conversational style
- a 'preaching' or homilectical style
- use of jargon or slang expressions
- spelling mistakes
- improper use of punctuation
- pronouns that lack clarity of reference
- inadequate or non-existent quotation marks and documentation of references
- overly repetitive of the same point

II. Structural matters with which to concern yourself whilst re-reading your paper

1. Thesis? What Thesis?
What was the thesis of this paper (its purpose and stated argument)? Was it stated clearly in the introduction and referred to again in the conclusion of the paper?

2. All's well that ... begins well
Does the introduction capture the interest of the reader, and does it clearly state what the prupose of the essay is?

3. Exorcising devilish details...
Is the argument of the paper clearly and coherently developed? Does it make sense? Will others understand what you have sought to express? Are parts of the body of the essay distracting, confusing, or unneccessary? Are there holes in the argument which need to be repaired? Is the main purpose of the essay always being served by its different parts?

4. From general to specific
Does the argument of the paper move from generalities to specific issues and arguments?

5. By way of conclusion
Does the conclusion of the paper pull things together without introducing new arguments or material?

6. Dotting the i's
Is the paper's format and style consistent with accepted standards for academic writing at the graduate level? See section 3.6 below for some details on this matter.

7.Your documents, please...
Does the essay accurately document where you have relied upon the work of others? Do you provide complete information about your research sources, and will others be able to locate these sources because you have documented them accurately? See section 3.5 below for more on this.

Many students lament that editing a draft can be a tedious and difficult process, one that demands time they do not want to invest into their essays. And yet, one's written work improves exponentially when written drafts are carefully re-read and modified. As Ambrose Bierce, an American writer from the early part of the last century, reminds us:

A Saint [is] a dead sinner revised and edited

3.5 The importance of being honest—Documenting theological writing

While it is possible to imagine several ways in which academic writing might be a lot like playing poker, there is one way in which it must never be so. Students and scholars must always be ready to tip their hands, to show those with whom they are playing just what they've put into their fold. On one hand it is simply sporting to do so—it gives your readers an entrée into your work, affording them the chance to scrutinize your evidence and to examine your influences and teachers. On the other hand, admitting your sources in footnotes and proper bibliography is also a deadly earnest matter in which both personal and scholarly integrity are at stake.

These two points can be thought about in another way. Citing your sources in footnotes and bibliographies in scholarly writing is act of courtesy and respect, and this in two directions. First and foremost, a footnote is a gesture of respect towards those upon whose work and insight you have come directly to rely. When you cite the works of others, you pay tribute to their own endeavours, and give them nothing less than their due. Is it too much to say that careful citation is a mode of obedience to the fifth Sinai commandment that we do honour to our forebearers in all things? That we owe much to those who have taught us, to the literary, religious and intellectual traditions in which we have been fostered, as well as to those contemporaries with whom we are engaged—all of this is publically, easily and appropriately acknowledged in the little trouble we take with footnotes, endnotes and bibliographies when we write.

Second, footnotes and bibliographies are also a courteous gesture towards those who will read your work. For citations are the doors through which your readers can press deeper into your own argument, appreciate your thinking, and meet your conversation partners. The little notes that dwell along the foot of our pages can and do open up further vistas for reading and inquiry of which your readers might well be ignorant. A good reference simply tells your readers everything they need to know should they wish press further along the lines of the conversation you've opened up, perhaps to examine your sources themselves, and to form their own judgments about then. Proficient scholarly reference is like a generous moment in the frank, open and polite conversation. All of this being so, this modest plea for the importance of citation must not and will not itself pass unreferenced.[3]

In matters of documentation, the School has adopted Kate Turabian**,** *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 6th edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) as its preferred style guide. Readily available and always kept in print, this will prove an invaluable guide to the details of proper referencing and the preparation of bibliographies. Buy a copy for your desk.

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[3]Two enchanting accounts of the historic course of the lowly footnote have recently come to press: Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), as well as Chuck Zerby, *The Devil's Details: A History of the Footnote* (Montpelier, VT:Invisible Cities Press, 2001).

