

Master of Theology

# Master's thesis

*Guide 2019-2020*

Radboud University



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# **1      MASTER'S THESIS WORKSHOP**

## **1.1     Contents, place and function**

The Master's thesis concludes the Master's programme. The preparation and supervision take place in the Master's thesis workshop, which students are obliged to attend. In the first two sessions, students develop a research question for their thesis under the guidance of a lecturer and with feedback from fellow students. For this purpose, they decide on a research method and subject that correspond with their Master's specialisation and they develop this into a preliminary draft. The next step is finding a supervisor with expertise in the chosen subject or the chosen research method. Students complete these steps individually and discuss the outcome in the workshop. The Master's thesis is completed at the end of the second semester.

There is a workshop that is scheduled on days that students have other Master's subjects (see overview below and timetable on the website). The first three sessions are devoted to developing a preliminary draft. After these three sessions, students are guided by their chosen supervisors.

## **1.2     Aim**

By completing the Master's thesis, students demonstrate their academic ability, i.e. their ability to think, write and do research independently, critically, methodically and systematically. In concrete terms, students have to show their insight into a theme and in one or more methods of approaching that theme by means of a well-defined, clear research problem and logically structured arguments.

## **1.3     Period, scheduling and study load**

Workgroup sessions start in the first semester of the second year. Students have to sign up for this on OSIRIS.

MA Theology	Dr Gian Ackermans	FTR-THMA250
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The timetable and material covered in the sessions (depending on agreements with the relevant lecturer/s) could be as follows: three introductory sessions (on questions such as: how do I formulate a good research question, how do I find a supervisor, etc.) and a session at the start of period IV to monitor progress.

*Session 1:*

Brief introduction on requirements and criteria, and questions such as: how do I formulate a good research question, how do I find a supervisor, etc.

*Session 2:*

Discussion of research proposals.

*Session 3:*

Discussion of research proposals and how to find a supervisor.

*Session 4:*

Discussion of progress with the thesis.

<i>Study load in hours (SLH)</i>	<i>Contact hours (CH)</i>	<i>Independent study hours</i>
20 ECTS credits = 560 SLH	4 CH = 8 SLH (4 x 2-hour sessions)	560 - 8 = 552 SLH

## 2 MASTER'S THESIS

The requirements and criteria of the Master's thesis appear in the faculty's Rules and Guidelines.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Theology thesis requirements

#### Requirements

The thesis:

- comprises 30 to 60 A4 typewritten pages, excluding footnotes and bibliography (12,000 to 24,000 words), unless the structure/content justifies a different length.
- has a title (and possibly a subtitle) covering the content of the thesis.
- is written in good, clear, grammatically correct Dutch or English (this applies *mutatis mutandis* to theses written in any other language).
- is the result of independent work (statement have to include after the title page, see appendix B).
- makes a clear distinction between different styles (arguments, criticism, questions, paraphrases, quotations, etc.)
- follows the conventional structure of an academic paper (e.g. title, introduction, research problem, research aim, research question, description, conclusion, summary).
- is clearly subdivided into sections (e.g. chapters, sections, paragraphs, appendixes, index).
- has a consistent reference style and a separate bibliography compiled according to a conventional system.
- quotes source texts or uses an official translation.
- acknowledges one's own or quoted translations.

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<sup>1</sup> Rules and Guidelines of the Board of Examiners of the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religion Studies as stipulated in the Education and Exam Regulations (Section 1, General section) for the degree programmes of the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies.

- If two or more students write a thesis together, it should include both jointly-written chapters and separate contributions by each student.

### **Criteria**

The thesis:

- is the result of independent research. It should be the creative outcome of sound reflection. For this reason, it should not be confined to a mere reproduction of the writings and opinions of other authors.
- should be an independently written text showing critical insight and independent, wellfounded judgement. It should therefore not be a purely subjective account of personal experience.
- should relate the study of an author, theme or practice to a relevant context (social, historical, religious, literary, etc.).
- should have a research problem and question that are clearly defined and relevant to current developments in the field.
- should contain a logical, objective and reasoned discussion of the research problem and questions (i.e. should form a logical unity from research problem to conclusion). The introduction to the thesis should describe and justify the chosen method and outline and justify the structure of the thesis.
- should discuss the literature relevant to the study. The chosen literature for the thesis must be justified and the literature should be clearly and correctly acknowledged.
- should be written in correct, consistent language, using an objective, readable style.
- should contain functional references, quotations, appendixes, etc. that support the development of the argument.

## **2.2 Supervision**

Supervision starts with the compulsory Master's thesis workshop in the first or second semester. The first three sessions are devoted to developing a preliminary draft. After these three sessions, students are guided by their chosen supervisors. Students are entitled to five sessions with their supervisor. To progress with the actual writing of the Master's thesis, it is important that students start writing preliminary drafts and sections as soon as possible. The supervisor will provide feedback on these parts.

