

I. GENERAL PURPOSE

Religious studies is a secular, academic field that employs theories and methods for inquiry from a diverse array of academic disciplines, such as anthropology, history, literature, philosophy, sociology, psychology, and geography. Conclusions should be based on sound, rational, evidence-based practices that can be understood by different groups of individuals through empirical inquiry, not faith. Since religious studies is an interdisciplinary field, writers and researchers should be aware of multiple audiences.

II. TYPES OF WRITING

- **Thesis paragraph:** Stating and supporting a thesis precisely and succinctly
- **Critical book review:** Concise, descriptive summaries of content and critical evaluations
- **Comparative essay:** Comparing two or more practices based on one theory or comparing an analysis of the same practice employing different theories
- **Critical exposition of religious texts:** Analysis of texts employing one or more literary-critical methods (e.g., source criticism, form criticism, socio-scientific criticism)
- **Ethnographic study:** Systematic descriptive study of people and their cultures
- **Historical analysis:** Exploratory and descriptive study of the historical settings of a religion and its texts as well as the historical development of a religion
- **Journal entry:** Informal writing that is often used as a way to allow students to think critically about their own ideas and engage with their own biases and prejudices; a good way to keep notes if one is doing ethnographic research or reading primary texts

III. TYPES OF EVIDENCE

Context is extremely important when making arguments and understanding the rituals and practices of belief systems. Culture often reveals the underlying reasons for traditions, belief systems, and religious practices. Scholars in religious studies should be alert to and respectful of customs disparate from their own. Likewise, personal beliefs and biases should be left out of the academic conversation. When regarding research, academic arguments should be based on a fresh assessment of the evidence. **Primary sources** are often sacred or historic texts. When doing ethnographic work, primary sources are observer notes and data collected in the field. When doing ethnography, both **qualitative evidence** and **quantitative evidence** are valued. **Secondary sources** are texts written about sacred texts and religious practices.

IV. WRITING CONVENTIONS

- Religious studies is an academic field in which discourse is written for secular audiences. Writers should not attempt to engage in scholarship that seeks to prove or disprove supernatural phenomena, such as the existence of a god or gods.
- Students and scholars are likely to have religious biases but should be alert to them.
- Assessment should focus on rational arguments.

V. COMMON TERMS AND CONCEPTS

There are entire dictionaries dedicated to religious terminology, and the terms used may be specific to the particular religion or sect being researched and written about. Consult the resources below for more terms, and define terms in the context in which they will be used.

VI. CITATION STYLE

Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS), 17th Edition

SOURCES CONSULTED

Smith, Jonathan Z., William S. Green, and Jorunn J. Buckley. *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995.

Taliaferro, Charles, and Elsa J. Marty. *A Dictionary of Philosophy of Religion*. New York: Continuum, 2010.

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