3.51 Something, unfortunately, about plagiarism

Art is either plagiarism or revolution.
—Paul Gauguin

The only "-ism" Hollywood believes in is plagiarism.
—Dorothy Parker

The ghastly spectre haunting all of this is, of course, that of *plagarism*. Plagiarism is a serious business, a bad business, a seriously bad business. Here's how one society of scholars and teachers defines the transgression that is plagiarism:

> Using another person's ideas or expressions in your writing without acknowledging the source constitutes plagiarism. Derived from the Latin *plagiarius* ('kidnapper'), plagiarism refers to a form of intellectual theft. . .In short, to plagiarize is to give the impression that you wrote or thought something that you in fact borrowed from someone, and to do so is a violation of professional ethics.[4]

Whether intended *or unintended*, unacknowledged use of another's work constitutes plagiarism and is subject to serious sanction. The gravity of these sanctions at the Atlantic School of Theology extends as far as suspension from studies. For details of the School's policy and its implementation see the *Atlantic School of Theology Student Handbook* (2002-3), pp. 47-49.

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[4]Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing.* 2nd. ed. (New York: MLA, 1998), p.151.

3.6 The document is the drama—Presenting polished products

I consider looseness with words no less of a defect than looseness of the bowels.
—John Calvin

We are cups, constantly and quietly being filled. The trick is, knowing how to tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out.
—Ray Bradbury

Having invested so much time and effort into researching, drafting, and editing your written work, it is important that the final product present itself well to its intended audience. A piece of written work is, essentially, intended to be read by *a reader.* It is therefore necessary to conform to certain standards that your reader will expect, for the impression of your work and thought will be the product of engagement with the document you set before her or him.

The following list summarizes some recognized standards in academic writing.

- The essay should be printed or typed on $8^{1/2}$ x 11 inches, white bond (20 lb) paper.
- Use only one side of the page, employing one inch margins.
- Typeface should be one of the following: "Times Roman," "Palatino." "Courier," or "Garamond."
- Font size should be 12 point for the main body of the essay.
- All papers should be double-spaced.
- Page numbers should appear in the top right corner, or in bottom center.
- Canadian (rather than American) spelling is expected.
- All titles of publications (books, journals) are to be *italicized* or underlined.
- Avoid the use of **bold** text except for optional use in headings.
- Quotations of fewer than 3 lines/40 words should be incorporated into a paragraph and enclosed by double quotations marks (with a footnote reference).
- Quotations longer than 3 lines/40 words should be set apart from the main body of the essay by being displayed in their own single-spaced paragraph. This block of text should be indented from the left margin by 7-10 spaces. No quotation marks are required.
- Reference to materials cited should follow Turabian guidelines (see section 3.5).
- Include a standard title page with each paper submitted.
- Do not submit papers with any other form of cover, plastic or otherwise.
- Staple your paper once in the top left hand corner.

4. 'How to write a paper in a week'— Some rather winsome southern advice

What follows has been adapted from advice which Professor Eugene Rogers, a theologian at the University of Virgina, offers to his students regarding the timely, happy and effective preparation of written work. To work under the aegis of these rules is to attempt to couple productivity together with consistency and humanity. The 'week' promised in the title of this chapter is a rough estimate of the length of time need to prepare a seven or eight-page paper under this regime.

Here are the 'Two Rules' that are the motor of the technique:

✑ *Rule One—The Two-Page Rule.*
Commit yourself to writing *no more* than two pages a day. After you have written two pages, stop. If at all possible, it is best to break off in the middle of a sentence. This will keep your pump primed for tomorrow.

✑ *Rule Two—The Twenty Minute Rule.*
When you find that you have nothing to say, or think you could never get two pages, you apply this second rule. Turn on the computer and open your file— or take up your pen, dust off the typewriter keys etc. as appropriate. Set an egg-timer for twenty minutes. Start to write. Try not to edit as you go along. Rather, allow your momentum to build without particular worry about either content or style. Write for twenty minutes. When the egg-timer goes off, you may stop, leave off writing and take yourself out to the movies. If, however, you find you're on to something and want to keep going, do so. But remember Rule One.

To watch these rules conspire to do their stuff, let's consider a 'for instance'. Having been assigned a five-page paper for one of your courses. . . . .

✑ *Day 1*—You wake up one morning and think you have nothing to say. Apply Rule Two. Perhaps you've got some preliminary notes or doodles lying about. While the egg-timer runs down, transcribe these into your computer along with any thing else that comes to mind once the game is afoot. When twenty minutes is up you may stop. If, after double-spacing what you've got, you have more than two pages, you must stop (see Rule One).

✑ *Day 2*— Re-read the course materials directly related to the project and search out passages that support, qualify, or oppose the initial ideas you've been developing. Type these into the file in appropriate places; why not reference these citations appropriately already at this point to save time later? Once you've done this, you will not likely be able to write any connecting material, since you'll have too many pages under Rule One. You're done for the day.