*If the writing of the thesis is delayed (e.g. as a result of personal circumstances), students should contact the student advisor as soon as possible.*

## 2.3 Assessment

In accordance with section 10 of the faculty's Rules and Guidelines, the assessment proceeds in four phases:

1. At least one month before the intended submission date, the [thesis supervisor](#) requests the Board of Examiners to appoint a committee of examiners (CoE) [web form]. The [STIP](#) will create a Turnitin assignment on Brightspace which includes the student's name.
2. The [Board of Examiners](#) appoints the committee of examiners (CoE), consisting of the 1st examiner (also chairperson), the 2nd examiner, and the permanent examiner. Generally, the 1st examiner will be the thesis supervisor. The [STIP](#) informs the student about the CoE.
3. The [student](#) submits the thesis via Brightspace (see step 1).
4. The [thesis supervisor](#) checks the thesis with Turnitin. If plagiarism is suspected, this is reported to the Board of Examiners, and the procedure is suspended.
5. When the thesis supervisor considers that the thesis is ready to be defended, the [supervisor](#) submits the thesis. [web form] The [permanent examiner](#) forwards the thesis to the 2nd examiner.
6. Within 2 weeks after submission, the [permanent](#) and the [2nd](#) examiner inform the 1st examiner about their assessment of the thesis.
7. If the thesis is judged unsatisfactory by one or several of the examiners, the supervisor requests the student to revise the thesis so as to meet the examiners' objections. The procedure then restarts from step 3.
8. If the thesis is judged satisfactory by all examiners, the [1st examiner](#) informs the student, the [student](#) consults with the examiners to determine the date of the defence, and informs the [STIP](#) about the agreed date.
9. The [examiners](#) jointly agree on a bandwidth of 1 point. The mark at the defence must fall within this bandwidth.
10. Each [examiner](#) completes the assessment form and submit their assessments to the [permanent examiner](#), who determines the final mark for the thesis by averaging the individual assessments. If the mark does not fall within the agreed bandwidth, the procedure repeats from step 9.
11. Once the mark has been determined, the defence takes place before the 1st and at least one other examiner (normally the 2nd examiner).
12. The [examiners](#) present at the defence assess the defence and complete the final assessment form.
13. The [1st examiner](#) forwards the final assessment form to the student and the other examiners. The [permanent examiner](#) forwards all the forms to the STIP.

## Appendix A: Master's thesis assessment form

Final assessment of Master's thesis		
Student:	Student number:	
Title of thesis:		
First examiner:		
Second examiner:	Date:	
CRITERION	MARK COMMENTS	
Student has formulated a clear research problem and aim that corresponds with a given field of research or work (academic and social relevance). (10%)	0	
Student has put the research problem in a theoretically relevant perspective and has described the theoretical framework in such a way that it focuses on the research problem in a critical and in-depth manner. (30%)	0	
Student has studied the problem using an academic method. The choice of this method is adequately justified and the application of the method and techniques is clearly described and correctly conducted. (10%)	0	..
Student has critically analysed the problem using theories, models and methods and, based on the research results, has formulated correct, comprehensive and unambiguous conclusions that answer the initially formulated research question. (20%)	0	
Student has reflected critically on the structure, choice of method, results and his/her performance as a researcher. (10%)	0	
Student presents the research in a clear, logical and structured manner in accordance with the agreed length. She/he articulates the results correctly and in an academic manner (language, source references). (10%)	0	
Originality, creativity, language and – if applicable – interdisciplinary approach of the thesis. (10%)	0	..
<b>Assessment Master's thesis (1st/2nd examiner) (80% of final assessment)</b>	0	
<b>DEFENCE</b>		
Student can express him/herself well; presents and responds in a way that is to the point, clear, well-reasoned and critical (also self-critical). (20% of final assessment)	0	
<b>Total</b>	0	
<b>Bonus supervision process (max. + 0.5)</b>	0	
<b>Final assessment exam (completed)</b>	0	

## **Appendix B: Fraud policy**

### **Paragraph 1 Introductory provisions**

#### *Article 1. Purpose of these regulations*

1. To prevent fraud during interim examinations and examinations as referred to in article 7.12b WHW, the executive board of Radboud University (hereinafter: RI-J) adopts the following regulations.
2. For the harmonisation of the provisions in these regulations between faculties, these regulations have been laid down as 'comply-explain' regulations (pas-toe-leg-uit-regeling).

#### *Article 2. Scope of these regulations*

1. Except for the provisions referred to in appendix I, these regulations apply both to the initial RU programmes and for the students who have registered for these programmes.
2. The executive board may decide, in a separate decision, to apply these regulations mutatis mutandis to the other programmes offered by RU.

#### *Article 3. Definitions*

The terms that are used in these regulations — in so far as these terms are also used in the Higher Education and Research Act (Wet op het Hoger onderwijs en Wetenschappelijk onderzoek (hereinafter: WHIP)) — have the same meaning that is given to these terms in the WHW.

