

# Academic Writing

There are several hallmarks of academic writing:

- Appropriate presentation
- Formal register
- Specialised terminology
- Objectivity
- Clear and sustained argument
- Judicious use of footnotes

## Appropriate Presentation

For PTC, the following presentation requirements apply:

- A4 paper, word-processed, printed in black ink on one side only.
- Clear font in an easy-to-read size. The ACT recommends 12 point Times New Roman or equivalent.
- Double spacing in the main text. Single spacing for footnotes and block quotations. Block quotations should be indented 1cm on both sides with a smaller font.
- Left margin of 4cm, right margin of 2.5 cm.
- Pages numbered consecutively at the top right or bottom middle of the page, beginning on the first page of the essay proper, not the synopsis.
- Greek and Hebrew words should not be transliterated. Greek accents should be used, but Hebrew words need not be pointed unless it is exegetically significant.
- The essay should comprise the following elements, each starting on a new page:
  1. PTC cover sheet;
  2. Synopsis;
  3. Essay;
  4. Bibliography.

## **Formal Register**

This is achieved by avoiding colloquial terms and phrases. Words which are commonly abbreviated in speech should be spelled out in full e.g. 'cannot', 'does not', 'will not' etc.

It is best to avoid using the first person 'I' unless the assignment is a personal reflection.

Pay particular attention to your grammar. Make sure that each sentence has a finite verb and that apostrophes are used correctly.

Gender-inclusive language must be used.

When you refer to scholars in the main body of your text, use their full name if it is the first time you have mentioned them, and their surname for all other instances.

## **Specialised terminology**

As you read, you will encounter a number of specialised theological terms. If you are unsure what they mean, consult a theological (not a general) dictionary. The register of your writing will be raised by the correct use of such terms.

Caution: only use specialised terminology if you are sure that you know what it means. Check your understanding with another student or your lecturer if needs be.

Highly specialised technical terms are best supported with a brief footnote explaining their meaning.

There are certain conventions to follow when referring to books of the Bible. The name of the book is abbreviated when it is followed by chapter and verse, but written in full when it appears on its own, or with only a chapter reference e.g.

In Rom 1:16, Paul . . .

In Romans 1, Paul . . .

In Romans, Paul . . .

The *SBL Handbook of Style* provides a list of conventional abbreviations for biblical books.

## **Objectivity**

Academic writing avoids making sweeping generalisations or dogmatic assertions. Make sure that everything you say is backed up by evidence.

A polemical tone is to be avoided at all costs. Perhaps this author could have worded his thoughts a little less stridently:

The fact is that I, like most non-Calvinist evangelical Christians, embrace free will for two reasons (beyond that we believe it is everywhere assumed in the Bible): it is necessary to preserve human responsibility for sin and evil, and it is necessary to preserve God from being responsible for sin and evil. I can honestly say (as most non-Calvinist evangelicals) that I don't give a flip about free will except for those reasons.<sup>1</sup>

The use of certain phrases helps tone down your writing and avoids irritating your reader e.g.

It is possible that . . .

It appears that . . .

Given the evidence, perhaps . . .

Whilst Scholar X suggests that . . . , perhaps a more likely explanation is . . .

Choose your points for your essay carefully. Do not use material from just one body of thought; make sure that your argument is balanced and that you show awareness of more than one point of view.

## **Clear and Sustained Argument**

Your argument should be advanced through clear, logical stages. It is helpful to keep on referring back to the question.

Link your paragraphs by using phrases in the new paragraph that mirror the previous paragraph. Introduce new content by referring to what has already been mentioned.

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<sup>1</sup> Roger E. Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 23.

Mini-introductions and mini-conclusions help the reader follow your train of thought. For example,

This section will relate Luke's literary arrangement of material to Acts 1:8 and show how he prepares for narrating the spread of the gospel to Gentiles by demonstrating its movement out from Jews in Jerusalem to those on the fringe of Judaism.

Blah, blah, blah . . .

Having shown how Luke's literary placement of the Cornelius section prepares his audience for the next stage of the fulfilment of Acts 1:8, we shall now demonstrate how his use of literary strategy emphasises the importance of this account.

