Writing Academic Papers

There are different kinds of papers you might be asked to write in seminary. Make sure you understand what the professor is asking the class to do! Your paper needs to be functional— to accomplish a purpose (to defend, describe, explain, etc.) using evidence and your own thoughts.

Examples of Common Types of Papers

1. Interact with a reading assignment
   a. Summarize and show that you understand what you’ve read.
   b. Respond to the reading- either agree or disagree. Back up your opinion!

2. A research question on an issue or a topic (ex: "What does the Bible teach about baptism?")
   a. Raise the issue and state it clearly.
   b. Identify the options.
   c. State your position on the issue.
   d. Give evidence for your position.

3. Exegesis papers- Explore the passage. Possible things to cover:
   a. The grammar of the passage.
   b. What the words mean.
   c. How the passage should be translated.
   d. How it relates to other passages.

4. Inductive vs. Deductive papers:
   a. Inductive- Move from the specific to the general.
   b. Deductive- Move from the general to the specific.

Structure

1. Every paper should have one topic (thesis) that is stated in the first paragraph.
2. Everything else should relate to the main topic of your paper and flow in a logical order.
3. The flow of a paper:
   • The first section introduces the topic/thesis.
   • The middle sections develop the topic.
   • The last section gives a conclusion.
4. Use transition words to connect paragraphs (First, In conclusion, Therefore, etc.)
5. Sub-headings can be helpful to show different sections in a longer paper.
6. "Quality" is more important than "quantity."
## Transitional Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Relationship</th>
<th>Example(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicating a series/chronology</td>
<td>first, second, finally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicating contrasting ideas</td>
<td>however, but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicating equal ideas</td>
<td>in addition, likewise, in the same way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicating degree of uncertainty</td>
<td>perhaps, possibly, maybe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicating certainty</td>
<td>as proven, as shown, clearly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicating result / conclusion</td>
<td>therefore, as a result, to summarize, in conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicating illustration</td>
<td>for example, as shown, as discussed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4 Transitional Devices:

1. Repetition of key words  
   Ex: I got a new car for my birthday. That car, however, is constantly in the repair shop.

2. Use of synonyms  
   Ex: Sherri is on a diet. Likewise, I am trying to eat low calorie foods.

3. Use of pronouns  
   Ex: Alex is an expert at coloring in a coloring book. Unfortunately, he isn't a child. He is 45.

4. Use of transitional words and phrases:  
   Ex: Jess is a fan of Chicago baseball, as shown by the fact that he named his first-born son "Cubbie."
Articles- "A," "An," and "The"

"A" and "An"

- "A" is pronounced (uh) most of the time.
- "A" is used before nouns that begin with consonants (car, bank, man, etc).
- "An" is used before nouns that begin with vowels or vowel sounds (apple, elephant, oven, umbrella, etc.).
- They are indefinite articles - that means they are used before a noun to designate one of many.
  - I want an apple.
  - I went to a new restaurant.
  - Taking a bath is a good way to relax.
  - We just bought a new car.
  - She has a dollar in her wallet. (In this sentence "a" is used in place of "one")
- If there are adjectives before the noun, the article comes first and then the adjectives. (I bought a beautiful, new, yellow dress.)
- If the noun is plural, you don't use an article.
  - I love apples.
  - There are many restaurants in Chicago.
  - Baths are so relaxing.
  - New cars are very expensive
  - I have books in my apartment.
- There are some phrases that don't use articles.
  - Our governor might go to jail.
  - She's at school. She left for college last week.
  - She left home at age 16.
  - We went downtown yesterday.
  - We went on vacation last month. We visited our daughter in California.
  - Where is your brother? He's at work.
"The" – Definite article –

- Used to refer to a specific thing.
  - Please give me a book (any book). Please give me the book (a specific book.)
  - Did you see a movie last night (any movie). I saw the movie you recommended (a specific movie).

- When you mention something for the first time, you use "a" or "an." After that you use "the." (I saw a cat up a tree. The cat was very afraid. The tree was big and he couldn't get down.)

- We use "the" sometimes with names (plural) — The Roys live in Mundelein. The Obamas live in the White House.

- Use "the" with countries that are collectives, but not with individual countries or cities – I live in the United States of America. The Soviet Union broke up in 1991. Tokyo is a huge city. France is a very popular vacation site.

- Use "the" with rivers - The Nile is in Africa.

- Use "the" with large open bodies of water - The Gulf of Mexico had a bad oil spill.

- Don't use an article with smaller closed bodies of water - Lake Michigan has many beaches.

- Use "the" with places that have "of" in the name - the University of Illinois, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the United States of America, etc.

- Use "the" with mountain chains, but not individual mountains - The Alps are in Switzerland. Mt. Fuji is in Japan.

- Most of the time, don't use "the" when referring to a store, school, or hospital by its official name – My children go to Vernon Hills High School. I like to shop at Macys. The sick man went by ambulance to Lake Forest Hospital.

