

Guidelines for Writing Text Analysis Papers

Writing text analysis papers in history of Christianity generally serves three purposes. First, it helps students to do critical, historical analysis of Christian literature. Students will learn to sharpen their powers of observation and judgment appropriately to examine primary church-historical documents. Second, writing these papers is intended to encourage students to think and talk about history in class and to incorporate this kind of thinking and talking into their professional, academic, and ministerial professions. Third, they are designed to help students practice writing as a basic scholarly activity.

Text analysis is about answering questions, questions such as who, when, what where, how, and why. As you read the text, think about these things:

What kind of document is it (letter, paper, narrative, sermon)?

Why was it written?

Who is the author? What is known about the author?

What is the author's main point or central thesis?

How is the author's argument developed?

What question(s) is the author trying to ask or answer?

What problem(s) or issue(s) is the author trying to address?

Who is the intended audience?

- What is the historical context and how does this contribute to the way the author sees the issue?
- Why does this problem or issue loom large at this time in history?

Form

"Form...: orderly method of arrangement (as in the presentation of ideas)"

---*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*

1. These papers are short. Focus your argument and limit your analysis. It is often sensible and necessary to limit your paper to only part of the document or one issue in the document.

2. Set the context briefly. Are the authorship, date, and place of writing clearly established? State what one must know about the historical context in which the author worked if one is to understand the text. It may be appropriate to include in this section a short summary of the text or part of the text you are concerned with. (Limit this to no more than ½ to 1 page.)

3. Discuss the main issues relevant to the question(s) you are asking of the text. Focus on what the text actually provides to help answer the question(s) but do not rely on quotes to speak for themselves. That is, in each major paragraph in this section, you should,

- a. provide a statement which answers a part of your question(s),
- b. sufficiently discuss or explain your statement so that the reader does not have to guess at your meaning,
- c. provide, **from the primary text**, evidence supporting your statement in the form of a summary, paraphrase, or quotation, and
- d. show, explicitly, how the evidence, supports your statement. It is not the reader's responsibility to interpret the evidence that you present.

You may introduce relevant information from outside the text (historical/contextual data), but your focus must be to **answer your question(s) about the text from the text** (two or three pages).

4. Having answered your question(s), **react to the text** in any of the following ways: make a critical assessment, raise new questions, offer a counter proposal, analyze the effectiveness of the author's argument (in its historical context and your own context), or explore the author's presuppositions. Provide examples; eschew generalization. One point clearly presented and fully discussed is worth more than a hundred generalizations. Be specific.