### **Paragraph 2 Definition fraud, procedure and sanctions**

#### *Article 4. Definition of fraud*

1. At RU, fraud is understood to mean any act or omission by a student which, in its nature, is intended to have as an effect that proper assessment of the knowledge, understanding and skills of that student, or another student, is made fully or partially impossible.
2. Fraud is in any case understood to mean:
  - a) fraud when taking written interim examinations, including i.having materials available which are not permitted under the House Rules Examinations Rooms RU Regulations (Regeling Huisregels Tentamenruimten RU)\*; ii. copying or exchanging information; iii. passing oneself off as someone else, or being represented by someone else during interim examinations;
  - b) fraud when producing theses and other papers, including i.plagiarism in the sense of using or copying someone else's texts, data or ideas without complete and correct source references, plagiarism in the sense of copying the work of another student and presenting this as one's own work and other specifically academic forms of plagiarism; ii. fabricating (making up) and/or falsifying (distorting) research data; iii.submitting a thesis or another paper that was written by someone else.
  - c) Other fraud in the context of interim examinations or examinations, including i.taking possession of assignments, answer keys and the like, prior to the time the interim examination or examination is to take place; ii.changing answers to assignments in an interim examination or examination after it has been handed in for assessment; iii. providing incorrect information when applying for an

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exemption, extension of validity period. and the like. of an interim examination or an examination.

3. An attempt to commit fraud will also be seen as fraud for the purpose of these regulations.

#### *Article 5. Procedure for suspicion of fraud*

1. When fraud is suspected, the board of examiners or the examiner immediately informs the student of this suspicion. If the suspicion of fraud is established when the interim examination or the examination is administered, the board of examiners or the examiner will allow the student to complete the interim examination or the examination.
2. The board of examiners or the examiner may order the student to make any material related to the suspicion of fraud available to them.
3. The board of examiners or the examiner drafts a report of the suspicion of fraud. If the examiner drafts the report, he will send this report to the board of examiners without delay.
4. For the purposes Of the provisions in paragraphs I and 2 of the present article, examiner is also understood to mean the invigilator or any other RU member of staff.

#### *Article 6. Procedure for investigation and determination of fraud*

1. The board of examiners makes the report referred to in article 5 available to the student without delay and then starts an investigation into the matter. The board of examiners provides the student with the opportunity to respond to the report in writing. The board of examiners hears both the examiner and the student.
2. Within four weeks following the date the report was made available to the student, the board of examiners decides whether fraud was actually committed. The board of examiners informs both the student and the examiner of their decision in writing. The four-week period may be extended by two weeks.
3. If fraud is established, the board of examiners declares the relevant interim examination or examination invalid.
4. If fraud is established, the board of examiners records both the fact that fraud was committed and the sanction imposed in the student's student file.

#### *Article 7. Sanctions*

1. If the board of examiners has established fraud has been committed, the board of examiners may:
  - a) determine that the student may not sit one or more interim examinations or examinations during a period to be set by the board of examiners, which period will be a maximum of one year;
  - b) determine that no distinction will be awarded on the degree certificate;
  - c) make a recommendation to the Dean of the Honours Academy that the student should not be admitted to the honours programme of the university or the faculty or recommend that the student's participation in the honours programme of the university or the faculty should be ended.  
If the board of examiners has established that serious fraud has been committed, the board of examiners may also
  - d) make a recommendation to the executive board that the student's registration for a programme should be terminated with definitive effect.
2. After the board of examiners has established that serious fraud has been committed, the executive board — upon the board of examiners' recommendation — may terminate the student's registration for a programme with definitive effect.

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3. The sanctions as referred to in this article are imposed as from the day following the date the student is notified of the decision that sanctions are imposed.

### **Paragraph 3 Transitional provisions**

[no transitory regulations)

### **Paragraph 4 Final provisions**

#### *Article 8. Decisions and legal protection*

1. Decisions pursuant to these regulations may be sent to the student digitally and/or by email.
2. The student can appeal against any decision made under these regulations, within six weeks following the date on the relevant decision, by lodging a notice of appeal at the Examinations Appeals Board

(College voor Beroep van de Examens (CBE).

#### *Article 9. Adoption and amendment*

1. These regulations have been adopted by the executive board in accordance with the 'comply-explain' principle.
2. In so far as the content of these regulations relates to the duties and powers of the faculty's dean or the duties and powers of the programme's board of examiners, the content must also be confirmed by that dean or that board of examiners. Without any comments by the dean or the board of examiners as referred to in the first paragraph of the present article, confirmation will take place five months after the regulations have been adopted.

#### *Article 15. Effect*

With due observance of the provisions in Article 9, these regulations take effect on 1 September 2018. These regulations will then replace any previous regulations.

#### *Article 16. Publication*

1. The executive board sees to the appropriate publication and possible amendments of these regulations.
2. For the purpose of appropriate and clear provision of information to students and prospect students, the dean and the board of examiners will include these regulations, every year, as an appendix to the Education and Examination Regulations (Onderwijs- en Examenreglement (OER) and as an appendix to the Rules and Guidelines (Regels en Richtlijnen (RR)) of the programme.

The Royal Dutch Academy of Science (KNAW) has published an excellent brochure explicitly aimed at students and young researchers to cultivate their awareness of academic norms: KNAW [ed. J. Heilbron et al.] (2005). *Wetenschappelijk onderzoek: dilemma's en verleidingen*. Second edition.