- But you would say, "The sick man went by ambulance to the hospital in Lake Forest." (a definite, specific hospital). Or you could say, "The sick man went by ambulance to a hospital in Chicago." (many hospitals, we don't know which one he went to).
PARAGRAPH FORM

A paragraph is a group of related sentences about a single topic. The topic of a paragraph is one, and only one, idea. The paragraph needs to have enough sentences to give details and explain the topic well. Each paragraph in a paper explains one idea, example, opinion or piece of evidence in the paper.

A paper will have multiple paragraphs:

- The first paragraph introduces the topic of your paper.
- The middle paragraphs develop the topic.
- The last paragraph in a paper gives a conclusion or ending.

Here's a summary of guidelines for writing good paragraphs:

1. Each paragraph should be about a single idea, or aspect, of your paper.
2. Each paragraph should include enough sentences to describe, explain, or give evidence for that idea.
3. All the supporting evidence/examples/opinions should relate to the topic of the paragraph. The paragraph should be unified.
4. The information in a paragraph should be arranged in a logical order.
5. A paragraph should have at least 3 sentences.
6. New topic = new paragraph.
7. All the paragraphs in a paper should relate to the overall topic/thesis of the paper.
8. Transitional words can help you move from one paragraph to another.
Read the following quote from J.I. Packer’s book *Knowing God* (p.133)

Paul refers to the fact that we must all appear before Christi’s judgment-seat as ‘the terror of the Lord’ (2 Corinthians 5:11), and well he might. Jesus the Lord, like His Father, is holy and pure; we are neither. We live under His eye, He knows our secrets, and on judgment day the whole of our past life will be played back, as it were, before Him, and brought under review. If we know ourselves at all, we know we are not fit to face Him. What then are we to do? The New Testament answer is: *call on the coming Judge to be your present Saviour.* As Judge, He is the law, but as Saviour He is the gospel. Run from Him now, and you will meet Him as Judge then – without hope. Seek Him now, and you will find Him (for ‘he that seeketh findeth’), and you will then discover that you are looking forward to that future meeting with joy, knowing that there is now ‘no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus’ (Romans 8:1).

Your assignment is to pick two attributes of God and discuss them in a paper. You have chosen God as savior and God as judge. The paragraph above is a good source for your paper! You can either quote it or paraphrase it. **In both cases, you have to cite where you got the information!**

1. What is the main point of the paragraph?

2. How will you use it?

3. Finish this sentence with a quote. (Note that if you quote, you have to use the same spelling and punctuation the author uses).

   In his classic book, *Knowing God*, J.I. Packer says, 

   "__________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________

4. Finish this sentence with a paraphrase.

   In his classic book, Knowing God, J.I. Packer says that__________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
Avoiding Sentence Fragments
(Incomplete Sentences)

Writing incomplete sentences is a common error for many writers, especially ESL students.

A sentence is incomplete if...

1. There is no subject in the sentence.

   Example: Did very well on her quiz.
   Correction: Mary did very well on her quiz.

2. There is no verb in the sentence.

   Example: Both Dr. Roy and Dr. Harris.
   Correction: Both Dr. Roy and Dr. Harris are very fine teachers.

3. The sentence has a subject and a verb, but it's a dependent clause. A dependent clause is not a complete thought and it must be attached to an independent clause to make a sentence.

   Example: Before I came to Trinity.
   Correction: Before I came to Trinity, I lived in Texas.

The following words often begin a dependent clause:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When</th>
<th>Whenever</th>
<th>Although</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before</td>
<td>While</td>
<td>Since</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because</td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Unless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Until</td>
<td>If</td>
<td>Even if</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Common Problem Areas in Writing Papers

- Sticking to the topic / thesis of your paper.
- Defining your terms clearly.
- Presenting your thoughts in a logical, organized way.
- Presenting evidence for your positions.
- Citing references / sources correctly.
- Using complete sentences – a common error is using a dependent clause instead of an independent clause. An independent clause is a complete sentence. A dependent clause is not. (Ex: "As a result of my extensive research." You need to finish the sentence. "As a result of my extensive research, I've decided that Trinity is the best place for me to get my degree."

- "Rambling"- writing to fill the page without a clear purpose in mind.
- Sentences are too long and need to be divided – it's easier to make a grammatical error in a long sentence. You can express complex thoughts in short, simple sentences.
- Omitting transitions between paragraphs.
- Making grammatical / punctuation mistakes:
  o Incorrect use or omission of articles- "a," "an," and "the."
  o Incorrect use of pronouns- he, she, it, we, you, they, my, your, our, etc.
  o Subject / verb agreement – "Last week the students enjoy going to the ball game." Should be: "Last week the students enjoyed going to the ball game."
  o Possessives – knowing when to use 's and s'
  o Quotation marks – The period goes inside the quotation mark. (Ex: I don't understand the idiom "down the drain.")
  o Switching verb tenses incorrectly within a paragraph -this is very easy to do!
  o Knowing when to use commas, colons, and semi-colons.