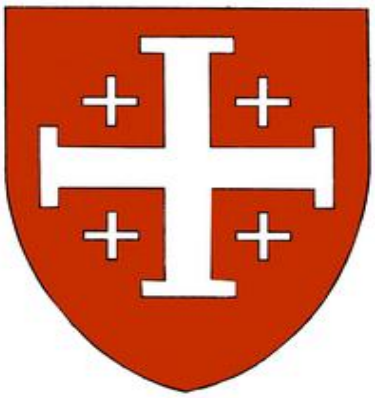
RESEARCH GUIDELINES
FOR STUDENTS OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION
ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY

(Version updated: 06th June 2012)

Preliminaries

This paper is just an outline on how to write a research paper, essay, thesis / dissertation. It is merely a preliminary to the hard work of reading books and serious study of the subject you choose. It offers useful tips, rather than offering prescriptions etched in stone. For that reason, individual advisors and students need not take everything suggested herein. But certain things like formal prescriptions are standard and not negotiable.

When you should start

You should start right away. Remember that you have other courses, and your advisor also has other students to teach plus her/his own research. So it is important to give yourself and your advisor as much time as possible. It is pertinent to allocate *sufficient time* and follow *a regular schedule* for conducting research; this applies to all aspects of research such as skimming, reading, structuring, writing, and editing.

Deadlines

Be sure that you meet all the deadlines and dates stipulated by the Faculty.

How to Find a Topic

Students sometimes find it difficult to choose a topic for their theses. The solution to this lies in the way one reads texts. As you read for the different courses try to do so critically. Reflect on the following:

1) What does the text/author say? Ask questions about why the author says what s/he says?
2) What does the text/author mean?
3) Do you agree/disagree with her/him and why?

The basic point is that as you read, write down the possible research topics that come to your mind. It is important to jot down these possible topics lest you forget them. Another reason for doing so is that it gives you the opportunity to think more about it later. The more possible topics you have the better.

Tips on Reading

1) Before seriously studying the text itself, you should first skim the text by reading the abstract, the preface, the introduction, the headings or the table of contents and the summary.
2) *Be Open-minded:* This requires that you give all ideas a fair hearing. This is particularly important when the ideas concerned are ideas you either disagree with or those you cannot imagine yourself ever entertaining. The advantage of this is that it minimizes the danger of making impulsive and uninformed prejudgments. Before raising objections to new ideas make sure that you understand the author's argument and its significance. It's very easy to fight the author on the basis of a misinterpretation which makes her/his argument look weak. It is best to interpret the author in such a way that her/his argument appears in the strongest light.
3) Read a sentence repeatedly, especially the difficult ones, until you really grasp its content. Read slowly and ruminate. "To practice reading as an art […] one has to be nearly a cow but **not** a 'modern human being': [one has to] R u m i n a t e…" (Nietzsche, 1887, p.73).
4) Make sure that you are attentive to the organizational structure of the text and special method the author uses. Subtopics often help to highlight the major issues. Quotation

marks and italics need to be noted; the author has not done that arbitrarily (see example above).

5) Try to be an active reader. This means you have to interact with the text, by way of asking questions, commenting etc. It is useful to capture your responses. If you are reading your own copy of the text you could highlight important passages and write comments in margins. When using copies of texts/books which are not your own or in pdf format make sure that you take notes; this includes not only the arguments stated, but also data of the sources (e.g. author, year, page, title of the text, library call number, website addresses , download dates etc.).

6) Highlight terms, sentences and ideas which you think will be important for your research. Use different signs or colours to highlight different points of view or approaches.

7) If you don't understand names, terms, issues, concepts mentioned in the text look them up in thesauruses, dictionaries, encyclopaedias and handbooks. After clarifying unknown terms, read again the sentence you didn't understand.

8) Note that it is sometimes difficult to understand the text. The text may not be difficult but may simply be tiring. You need time to rest and play too.