Free download at [www.knaw.nl/Content/Internet\\_KNAW/publicaties/pdf/20041076.pdf](http://www.knaw.nl/Content/Internet_KNAW/publicaties/pdf/20041076.pdf).

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Students have to include the following statement and sign:

**Statement of independent work**

Hereby I, N.N., declare and assure that I have composed the present thesis with the title (.....), independently, that I did not use any other sources or tools other than indicated and that I marked those parts of the text derived from the literal content or meaning of other Works – digital media included – by making them known as such by indicating their source(s).

Place, Date

**Appendix C: Learning outcomes for the Master of Theology**

After successful completion of the Master's programme, students will have an academic profile with the following attributes:

*1. Acquisition of specific knowledge and insight*

- a) The graduate will have thorough knowledge of and insight into the hermeneutic, systematic, critical and constructive tasks of theology, and the academic methods (literary, historical, systematic and empirical) needed for this.
- b) The graduate will have a thorough understanding of and insight into the historical and contemporary situation of Christianity as regard to its source texts, its philosophical and doctrinal content, and the practices in which it is manifested.
- c) The graduate will have expert knowledge in the chosen field of specialization.
- d) The graduate will have a thorough knowledge of and insight into the many contexts in which the meaning of Christianity has been expressed in the past, and more specifically is expressed in the context of contemporary society.
- e) The graduate will have knowledge of and insight into the professional field of qualified theologians.

*2. Application of specific knowledge and insight*

- a) The graduate is able to apply the above-mentioned knowledge and insight (1a-e) in a differentiated and largely independent manner by adequately describing, analysing and synthesising a new problem situation in a research project.
- b) The graduate is able to apply the above-mentioned knowledge and insight (1a-e) in a differentiated and largely independent manner in one of the following professional contexts: theological research, policy making, spiritual care and education.

*3. Forming a judgement*

The graduate can form an independent judgement of societal, ecclesiastic and/or theological developments based on a reasoned and synthesised synopsis of the knowledge and insight specified in 1a-e by gathering and interpreting relevant information and evaluating it independently according to academically justified internal and external criteria.

*4. Professional skills*

- a) Communication: The graduate is able to report the results of their own research both verbally and in writing and to communicate these results to both theologically and non-theologically trained audiences.
- b) Collaboration: The graduate is able to work together with others towards a (final) product and to make an active contribution to this work. The graduate organises the work in consultation with others and takes responsibility for their part in the collaboration.
- c) Feedback: The graduate is able to evaluate and improve a product, partly based on feedback from others and is able to provide feedback to others that supports them in evaluating and improving their work.

*5. Learning skills*

The graduate possesses the necessary skills to independently reproduce, understand, interpret, analyze, evaluate and develop knowledge about Christianity and its contexts in one of the following professional settings: theological research, policy making, spiritual care and education.

## **Appendix D: Writing a paper/thesis<sup>2</sup>**

Set texts:

De Jong, J. (2011). Handboek academisch schrijven. In stappen naar een essay, paper of scriptie. Bussum: Coutinho.

Writing a paper or thesis within a certain period of time requires good preparation. Those who proceed headlong waste a lot of time chasing up blind alleys. This may be informative, but if you have limited time you should make a good time schedule. The first phase starts with reflecting on the topic and devising a good research problem. The student advisor and mentor can assist you with the initial orientation to the topic and making choices.

### **1. Choosing and exploring a suitable subject**

When choosing a subject for a study that will result in a paper or thesis, you are committing yourself for a period of time, so the choice should be carefully considered. In this section we look at the aspects that should be considered. We will discuss the following:

- interest in and importance of the subject
- type of subjects
- use of texts
- establishing the preparatory work

#### **1.1 Importance of the subject**

A paper in the field of theology or religious studies is important in three respects: in its personal importance, its academic importance and its social importance. If you can choose the subject of your research within the framework of your study programme, *personal interest* is of course the most important. As you progress with your studies, and certainly once you have graduated, other considerations are important.

*Academic importance* means that the research you carry out and record in a paper will increase your knowledge or insight. This means you have to consult the work of others who have already considered the same subject (and perhaps more deeply). But you may contribute something to the existing knowledge.

*Social importance* implies that clarifying or answering the research question could be relevant to public debates or even trigger such debates.

The choice of a subject also calls for time and planning. Pay particular attention to the following:

- Choose a subject that you think will occupy you for some time. If possible, focus on a subject you have already studied and which you are already somewhat familiar with.
- Find out whether good literature on the subject is readily available. Do not spend all your time searching for suitable literature.
- Write down what you would like to write (or say) on the subject. Do not randomly choose a subject but first consider key issues or aspects.
- Make sure the subject is not too complex, broad or ambitious. If it has too many aspects, settle for one of them. If it has several meanings, focus on one of these. If research into the

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<sup>2</sup> The principal source for this study guide is: M. Terpstra (ed.), *Onderzoeken, lezen, schrijven, spreken. Handleiding academische vaardigheden*, Nijmegen, CUN, 2003.