Blah, blah, blah . . .

Thus we see that as the story and repetitions unfold, Cornelius' role fades as Peter's rises, and ultimately even Peter's role is overshadowed by the Holy Spirit's involvement, until in the final repetitions in Acts 15:7-9 and Acts 15:14, the emphasis is entirely on what God has done.

Your reader is processing large quantities of information in your essay and will be helped by pointers which review what you have already said and reiterate where you are going with your argument. The rule of thumb is:

Tell 'em what you're going to say, say it, then tell 'em that you've said it.

Your argument should be expressed in your own words. If you do use a direct quotation from a scholar, you will need to introduce the quotation and then comment on it. For example:

Christoph Bultmann suggests that Jeremiah's Laments depict Jeremiah's cry of liberation as a poet who realises that 'what he judges from his experience to be a valid religious insight can be pronounced in the name of God.'<sup>2</sup> However, this creates an artificial distinction between the poetic and the prophetic in Jeremiah. Although Jeremiah's Laments are cast as poetry, they are nevertheless heavy with prophetic significance since Jeremiah's calling

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<sup>2</sup> Christoph Bultmann, 'A Prophet in Desperation? The Confessions of Jeremiah', in *The Elusive Prophet: the Prophet as a Historical Person, Literary Character and Anonymous Artist* (ed. Johannes C. Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 90.

was represented by his entire life, not merely by words.

### **Judicious Use of Footnotes**

Footnotes are not counted in the overall word limit of an essay. However, they must not exceed 25% of the prescribed essay length, and should not be used as an excuse to write a second essay at the bottom of the page.

Footnotes should be used sparingly. They are appropriate when a comment needs to be made which is not directly relevant to your argument e.g.

‘Paul evokes the divine conjugal metaphor of the OT in his command for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Eph 5:25a).<sup>3</sup>’

Resist the temptation to cut your essay down to the required word-length by placing chunks of it in footnotes. Anything important must go in the main body of text.

A footnote is also appropriate for defining a technical term when that definition would interrupt the flow of your argument.

Footnotes are also used for acknowledging when you have borrowed an idea from another author or quoted their work.

### **Final Caveat**

There will always be lecturers who have particular likes and dislikes about certain aspects of academic writing. It pays to find these out in advance and adhere to them, even though they may contravene the conventions by which you normally write.

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<sup>3</sup> Authorship of the Letter to the Ephesians is hotly debated. This paper will refer to the author of Ephesians as Paul, whilst acknowledging that Pauline authorship of this letter is not universally accepted.

# Introductions for Analysis and Critique

## **1. Evaluate recent scholarly attempts to classify the Psalter as wisdom literature, prophecy or song.**

For many years the Psalter was regarded as the Hymnbook of Second Temple Judaism, a 'Liquorice Allsorts' collection of songs and prayers for Israel's cult. Post-critical scholarship, however, has developed an interpretation of the Psalter as a literary and canonical whole with a coherent message and structure. Its classification is now debated between those who continue to understand it liturgically and those who see literary and theological principles (in various guises) governing its interpretation.

This paper will evaluate key contributions to the debate from representative scholars. The strengths and weaknesses of classifying the Psalter as wisdom, prophecy or song will be assessed and the implications of each approach will be illustrated by brief comment on two psalms (89 and 90) across the divide of Books III and IV.

(128 words)

## **2. Critically assess the theme of kingship in the Books of Samuel. How would you reconcile the pro-and anti-monarchic passages in 1 Samuel 8-12? What light do Saul and David's reigns shed on this question?**

The Books of Samuel chart Israel's transition from loose tribal confederacy to centralised monarchy. From Hannah's Song (1 Sam 2:1-10) to David's Thanksgiving (2 Samuel 22), the theme of kingship dominates the narrative. The compiler's treatment of kingship is complex and the text riddled with tensions towards the institution of kingship over which much scholarly ink has been spilled.