9) Notes Taking: As you read make sure that you take notes. Note down only what is noteworthy, usually the basic points. It is best that you use record cards, loose sheets or a computer. Take all the bibliographical details, author, title, publisher, year and place of publication, page numbers and the library call-number. Depending on your own working style software such as "endnote" or "zotero" is useful for storing and utilizing bibliographic data. Clearly indicate what you paraphrase and use quotation marks when you quote verbatim. It would also be useful to jot down the *major idea or concept* (for example, mind-body dualism could be a major idea in my topic on life after death). Devote one card/sheet to one idea.

   After jotting down the notes or quotations, make your comments on the rest of the card. File these cards/loose sheets according to the major ideas, rather than according to the sources. This will help you organize your notes in such a way that it becomes easier to put them together while writing. These major ideas could become chapters or sections of chapters in your thesis. Recording the bibliographical data helps *prevent plagiarism* and the need to go back to the library when you are citing the sources. Sometimes when you need to reuse the text, it may not be there in the library. This strategy can also be used on the computer.

The Actual Writing

1) Start writing as early as possible. Do not wait for a moment of inspiration as this may never come. It is important to realize that you think deeper when you are in the act of writing than when you merely sit down to think. Getting started is often hard because you tell yourself that you have not gathered enough material. There are time constraints and the advisor also needs time to read your work.

2) Always keep a back-up copy of your work at different storage places (hard-disc, usb-drive, email-account, cloud-storage etc).

3) Try to state your main argument(s) as early and clearly as possible. Well-written papers state what they aim to do right at the start. This way you let the readers know what to expect. A good paper is well organized and provides good and relevant examples and explanations.

4) Divide your work into chapters and sections. This helps you break down the topic into smaller and more manageable units. All the units must contribute towards establishing your thesis or your case. That means they must be consistent with each other.

5) Avoid making vague or unsupported arguments. Compare the following:

a. Radical feminists argue that women must have the right to abortion on demand. Abortion goes against the most fundamental teachings of Christianity….

b. Radical feminists such as Mary Ann Warren and Judith Jarvis Thomson take the women's right to their own bodies as more important than foetus's right to life if ever it has such rights. For this reason they support abortion on demand. Abortion on demand is against the teachings of the Catholic Church….

c. According to most feminists, women must be allowed the right to have abortion on demand. This directly contradicts what is generally taken as moral within some religions….

Which of these passages would you judge to be the best and why? Passage ***b*** is the best because it provides exact information. Passage ***a*** talks about radical feminists, which is a general concept. It also generalizes about Christianity. However it is better than ***c***, which is even more vague. 'Some (unnamed) feminists' is not an informative concept. The same is true of "some religions"

6) Your arguments must be well supported. Get your facts right, make sure they are relevant to the case you are making. When appealing to expert opinion attribute this to the right person or author.

7) Define and explain key concepts and technical philosophical terms. Try to avoid complicated jargon. Your thesis must make sense to an educated person of average intelligence even though she may not be a philosopher. This means you must write in clear and simple language.

8) Make sure that you have revised and proof-read your work.

9) Make sure that you stick to all deadlines including those you personally agreed to with your advisor. Some students have the habit of disappearing for long periods of time and then coming towards the end wanting the advisor to just approve their work or to read it overnight because the deadline is fast approaching. If the advisor thinks your work does not confirm to an acceptable standard he will most probably tell you to make some corrections or to read some additional text even though the deadline for submission is the next day. S/he will not be doing you a favour by letting you hand in a sub-standard thesis because in the end you will fail.

The Topic Itself

A clearly formulated topic lightens the load and leads to a well-argued paper. Conversely, a vaguely formulated topic tends to lead to a vague paper. Consider the following examples:

1) Social justice.

2) Rawls's Theory of Justice: A critical discussion.

3) An analysis of the Rawlsian priority of the right over the good.

Which of these topics is most clearly formulated, or if you had to choose from the above three, which one would you choose for your thesis? Why would you make that choice?