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subject requires a great deal of knowledge, shift your attention to that. If the literature is too extensive, consciously limit the amount you will study.

#### 1.2 Types of subjects and first considerations

Many types of subjects are conceivable in the fields of theology and religious studies. They may include the following:

- a verse, theme or viewpoint in a sacred scripture or by a classical author
- a historical or contemporary religious phenomenon
- a practical problem (in pastoral work, education, interreligious dialogue) - a social, cultural or political issue.

To begin with, your subject will often be unclear. By taking notes and discussing it with others, e.g. a supervisor, you may find pointers that help you narrow it down. You can also undertake certain activities to confirm your choice of a subject:

1. Write brief notes on the reasons for your *interest* in the subject. If you find you have little to say on this point, your interest is probably too vague (or emotionally charged).
  2. Write down briefly what you want to find out about the subject. A subject is linked to *questions*. Write these questions down so you know what you will be looking for. Are you looking for an explanation of the subject, do you want to know more about the history of scholarly thinking on the subject, or are you looking for arguments for or against a particular thesis or idea? In section 2.2 you will find more on the types of research questions you can pose when designing a paper.
  3. Write down some *key words* you think are related to the subject. Write down briefly where you want to begin searching (a certain author, a certain book, etc.). You will need this when you start searching for literature. As for key words, sometimes using the actual subject as a key word will not get you very far, whereas other key words put you on the right track. You can also use supplementary key words to narrow down the material you have found (focusing the subject). Ensure that your list of key words includes the corresponding terms in French and German, since you generally cannot confine yourself to English reference works and literature. Obviously the name of an author or title of a book that interests you will help to direct your search.
  4. Read short, informative texts on the subject (see next section) and keep a list of texts you have consulted. These can be read before, during or after the above-mentioned activities.
- Reading up* is important when you are not yet sure what actually triggers your interest in the subject. Keep in mind that your reading should be aimed at deciding on your subject: you are not yet gathering material for your paper.

#### 1.3 Exploration with the aid of texts

In the preliminary study you need to read selectively. We are assuming that you do not have much time available for this phase and that you want to spend it on perusing the truly relevant texts. At this stage, texts serve purely to help you formulate a clear research problem. You are looking for concise information on:

- different aspects of your subject
- different viewpoints on your subject (including relevant authors and schools of thought)
- different topics that relate to or have common ground with your subject
- other literature on the subject.

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The following are suitable texts:

1. Dictionaries, encyclopaedias, handbooks, introductions. You can also use a keyword to search for short articles (or *lemmata*) on the subject in the Religious Studies and Theology library. This exploration of your subject will provide information on authors, schools of thought, definitions of concepts and the like. A bibliography is usually included.
2. Short, preferably recent journal articles. These not only serve as examples for your own paper, but also provide information on authors, viewpoints, arguments and the like.
3. Texts found via search engines in catalogues, especially in the library.
4. Sources on the internet. Searching the internet can broaden your horizon. Research results are becoming ever more accessible on the internet. Exploring in this way can give you ideas. The quality of online texts does vary enormously though.

#### *1.4 Recording preliminary work and your own approach*

The first thing to do when you start your thesis is to begin compiling a *file*. Keep a good overview of your material and make notes on every step in your research. Every study starts with an initial idea, which you record in a working title. The *working title* indicates the subject or the focus of your research. A working title is always provisional. While preparing or writing your thesis, you may well come up with a better title. For example: "Thomas Aquinas and present-day interreligious dialogue". This working title indicates the author you are dealing with, the idea you particularly wish to focus on in your research, and that you want to relate Aquinas's views to the contemporary dialogue.

As for manner of documentation (notes, file) and the steps that follow, we can offer only general guidelines. Everyone has their own distinctive learning style and approach to research and writing. Some are resourceful in collecting interesting material, but have difficulty describing it succinctly or reaching a coherent point of view, while others enjoy analysing texts in detail, but fail to collect all the relevant material. Some want to work strictly according to prescribed rules or examples, while others write fluently and intuitively, then achieve coherence by deleting copiously. Try to be aware of your own strengths and weaknesses and consult your supervisor if you get stuck.

## **2. Deciding on a research problem, research questions and method**

Exploration of your subject all too soon reaches a point where you are just about drowning in masses of information. That is when you have to decide which route you really want to take. Which aspect of the subject merits most attention? Must your research incorporate every view and idea? Or should you switch to a related topic that really gets to the crux of the matter? Once you have made this choice, you can start working on it. Now you should not just search on one key word that represented your initial interest, but under numerous, specific key words or core ideas. This restricts the amount of information that you will uncover. You can now also decide which method(s) to use, depending on the level of your research questions.

We now turn to the following:

- finding a research problem
- types of research questions
- the method

## **2.1 Research problem and research questions**

The idea that you started out with now has to be focused on a research problem and then elaborated into manageable research questions. A *research problem* is a concise, precise definition of the issue you want to clarify; the question you want to answer. Try to formulate it in just one sentence. This entails more than just asking a question. The research problem must be a suitable starting point that makes it clear which research questions you are going to investigate and how.

