Ensuring Success at Seminary

ORGANIZATION AND OUTLINING

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SUCCESS AT SEMINARY

With the rich opportunities to learn and assimilate the full range of spiritual lessons that the seminary affords, every student should strive to develop the highest level of skill in thinking, writing, and speaking. To this end, this hack will focus on grasping ideas and information and getting organized. The first step is selecting and focusing the topic.
FOCUSING A TOPIC

The textbook practice is the following:
- State the thesis
- Develop an outline
- Write the first draft
- Revise and Edit and Rewrite
- Polish the final draft

FOCUSING THE TOPIC

Strategic elements to consider:
- Definition of the specific Audience
- Definition of the exact Purpose
- Definition of your Stance and Voice as the writer
- Facts, definitions, concepts relevant to the topic (accepted and validated)
- Perspectives by experts, analysis, and critics
FOCUSING THE TOPIC

Once the significant issues of purpose, audience and stance are defined, the next step is to develop a thesis statement. This sentence has the following characteristics:

- An judgement, attitude or opinion concerning the topic which will be developed in the paper
- 8 to 15 words in a declarative voice
- Placement somewhere in the introductory paragraph, usually near the end
- A clear and distinct point of view

NOTE-TAKING

Whether listening to a lecture in class or researching a topic for a writing project/presentation, the practice of note-taking is crucial to academic success. Although many individuals attempt to take notes verbatim, a personal system of analysis and abbreviation will make the effort more efficient in learning and using the information.
NOTE-TAKING TIPS

1. Don't write down everything that you read or hear. Be alert and attentive to the main points. Concentrate on the "meat" of the subject and forget the trimmings.

2. Notes should consist of key words or very short sentences. If a speaker gets sidetracked it is often possible to go back and add further information.

3. Take accurate notes. You should usually use your own words, but try not to change the meaning. If you quote directly from an author, quote correctly.

4. Think a minute about your material before you start making notes. Don't take notes just to be taking notes! Take notes that will be of real value to you when you look over them at a later date.

5. Have a uniform system of punctuation and abbreviation that will make sense to you. Use a skeleton outline and show importance by indenting. Leave lots of white space for later additions.

TIPS (CONTINUED)

6. Omit descriptions and full explanations. Keep your notes short and to the point. Condense your material so you can grasp it rapidly.

7. Don't worry about missing a point.

8. Don't keep notes on oddly shaped pieces of paper. Keep notes in order and in one place.

9. Shortly after making your notes, go back and rework (not redo) your notes by adding extra points and spelling out unclear items. Remember, we forget rapidly. Budget time for this vital step just as you do for the class itself.

10. Review your notes regularly. This is the only way to achieve lasting memory.
The quality and reliability of sources is always an issue, especially sources on the internet. For theological purposes, it is always best to trust the peer evaluated scholarly materials from writers and editors of recognized expertise. Journals, conference papers, databases, and books with extensive bibliographies are especially useful. The following is a useful tool to determine the usefulness and appropriateness of sources:

- Questions (Q)
- Analyses (A)
- Main Ideas (MI)
- Comparisons/Criticisms (C/C)
- Ah Ha (!)
- References (R)
- Look Up (LU)
- Definitions (D)
- Criticisms (Cr)
- Connections (Cn)
NOTE-TAKING, CONT.

Several note-taking methods exist to efficiently and effectively capture information, images, video, and speech during research and lectures.

- Outlining
- Cornell Method

OUTLINING

The simple purpose of an outline is to organize and develop a map for the writing assignment showing the scope and sequence of the content, the focused purpose of the writing, the audience, and the logic. For the purposes of most theological writing, outlines develop the topic with explanation and analysis which leads to a logical conclusion. Headings must be parallel and coordinated throughout.
**COMPONENTS OF AN OUTLINE**

- Introduction: Thesis statement within context paragraph
- Body: Headings, subheadings and details
- Conclusion: Final paragraph with summation statement that ties the analysis/persuasive logic together

**TYPES OF OUTLINES**

- Alphanumeric
- Full sentence
- Decimal

Samples: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/media/pdf/20081113013048_544.pdf
CORNELL METHOD

Divide the paper into three sections.
- Draw a dark horizontal line about 5 or 6 lines from the bottom. Use a heavy magic marker so that it is clear.
- Draw a dark vertical line about 2 inches from the left side of the paper from the top to the horizontal line.

Document
- Write course name, date and topic at the top of each page

Write Notes
- The large box to the right is for writing notes.
- Skip a line between ideas and topics
- Don’t use complete sentences. Use abbreviations, whenever possible. Develop a shorthand of your own, such as using & for the word “and”.

Review and clarify
- Review the notes as soon as possible after class.
- Pull out main ideas, key points, dates, and people, and write them in the left column.

Summarize
- Write a summary of the main ideas in the bottom section.

Study the notes
- Reread the notes in the right column.
- Spend most of your time studying the ideas in the left column and the summary at the bottom. These are the most important ideas and will probably include most of the information that will be tested.

CORNELL NOTES TEMPLATE AND SAMPLE

Template:

NOTE-CARDS FOR RESEARCH

Making Note Cards

1. Write the subtopic heading of the note at the top of each note card.
2. Write only one main point on a note card.
3. Only write information directly related to your Statement of Purpose.
4. Write only essential words; abbreviate when possible.
5. Be accurate: double check direct quotes and statistics.
6. Identify direct quotes with quotation marks and the person's name.
7. Bracket your own words [ ] when you add them into a quote.
8. Use ellipsis points (...) where you leave out non-essential words from a quote.
9. Distinguish between 'fact' and 'opinion'.
10. Include the source's number on the card.
11. Write the page number of the source after the note.
12. Use the word 'over' to indicate information on the back of the card.

SAMPLE RESEARCH NOTE CARD

Like many of the Caribbean countries, the Dominican Republic is ‘known for its magnificent beaches’. Boca Chica beach is 45 minutes from Santo Domingo.

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The following are frequently used strategies to efficiently and effectively develop the essay in a tightly organized fashion.

- Definition – relevant and appropriate
- Comparison/Contrast
- Relationship – cause/effect, time, consequences
- Variation – change, varieties
- Application – uses, implications
- Analysis – relationship among components

### ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES – CONT.

- Chronological
- Spatial
- Persuasive: support structure, discovery structure, Pro-and-Con Structure
- Use of transitions: see Word doc ‘Transitions’
BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dartmouth Institute for Writing and Rhetoric: http://writing-speech.dartmouth.edu/learning


- Purdue Online Writing Lab guide to the Chicago Manual of Style: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/02/


BIBLIOGRAPHY – CONT.

- Organizing as You Write, University of Nevada Las Vegas: https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bwfxwa-l4YntNUkybmFWRzVGLVE

- The Five Features of Effective Writing by Kathleen Cali and Kim Bowen: www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/few/683