Try to make your *topic as clear as possible*. Think small. That is, try to have a clear and manageable task. Do not underestimate the amount of clarification, explanation and analysis required in writing a clear, coherent, and convincing paper. Remember that you have to work within certain constraints. These are limitations of time, the length of your work and the resources at your disposal.

What to avoid

1) *Plagiarism*: Using other people's ideas and expressions without proper acknowledgement (see the section on quotation below). This is the worst scholarly offence you can commit. Don't do it! All submissions to the Faculty will be submitted to "turnitin".
2) It is critical that you recall that in philosophy what counts are good well-supported arguments. Expression / opinion about a religious, ethical or any other philosophical issue is not the same thing as a good argument for it.
3) Misspelling key concepts and the names of the authors you cite.
4) Grammatical errors
5) Sexist, racist or any other derogative language
6) Colloquial expressions
7) Redundancy

What to do

1) For the proper understanding of key concepts, ideas and philosophical terms it is absolutely necessary to use handbooks, encyclopaedias, dictionaries and thesauruses.
2) Develop clear, stringent, differentiated, elaborated arguments. Make them short but clear; don't try to explain simple things in a complicated way, but describe complicated issues as concisely as possible. Use short sentences.

Writing Thesis / Dissertation Proposals

When you have chosen your topic you are expected to write a research proposal. You have to convince the reader that your topic is worth researching, and that you know how it can be done. The word 'proposal' serves as a synopsis of the academic research. In order to plan your work you must compose a synopsis of the academic research. The following is an outline of such a proposal which consists of the following sections:

1) **Research Topic**

The topic must be meaningful clear and precise. When it is read, it can be easily and immediately known what particular research the candidate wants to do. It doesn't matter whether the topic is short or long.

2) **Background and Significance of Research**

Explain why you decided to do research on this particular topic. The answer to the above question should involve the following: (1) Explain your topics relation to particular fields of knowledge, concepts, ideas, and theories. (2) How has the topic been covered by others? If it has been investigated by others before, in which aspect? Discuss the chosen topic also with reference to the future. (3) What will be your own contribution to the discussion? State what contribution it may add to a particular field of knowledge. Explain why your research is new and a first hand contribution, that has not been investigated by others in the same way.

3) **Thesis Statement and Research Questions**

Get straight to the point! What is the main thesis your research will try to defend? Write down the main statement of your thesis; don't forget this main thesis statement while doing research. Which are the main questions you attempt to answer?

4) **Research Objectives**

What do you intend to achieve with your research? What is you goal? Indicate the main-objectives and sub-objectives, if any. Indicate your objectives briefly but clearly. You can also number them.

5) **Preceding Relevant Researches**

You need to have a clear idea and a good overview about what has been written so far in this particular research area. Review and investigate relevant research material whether in the forms of books or articles in order to show that there are enough materials for pursuing the research topic and clearly identify what contributions the proposed research topic will make to the field of knowledge. Where and how do you go beyond what has already been published?

6) **Definitions of the Terms Used in Research**

List the definitions of the terms used in the research if it involves ambiguous or uncommon terms.

7) **Research Limitations**

Indicate clearly the area and the scope of the research topic. Explain which aspects will and will not be treated in this research and why they will not be covered even though they might be interesting.

8) **Research Methodology**

Explain the procedure of your research work and the styles of the research approach(es). How will you analyze and criticize the research materials?

9) **Chapter Outline of Research**

In which order are you going to tackle the issues? Include, as detailed as possible, the structure of your thesis or dissertation, by listing chapters and sub-chapters.

10) **References**

List the books, articles, and web-sites referred in the research work in the list of 'references' at the end. A good and simple way to collect references is to use "zotero" (zotero.org).

Citations / Quotations

Every research is built on results of other research projects. The thoughts of other authors must be indicated clearly and accurately. Quote only if you think that the original phrase is absolutely necessary for a proper understanding of the quoted author. Quotations are like salt in the soup. All quotations must always be in quotation marks. Quote according to the following manner: (Surname of the author, year of publication, page/s). Example: "War is merely the continuation of politics by other means" (Clausewitz, 1932, p.37).