An example (based on the aforementioned working title) would be: "What does Thomas Aquinas's view on believers of other faiths imply for present-day interreligious dialogue?" The problem must be solvable in that it is sufficiently defined, but it must also be a real problem. In the course of research you may find that the research problem needs to be further narrowed down, but a carefully considered research problem can usually be sustained to the end. This narrowing down of the subject is not confined only to the preparatory stage. You also need a guideline for how to approach the material you are going to collect. Your actual research will be based on the research problem and one or more specific *research questions*. These questions indicate what exactly you want to find out when reading the texts. Research questions enable you to use the information you uncover *selectively*.

You can base your research questions on your preliminary notes, in which certain *key concepts* come up regularly. These key concepts also feature in the research problem, as in our example: - interreligious relations

- Aquinas's view of these
- present-day interreligious dialogue

For a paper it may suffice to confine yourself to a research problem. In a thesis a few research questions usually helps to provide some points of focus. But every research question included in your paper must be answered, preferably explicitly in the conclusion as well. The list of research questions also provides a preliminary structure for the paper: three or four sections (Aquinas's notions about other religions, his views about contact and dialogue with their adherents, similarities and differences between the dialogue at that time and today, the relevance of Aquinas's view to the contemporary dialogue).

## **2.2 Kinds of research questions and aim**

The number of possible questions is infinite. Every question raises new ones. The trick is to use the research problem to formulate exactly those manageable and concrete questions whose answers will successively constitute the substance of your thesis.

To formulate manageable research questions it is helpful to scrutinise different kinds of research questions posed in theology and religious studies.

- questions about *clarifying a concept*, theme or viewpoint of a great classical or modern author, especially when based on appropriate argumentation
- *discussion or testing of a theory*
- questions about the *analysis* of a historical or current religious *phenomenon*
- developing a *solution to a practical situation* in, for example, pastoral work, religious education or interreligious interaction
- *determining a position in the debate* on some social, cultural or political issue.

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Every kind of research question entails not only a distinctive type of inquiry, but also a distinctive approach or method, as will be seen below. In addition, problems can be tackled either broadly or in depth, i.e. at different levels. A text or issue on which little is known or has been published first has to be explored, whereas one that has been dealt with in scores of books can be treated in greater depth or more detail. You can identify different levels of treatment (of texts, viewpoints, phenomena):

- exploration
- classification
- description
- analysis
- interpretation
- explanation
- comparison
- discussion
- synthesis or reconstruction
- theory building
- recommendation

When determining the level at which you will deal with your research questions, you consider the *aim* and thereby the epistemological level of your research. Although these need not be mentioned explicitly in the actual paper, it is good to formulate them with a view to choosing the method and your further approach.

### **2.3 Methods**

The type of research problem, the kinds of research questions and the aim together determine the method. An example: a detailed linguistic analysis (e.g. "What is the meaning of chokma in Proverbs 1:2?") requires a different methodological approach than the construction of a new curriculum for interreligious dialogue in senior secondary school. The types of questions and successive steps in the treatment are completely different.

The degree programmes in Nijmegen devote special attention to methods. We distinguish broadly between four methods:

- literary methods (philology, text criticism, historical localisation, textual exegesis, etc.) -
- historical methods (archival or source research, oral history, selection of material, interpretation, etc.)
- systematic methods (concept analysis, hermeneutics, etc.)
- empirical methods (surveys, sampling, interviews, fieldwork, statistics, etc.)

In the Master's programme you decide, together with a lecturer competent on the subject, the global or specific method(s) you will use based on your thesis plan. The method must be clearly explained and justified in the thesis, usually in a separate chapter or section. To efficiently approach your own research, you must from the outset (1) identify the type of research question, (2) define the aim, and (3) decide on the right method and steps to follow. In the course of this planning you may find that a particular approach is not feasible because you have not mastered the required method: for a literary method you should preferably be proficient in the language of the source texts; historical methods mean that you have to decipher archival or source material; for surveys you must have a grasp of statistics and the relevant programs. If you are unable to use these methods, the research problem and questions have to be adjusted.

### **3. Working hypothesis**

Compiling and testing a *working hypothesis* may be a useful way to structure your research. In the working hypothesis you formulate the anticipated outcome of the research before conducting the investigation. The hypothesis is therefore a supposition based on prior knowledge. When doing the research you look for indications that either confirm or refute your supposition. A working hypothesis turns out to be either right or wrong. It is usually correct to some extent, but you find yourself with a pile of data that compels you to amend your original picture of the situation.

Using a working hypothesis is a great help when it comes to structuring the research and presenting the findings. After all, it defines the structure of the thesis. It also gives you a specific focus when studying the literature. You select the relevant parts of texts according to three criteria:

- What do I need in order to explain the subject to the reader or listener? - What do I need to test the working hypothesis?
- Where do I find variations that may have an effect on the hypothesis, whether this be confirming, refuting or modifying?

