

1. GENERAL ADVICE

- remember two basic secrets of A papers: 1. Finish your first draft several days in advance and then do at least two revisions thereof. 2. During the revision process, read your paper out loud to a friend or a friend at the university writing center.

2. ON DEVELOPING AN ARGUMENT

- for the sake of these papers your concern is not what really happened but rather the author's intention, argument, and means of developing and illustrating that argument.

3. SPECIFIC FORMAT INSTRUCTIONS

- Five pages is the maximum. There is no minimum. Papers must be written double-spaced, in Times New Roman Font 11 (not 12!), with 1 1/4 inch margins on the left and right and one inch margins on the top and bottom.

- do not include a title page or a title. Put the question you are answering centered at the top of your first page. At the top right of the first page put your name. On top right of each following page have the page number.

4. SOURCES

- use at least one outside source, in hard copy from Hesburgh Library, for this paper. I suggest:

Anchor Bible Dictionary

Anchor Bible Commentary

HarperCollins Bible Commentary

HarperCollins Bible Dictionary

New Catholic Encyclopedia

Oxford Bible Commentary

- no online sources are allowed. A trip to Hesburgh must be made. Speak with the reference librarian (directly ahead of you in the main reading hall) if you have any questions.

- when citing your sources, use footnotes, not endnotes or a works cited page. Follow the Chicago footnote method. This you will find through the citation guide link on the main page of our website. When citing an encyclopedia article, be sure to cite the name of the author of that article (not the editor of the encyclopedia) and the name of the article. No bibliography is necessary.

- put Biblical references in parentheses (Mark 13:8). Always include these references when discussing a specific passage.

- put etymologies in parentheses. Jacob had a nap at Bethel (“House of God”).

- if you use a translation other than the New Jerusalem for comparison (A VERY GOOD IDEA), simply name the translation (not the edition -- e.g. King James Version, not Oxford University Press) in a footnote.

- for footnotes referring either to introductory articles or footnotes in the New Jerusalem Bible, simply treat our Bible as a book. When referring to a footnote anywhere add “, n. [footnote number/letter]” after the page number.

5. MISTAKES OF GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, SYNTAX AND INFELICITIES OF STYLE

- a period goes inside quotation marks but outside of parentheses. The latter rule trumps the former when both punctuation marks “appear” (got it?). Footnote references go after the quotation mark or the period, whichever comes last.

- avoid using quotation marks for words that are not quotations. e.g. Christian “fanatics” think prayer is awesome. Simply find a word that does not need quotation marks.

- no contractions in formal writing. I'm serious.

- after a semi-colon a full sentence is required.

- isn't it interesting that the word interesting has no meaning and should never be used in writing?

- e.g. means “for example.” i.e. means “in other words.”

- quotation is the noun. Quote is the verb.

- numbers under 13 should be written out. Testing one, two, three, is anybody listening? hello?

- do not mistake adjectives and adverbs. “ND played badly,” not “bad.”

- split infinitive. "Remember to not do this." Oops!
- dangling participle "Watching the television show, the turkey burned" means that the turkey was watching the television show.
- beg the question. I do not think this means what you think it means. Look this phrase up in the OED (Oxford English Dictionary).
- "as regards" and "in regard to" are correct. "In regards" is incorrect.
- beware of using the word "as" and/or "ing" words. This often leads to ugly phrases. For example: "Beauty is viewed as supreme...." Yech. Better to write, "Beauty is the supreme quality...." Another example: "He interprets this as foretelling...." Yech. Better: "He explains that this foretells...." How about, "The emphasis is not on being a member...." Blech! Better: "The emphasis is not on membership."
- use present, indicative tense whenever you discuss a text. "Paul writes..." not "P wrote." Save the past tense for the description of historical events.
- use the active voice, not the passive voice. A passive sentence such as, "Jerusalem was sacked in AD 70," does not tell me who did the sacking. I need to know the subject of the verb! So: "The Romans sacked Jerusalem in AD 70" (or even better: "Titus sacked Jerusalem in AD 70").
- watch your subject, verb and object to see if they make sense. "One such comparison claims" Can a comparison claim? or "Theology is the subject that studies" Can a subject study? or "The theories examine...." Do they? No! "Scholars examine." "His goal concentrates on explaining" - Can a "goal" "concentrate"? Better: "His goal is to explain"
- feel free to use first person: "I will show..." but do not use plural first person: "We will show....." Do not use the general second person: "You cannot go wrong by...."
- parallel structure. "Paul argues that believers should repent and to pray," should be "and should pray."

6. A FINAL PLEA FOR GOOD WRITING

- above all write simply and clearly. Avoid long or complicated sentences. Use paragraphs. Quote only small portions of material.

- remember always to look at the context of a passage (i.e. what comes before and after) and the historical context of an author.

- make sure there is a smooth transition between different sections of a paper.

- your conclusion should be something more than a general review. What is the importance or consequence of your argument? What new horizons does it reveal?

- read this once more after you've done your first draft.

- Any paper that violates the precepts herein will be fed to the geese on St. Mary's lake.