✑ *Day 3*— Read over your text. Identify the best idea. You may have to ask a friend to help you do this. This idea will be the thesis of your paper. Now, re-arrange the paragraphs and citations you've assembled so far to make an argument in favour of your thesis. Add material so as to anticipate objections at any point where this seems important. Also write connecting material as necessary. You now have a first draft of your paper; but it's not ready yet.

☙ *Day 4*—This is the hardest and most important part. Read your draft *aloud* to a friend. Odds are good that you will find some passages of your draft embarrassing. These need work. As your read, you will catch yourself offering additional explanations for other passages. This is good—this is how you realize where the gaps and leaps are, and generate more text. You or your friend should make note of these almost involuntary explanations, because they or something like them will need to go into the paper to fill out the argument.

If you absolutely cannot stand to read your paper to somebody else, read it *aloud* to yourself in the mirror. *You may not read it silently*. Reading it silently simply doesn't work.

If this was exhausting, you've likely already trespassed Rule Two and may stop. Of course, with all the insights won from reading the piece aloud, if you want to finish the paper tonight you may.

☙ *Day 5*—Write up the final form of the paper, making any and all changes indicated by yesterday's experience of reading the draft aloud. Re-read the assignment to be sure that you've done what is, in fact, asked. Check your spelling, and format the paper appropriately. Confirm all your references, making sure you haven't overlooked any citations. Run off a final copy. Reward yourself.

5. Some potentially useful material tucked into several appendices

Delores breezed along the surface of her life like a flat stone forever skipping along smooth water, rippling reality sporadically but oblivious to it consistently, until she finally lost momentum, sank, and due to an over- dose of flouride as a child which caused her to suffer from chronic apathy, doomed herself to lie forever on the floor of her life as useless as an appendix and as lonely as a five-hundred pound barbell in a steroid-free fitness center.

—Winning sentence, 1990 Bulwer-Lytton bad fiction contest.

5.1 Where to find some important policies of the Atlantic School of Theology relating to scholarly writing and research

As a student you should acquire, and if not treasure at least retain in good condition, copies of both the The official *Calendar* of the Atlantic School of Theology as well as the *Atlantic School of Theology Student Handbook*. These publications are updated from time to time, so be sure to have the most recent verisons. Amidst all the other delights on offer in these publications, are to be found a number of things pertaining to scholarly writing and research, the following in particular:

	Calendar 2003-4	*Handbook 2002-3*
Policy regarding plagiarism	41	47-49
Policy regarding inclusive language	41	33-47
General academic policies and regulations	39-43	49-75

Happy reading...

5.2 What Grades Mean

Grading schemes vary (though not wildly) from one institution to the next. For this reason, the grading scheme peculiar to the Atlantic School of Theology is reproduced below for your ready reference. But perhaps, first, some general description of what standard letter grades may be taken to mean as regards written work in particular. What follows has been adapted from remarks made by Professor Alasdair MacIntyre while visiting Yale University during the 1990s.

- A solid 'B' essay gives the reader enough information, well organized and documented, to get from sympathetic skepticism to interested respect. It shows a mastery of both the matter and the progress of an argument.

- A 'B+' essay shows promise of extending beyond mastery, while a 'B-' essay exhibits sufficient reading and work, but fails, in varying degrees, to provide all the essentials of an argument.

- Given mastery of the material and a standard argument, an essay within the 'A' range essay carries the argument on to a new stage.

- Essays whose grade falls within the 'C' range lack essential material and show insufficient reading and effort to be acceptable at the graduate level, perhaps to the point of giving evidence of obvious misunderstanding.

- Essays which receive an 'F' manifest scarcely any evidence of either reading or understanding, or flagrantly flout the assignment.

The Grading Scheme at the Atlantic School of Theology

Below is reproduced the official grading scheme as found on page 38 of the School's *Calendar* 2003-2004.