If you use three or more words of an author in the same order, quote those words by using quotation marks: For example: According to Clausewitz war is the "continuation of politics by other means" (Clausewitz, 1932, p.37).

If there are two or more authors, use the surname of the two authors, year of publication, page (Critchley & Bernasconi, 1991, p.10).

Shorter quotations – like the example above – should be embedded in the surrounding sentences of the paragraph. **Longer** quotations (more than 3 lines) require a separate paragraph for the whole quotation indenting on both sides, in single line spacing with quotation marks. Example:

> "The essence of love and compassion is understanding, the ability to recognize the physical, material, and psychological suffering of others, to put ourselves "inside the skin" of the other. We "go inside" their body, feelings, and mental formations, and witness of ourselves their suffering. Shallow observation as an outsider is not enough to see their suffering. We must become one with the object of our observation. When we are in contact with another's suffering, a feeling of compassion is born in us." (Hanh, 2004, pp.81-82)

If you quote from the **classical works** such as Greek, Roman, the Tipitaka, the Bible, the Koran, Kant, etc., which are numbered systematically across all editions, use these numbers instead of page numbers, e.g. (Author, Book title, systematic number). Examples:

> "Whether it's true or not, only the gods know. But this is how I see it: In the knowable realm, the form of the good is the last thing to be seen, and it is reached only with difficulty" (Plato, *Republic*, 517b).

> "The maxim of self-love (prudence) merely *advises*; the law of morality *commands*. But there is a great difference between that which we are *advised* to do and that to which we are *obligated*" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 5:26). (If references are made to the "Akademie Ausgabe" 'AA' prefer those references since this the most professional way to quote Kant.)

> "Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them" (Mt 5: 17-18).

The Buddha says:

> "If self, monks, and what belongs to self are not truly and really found (*anupalabbhamaane)*, is it not, monks, a perfectly foolish doctrine to hold the point of view, 'This the world, this the self; after death I will become permanent, lasting, eternal, not liable to change, I will stand fast like unto the eternal?" (M.I.136)

This is an interpretation of the 'Three Common Characteristics' (*tilakkhaṇa*) which are stated in this formula (the original text can be placed in a footnote):

> "All component things are impermanent.
>
> All component things are suffering.
>
> All *dhammas* are not-self."[1]

If you use an **internet** as source, you just cite the surname of the author(s) and the year in your text: Example: (Clausewitz, 2003).

But in the list of your **References** you have to give the full address of that website and the date when you searched or download the site:

> Example: Clausewitz, Carl (2003) *On War:*
>
> Retrieved from: www.clausewitz.com/CWZHOME/On_War/ONWARTOC
>
> Html. on 01.01.2003

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1 *Dhammapada*, Ch. XX, 277-78-79.

"Sabbe sańkhārā aniccā.
Sabbe sańkhārā dukkhā.
Sabbe dhammā anattā."

References

1) All sources used in the work must appear in the Reference list.

2) The sources have to be listed in the **alphabetical order of the surnames of the authors**. (Thai authors should be arranged according to their first names.)

3) For every source the following data are necessary:

Surname, First Name(s) of the author. (Year of Publication). *Title of the Book or Article*. Place of Publication: Publisher. Example:

Callenbach, Ernest. (1975). *Ecotopia*. New York: Routledge.

If you quote an article in a collection of articles edited by an editor (anthology) follow the following example; don't forget to add the page numbers to indicate where the article can be found in that book.

An example of one editor:

Desmond, William. (1994). Philosophies of Religion: Marcel, Jaspers, Levinas. In Richard Kearney. (Ed.). *Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy*. London: Routledge. pp.131-174.

Example of two editors:

Putnam, Hilary. (2002). Levinas and Judaism. In Simon Critchley & Robert Bernasconi. (Eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp.33-62.