Such a selective approach is advantageous if you have to complete your research before a deadline. Using the structure 'working hypothesis - research - result' can also shape your thesis. You can also include this structure in your action plan. In the introduction you explain what you initially thought and why. Then you report on your research: what have you found? Finally, in the conclusion, you indicate to what extent the findings correspond with or deviate from the working hypothesis. In this way, you summarise what you have learnt from the research. One risk of such an approach is that you may not be 'honest' in using the material. For example, you might include only data that confirm your working hypothesis and disregard everything that refutes it. So you must take pains to mention and consider all significant views or results.

Do not hesitate to show your provisional working hypothesis to a fellow student. It may lead to stimulating academic discussion and useful suggestions. But in particular, by 'thinking aloud' you often get more clarity because you formulate the issue in your own words. Once you have decided on the research problem, research questions and method, you should get your supervisor to briefly check this.

### **4. 4 Gathering literature and drawing up an action plan**

When you have completed all the foregoing steps you can start on a new phase: gathering literature and drawing up an action plan. In this phase you make the first step towards addressing your research questions.

**4.1 Addressing the research problem and research questions: gathering literature** The research problem is addressed with the aid of the key words used to locate literature on the search systems. Do not start studying these texts right away. In this phase of your preparation, you use texts available in the library just to orient yourself. You consult the available texts with a view to their future usefulness and especially to find out about the most useful sources. You write these down. You may also find references to other articles on the same subject.

Equally useful are summaries of articles found in the search files of the library catalogue. Other helpful sources to consult in this phase are encyclopaedias, bibliographies and handbooks.

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Please note: If you have difficulty finding relevant texts in this phase of your preparation, you are probably using the wrong key words. Otherwise you may have to consider a related topic on which sufficient related literature is available. To sum up, addressing the research problem involves:

1. Compiling a list of key words based on the research questions.
2. Using the key words to search in different search systems (catalogues, encyclopaedias, handbooks, etc.).
3. Consulting particular texts for more information on useful material.
4. Making a provisional selection of texts to be read for the paper.

*Search systems* for gathering literature are available at various levels. We will not go into detail on that here, since they are covered elsewhere in the study programme. Briefly, there are search systems for literature in encyclopaedias and handbooks, also for different subject areas in bibliographic journals, and finally there are general and subject-specific electronic files in the library. The latter can be accessed on the library website under ‘disciplines’ – in our case mainly theology and the social sciences. The library also has its own key word system, as well as access to other libraries all over the world. If you do not get anywhere with this, the staff at the library information desk can help you further. A general electronic search engine for the sciences is scholar.google.com

### **4.2 Evaluating literature**

To evaluate literature, do not read the texts you have found themselves, but try to get an overall idea of their contents and to what extent they will help you to answer your research questions by checking the indicators mentioned below. Pay particular attention to the status and quality of texts. The summary at the end, the introduction, headings and the bibliography often give you a fair impression of the scope and level of a text, or of the author’s view.

For the evaluation of the strong and weak points of independent publications (handbooks and monographies), you should search for reviews in authoritative journals. These journals have indexes for each year, but sometimes also cumulative ones (over multiple years). A useful aid is the *Internationale Bibliographie der Rezensionen*, which contains nearly a million reviews covering numerous academic fields and dating back to 1985. It is available online at <http://gso.gbv.de/>.

When gathering literature it is useful to distinguish between *primary* and *secondary texts*. In the case of literary and systematic methods, the research problem often focuses on a short text that will be analysed in minute detail. For that purpose your primary literature has to be a *critical edition*, for instance, of a sacred scripture or a classical author, preferably in the original language. In that case, commentaries in books or articles serve as secondary literature. When adopting a systematic approach to a research problem, the key is to find one or more authoritative texts (e.g. a monograph on the topic concerned). Texts that do not deal directly with the topic or that contain divergent opinions may provide secondary material.

Once you have decided on a field and method to solve your research problem, authoritative *journals* in that field are obvious sources. There you will find the most up-to-date information.

#### **4.3 Selecting literature**

The texts have not been read thoroughly yet. You cannot keep searching for too long. It is difficult to say exactly when you should stop the search and make a selection. But you must have sufficient material to address your research problem and research questions.

Once you decide to finish gathering literature, the selection will not take long. On the basis of the research problem, research questions and method you determine which are principal or primary texts (to be studied first and in depth) and which are secondary. You will probably also have collected texts that will not be included in your selection; these you keep in reserve and may not use at all. Try to decide immediately, going by your first impression of the contents, in what sequence you will study the texts.

If in doubt about the right moment to make the selection or about the wisdom of your selection, it is best to consult your supervisor. It is not helpful to keep searching too long.

Make photocopies of texts that you feel sure you will need, for instance, an article in a religious studies encyclopaedia. Carefully note the title of the encyclopaedia, the volume number and year of publication (of both the entire encyclopaedia and that volume) on the photocopy. Do keep in mind though that photocopying is not the same as studying and that in-depth study is not the same as highlighting key phrases with a highlighter in a first reading. Try not to mark anything during your first reading, since you will not yet know what is truly relevant in the overall context of the article.

Finally you must allow for the possibility that in digesting the literature or writing the thesis other vital questions may arise that require you to study some additional literature, or that you may discover an excellent text which you will include (instead of one you selected earlier). But the main points have been established.