LETTER GRADE	PERCENTAGE EQUIVALENT	GRADE POINT	GRASP OF SUBJECT	DESCRIPTION OF STUDENT'S OVERALL PERFORMANCE
A+	94-100	4	Exceptional	A superior performance with consistent evidence of a comprehensive, incisive grasp of all aspects of the subject matter; a very wide knowledge base; insightful critical evaluation and analysis of the material; an exceptional capacity for original, creative, and/or logical thinking; an exceptional ability to organize, analyse, synthesize, and to express thoughts fluently.
A	87-93	4	Outstanding	A comprehensive grasp of the subject matter, outstanding evidence of original thought; sound critical evaluation of the material; an excellent ability to organize, analyse, synthesize and to express thoughts; mastery of an extensive knowledge base.
A-	80-86	3.7	Excellent	All the qualities of a B level performance and an excellent capacity for original, creative, and/or logical thinking; excellent ability to organize, analyse, synthesize, and integrate ideas; broad knowledge base in the subject matter.
B+	77-79	3.3	Good	A good performance with a substantial knowledge of the subject matter; a very good understanding of the relevant issues; familiarity with relevant literature and techniques; good ability to organize, analyse, and examine the material in a constructive and critical manner.
B	73-76	3	Acceptable	A generally adequate performance with a good knowledge of the subject matter; a fair understanding of relevant issues; some ability to work with relevant literature and techniques; some ability to develop solutions to difficult problems related to the subject material.
B-	70-72	2.7	Marginally Satisfactory	Some familiarity with subject material; some understanding of relevant issues; attempts to solve moderately difficult problems related to the subject material in a critical and analytical manner are only partially successful.
C	60-69	2	Unsatisfactory	An unsatisfactory performance. At the discretion of the instructor, supplemental work is possible to upgrade mark to a B range. Credit is assigned. No more than 2 C grades will be counted towards a degree program.

F	0-59	Failure	Student has not grasped subject matter; does not understand issues involved; cannot work with relevant literature.
P		Pass	Credit awarded, but no mark assigned.
W		Withdrew	This designation indicates that the student has withdrawn from a course by the deadline for course withdrawal. There is no academic penalty associated with this designation.
INC		Incomplete	This designation indicates that the instructor has granted the student an extension of 30 days from the end of term to complete course-work requirements. An extension beyond 30 days from the end of term to complete course-work requirements must be approved by faculty.

5.3 A Handy Checklist For Those You Compel to Read Your Drafts

In order to benefit fully from the insight and wisdom of those friends and colleagues who agree to read draft versions of your scholarly writing, you might provide them with a checklist like the one reproduced here. By asking them to check off the various items which apply as well as to record the pages and paragraphs where certain things happen (or ought to happen), you can come away with some very specific, and therefore really useful advice on how to tighten, tidy up and otherwise 'kick things up a notch' before you submit your final text.

As you become more familiar with your own problematic proclivities as a writer, you should definitely add items or questions specifically targeting things you are apt to have left undone or done poorly.

COMMENDATIONS	**SUGGESTIONS**
_____ Thesis well defined	_____ Focus thesis more clearly
_____ Thesis enlightening	_____ Render thesis more interesting
_____ Arguments support thesis	_____ Marshall compelling reasons
_____ Gets to heart of the matter	_____ Make deeper analysis
_____ Anticipates counterarguments	_____ Defend against counterclaims
_____ Effective use of text	_____ Refer more to the text
_____ Good internal logic	_____ Check *non-sequitors*
_____ Well structured	_____ Reorganize to support thesis
_____ Good intro/conculusion	_____ Rework intro/conclusion
_____ Clearly written	_____ Fix unhelpful language
_____ Lively style	_____ Adjust tone
_____ Good command of topic	_____ Fix factual / conceptual errors
_____ Good synthesis skills	_____ Consult sources or notes
_____ Well documented	_____ Cite sources
_____ Mechanics transparent	_____ Grammar & spelling distract
_____ Rewriting unnecessary	_____ Rewriting recommended
_____ I would grade this at...	_____ Unready for grading

The most successful bit of your argument appeared at _______; do more of that.

This list is adapted from Robert Weir, "Empowering Students," *Perspectives: National Historical Association Newsletter*. 31(1993), p. 6.

5.4 Some Useful Publications on Scholarly Research and Writing

Adler, Mortimer. *How to Read a Book*. New York: Simon & Scuster, 1972.

Avery, H. et. al. *Thinking it Through. A Practical Guide to Academic Essay Writing*. 2nd edition. Peterborough: Academic Skills Centre of Trent University, 1989.

Buckley, J. *Fit to Print. The Canadian Student's Guide to Essay Writing*. Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1998.

Chicago Manual of Style. 13th edition, revised and expanded. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Elbow, Peter. *Writing With Power*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Ellis, D.B. *Becoming a Master Student*. 3rd. Canadian edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Strunk, W. and White, E.B. *The Elements of Style*. 3rd. edition. New York: Macmillan, 1979.

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*. 6th edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Weston, A. *A Rulebook for Arguments*. 2nd edition. Indianopolis: Hackett, 1992.