An example of a reference from a journal:

Hughes, Cheryl L. (1998). The Primacy of Ethics: Hobbes and Levinas. *Continental Philosophy Review*. Vol. 31, January, pp.79-94.

An example of a reference from a translated book:

Descombes, Vincent. (1980). *Modern French Philosophy*. L. Scott-Fox & J. M. Harding. (Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

An example of a reference from articles in encyclopaedias if the author of that specific article is not mentioned:

Schischkoff, Georgi. (Ed.). (1991). *Handbook of Philosophical Terms*. Stuttgart. Keyword: "*Socrates*".

For references from the internet, you must give the exact address of the website and the date you searched or downloaded from that website:

Clausewitz, Carl (2003) *On War*. Retrieved from:

www.clausewitz.com/CWZHOME/On_War/ONWARTOC Html. on 01.01.2003.

An example of a reference from the Buddhist Original Texts:

Majjhima-Nikaya. V. Trenckner & R. Chalmers. (Eds.). Vol., I, PTS, 1948; I.B. Horner. (Trans.). *The Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. I, PTS, 1975.

Remarks on Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the theft of ideas – it is the most problematic academic offence!

A case of Plagiarism is if:

1) Quotations are not indicated as such: Merely the source is mentioned, but quotation marks were not used in the same passage(s).
2) The utilisation of the idea(s), concept(s), notion(s) of other authors without quoting or even mentioning the author.

How to Avoid Plagiarism:

1) If you use *three or more words in the same order* as the author you use as source, you must quote, using quotation marks.
2) If you use the idea(s), concept(s), of the author you use as source, you must indicate the source.

Consequences of Plagiarism:

1) In a case of plagiarism your work must be rejected.
2) The case will be reported to the Faculty which has to decide on the further procedure.
3) Severe cases of intended plagiarism lead to the dismissal of the student from the University.

If you have a problem with quoting:

1) Carefully read the research guide again.
2) If you still have doubts: ask your lecturer(s) / advisor(s)

Following pages are some possible guidelines for Writing "Chapter Outline, Content Page, and Cover Page" of both philosophy and religious studies programs:

Chapter Outline Structure

Structure of a Thesis / Dissertation for Philosophy

Analytic approach:

Chapter I: Introduction

Chapter II: Main subject-matter of the topic

Chapter III: Arguments *for* or *against* and responses

Chapter IV: Critical Discussions, and Contributions

Chapter V: Conclusion

Alternative approach:

(In many cases structure and method are determined by the specific approach to a certain topic)

Chapter I: Introduction

Chapter II: e.g. Critical Study of the background of the subject-matter of the topic

Chapter III: e.g. Main subject-matter of the topic

Chapter …:

Chapter …:

Chapter …:

Chapter …: Conclusion

Structure of a Thesis / Dissertation for Religious Studies

Chapter I: Introduction

Chapter II: Main subject-matter of the topic

Chapter III: Theories/Approaches of Religion and their criticism

Chapter IV: Critical Application of Theories/Approaches to the subject-matter of the thesis/dissertation

Chapter V: Conclusion

Format

Page setup: DIN A 4, font: Times New Roman, font size: 12.

Line spacing: Double, but use single space for separated block quotations, all margins 3 cm and insert page numbers at the top on the right.

Content Page

-all margins 3 cm-

Contents

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Abstract ii

Acknowledgement iii

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Tables (if any) v

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Abbreviations (if any) vii

CHAPTER I: **Introduction** 1

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(etc.)

CHAPTER II: **(Main subject-matter of the topic**)

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2.2 25

2.2.1 23

(etc.)

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CHAPTER V: **Conclusion and Recommendation for Further Research** 106

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Autobiography 125

Sample Cover Page

TITLE (e.g. HUME ON INDUCTION)
SUBTITLE (if any) (e.g. A CRITICAL STUDY)

Your Name

A THESIS / DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS / DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN PHILOSOPHY / RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION
ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY OF THAILAND
MONTH YEAR