This paper proposes that the compiler of 1 and 2 Samuel used the records of Israel's transition from theocracy to monarchy to produce a cohesive work of historiography, written with a theological perspective, which explores the relationship between divine and human kingship. Accordingly, this paper will examine the rise of the Israelite monarchy in the context of the tension between God's pre-ordained plan for Israel and her ill-founded request for a king. It will then rehearse approaches for

reconciling the ambivalences surrounding kingship in Israel. Finally, it will assess the reigns of Israel's first two kings in order to reach a conclusion regarding these ambivalences.

(165 words)

### **3. How does the relationship between human nature, the Gospel and the Holy Spirit direct our expectations for pastoral ministry?**

A biblically and theologically informed understanding of the relationship between human nature, the Gospel and the Holy Spirit is critical for expectations of pastoral ministry. This paper contends that it is all too easy inadvertently to foster the problem of nominal Christianity within evangelical congregations through preaching an inadequate model of the relationship between the above. Consequently this paper will examine the relationship between human nature, the Gospel and the Spirit, apply it to the problem of nominality and draw out implications for preaching.

Pastoral ministry is sometimes interpreted solely in terms of physical care and spiritual encouragement. It is broader than this; the pastoral office includes preaching the Word (John 21:15-17) to edify and equip (Eph 4:12-13), correct and rebuke (2 Tim 4:2), and maintain pure and sound doctrine. This paper assumes preaching without a regular, overtly evangelistic focus within a non-seeker-sensitive church model.

(151 words)

## Creating a Synopsis or Abstract

Creating a synopsis is the final stage of the essay writing process. It should only be done after the final polishing and proof-reading of the essay itself has been completed.

The synopsis is a very brief summary of the essay's argument. **It is neither an outline of the essay nor an introduction to it.** The synopsis should be approximately 150 words long and written in continuous prose, not bullet points. It 'retells the story' of the essay and, therefore, phrases such as 'This essay argues ...' or 'In this paper we shall demonstrate that ...' should not be used.

### a) Church History Unit 'The Church from 1550 to the Present Day'

**Title: The French Revolution was One of the Great Watersheds of history. Critically Evaluate the Effect on the Catholic and Protestant Church, and the Church's Response.**

The French Revolution challenged ecclesiastical and royal absolutism. The National Assembly provided for the reform of ecclesiastical abuses but the Reign of Terror attempted to purge Christianity from France. Dechristianisation failed, and the Concordat of 1801 ironically gave the Pope considerable authority over the French Catholic Church. Socialism, nationalism and political liberalism alarmed the Papacy, which responded by bolstering its doctrinal authority. Despite withdrawing from engagement with the new order, the strength of nineteenth century Catholicism was a testimony to its capacity for survival. The Protestant Church also required reform, and despite initial conservatism, it responded with renewal represented by the Clapham Sect and the Oxford Movement. Free churches embraced contemporary liberalism, empowering the individual towards lay participation, social activism and missionary activity. German theologians married their faith with the intellectual *Zeitgeist*. The universal church survived the revolution, but neither Catholicism nor Protestantism emerged unscathed; Catholicism faced the charge that it was anachronistic with a fortress mentality, whilst Protestantism courted a schism between liberal and evangelical theology.

(167 words)

### c) Study Tour Unit 'Bible in Context'

**Title: An Exegesis of Romans 16:1-23 Paying Special Attention to the Historical Setting and Relevant Archaeological Data.**

Romans 16:1-23 cements Paul's credentials with the Romans as he sends greetings to well-respected church members. The Roman Christians met as house churches comprising both Jews and Gentiles. Some were hosted by



craftworkers probably located in the Transtiberium area of Rome. The names of the individuals offer insights into the nature of the house churches. They appear to reflect the proportions of people of slave origin against freeborn within Roman society in general. Comparison with the frequency of names in Roman inscriptions shows that at least fourteen of Paul's addressees were immigrants. Paul demonstrates that his missionary work was team-based, and included women who receive specific commendations. Erastus is most likely the same man lauded in a Corinthian inscription for providing a pavement at his own expense in return for the aedileship. By mentioning Erastus's high-profile civic role, Paul subtly reinforces his earlier command to the Romans to do good in order to receive commendation from those in authority.

(159 words)

### **Hints for Creating a Synopsis:**

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