#### **4.4 Compiling a plan**

When deciding on the sequence in which to study the literature, you are to some degree already drawing up a plan. It is best to compile a plan for the entire thesis at this point because if everything has gone to plan, you have now gathered all your material. The plan must include the following sections:

1. *Research problem and research questions*, i.e. the exact questions you wish to answer. You should always keep these questions in mind as you proceed.
2. *List of key words* indicating what you should look out for when reading the selected texts.
3. *Texts*. The list of material you will be working on or texts you will study. Also clearly indicate the sequence and status of these. Which texts will you read first, which will be read later? Which texts will be read in full, which only in part?
4. *Method and approach* Try to clarify how you will study the texts and what you want to retain from your reading. Will you quickly skim the whole text first and then reread important parts carefully? Will you make a summary, draw up a schematic structure or keep notes on each text you read?
5. *Table of contents* Compile a provisional table of contents for your paper. This way you know in which part of the thesis the material can be used as you go along. The key words or concepts that emerged when formulating the research questions have already enabled you to make a provisional structure.
6. *Schedule* Draw up a schedule including the various steps and finalisation of your research and make an estimate of how much time each step will take. Make a complete overview of this. Here are some indications: of the total time available, one quarter is devoted to

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preparation (first two phases), half is needed to work through the material or texts, and the last quarter will be used to actually write the paper. Set aside an hour for in-depth study of 3-5 pages of primary literature, an hour for reading 8-10 pages of secondary literature, and three hours per page for writing and revising your text. Include some extra time at the end as a reserve.

Once you have compiled the action plan, it is time to discuss things with your supervisor. You can now provide a fair outline of the anticipated structure of the thesis and the time you foresee spending on the steps that follow. The supervisor can check the work you have done and make suggestions, where necessary. The thesis regulations allow for possible allocation of credits for the completed phases of the thesis at this stage.

#### **4.5 Conducting the research and dealing with the literature**

We cannot go into detail on the next phase, the actual execution of the research. Generally it entails studying and dealing with the selected literature. You should have gained sufficient experience of this in the course of your studies not to require special guidelines on different methods of reading and documenting. We confine ourselves to three comments.

With a view to references or quotations in the thesis, it is helpful to keep careful notes of pertinent statements or succinct formulations in the literature, maybe even to reserve a place for these already.

Some theses require exploratory research such as a sample survey, a questionnaire or interviews. Such methods call for careful agreement on methods. The most important general consideration is the feasibility of doing this kind of research in a short time, for you often need more time for a comparative literature study as well. In this case, regular contact with your supervisor is usually helpful.

Use your schedule (see previous subsection) to encourage you as you proceed. If you notice you are running out of time, it is best to discuss this with your supervisor.

## **5. Writing**

Regarding the writing process, we confine ourselves to general guidelines. Students may approach the task of writing in many different ways, just as they differ in their approach to documentation. Some type away rapidly, sometimes double the length of text required, and then based on their action plan, delete half of it. Others work according to a detailed overview or scheme, constructing a section sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, and arriving at a good result the first time round. Maintain regular contact with your supervisor. Submit major parts of completed text (e.g. each chapter) for correction. The general guidelines relate to the following main aspects of a paper or thesis:

- overview of fixed parts
- introduction
- main body of text
- conclusion
- editing, source references, bibliography and final revision

## **5.1 Parts of a paper or thesis**

### *5.1.1 Standard and special parts*

A paper or thesis comprises at least six components: title page, table of contents, introduction, body, conclusion and bibliography.

A thesis also requires a summary.

- *Title page*: here you give the title of the paper, your name (and student number if it is to be submitted to a lecturer for assessment), your degree programme and the date.
- *Table of contents*: here you list all the parts of your paper (including sections).
- *Introduction*: here you indicate what the paper is about.
- *Main body*: this is the actual report of your research.
- *Conclusion*: here you indicate the outcome or possible outcomes of your research, maybe with an evaluation of the study.
- *Bibliography*: here you list the texts used in your research.
- *Summary*: this is a formal requirement for a thesis and should preferably be no longer than one page.

It is fairly customary, but not mandatory, for a thesis to include a *foreword*. This is where you can insert personal comments such as the reason for or context of the thesis, acknowledgements or a dedication. Write the foreword at the end once everything has been done. It appears between the table of contents and the introduction.

Finally you may include evidence (short source texts, reports, calculations, illustrations) in an *appendix*. This material is too specialised or bulky to form part of the actual text, but it makes sense for the reader to have it readily available. If there are several appendixes, they are numbered and listed sequentially in the table of contents.

### *5.1.2 Benefit of a provisional table of contents*

Your thesis plan already provides a first outline of the contents of your paper or thesis. Before you actually begin writing, you need to adapt the original draft to the material you have gathered in the meantime. At this stage, you should have excerpts, notes and outlines that you need to incorporate in your paper. You must ask yourself the following two questions:

1. Does the original introduction to the paper still apply? If not, what changes are needed?
2. Which material belongs in which part?

Regarding the second question, it is advisable to classify the material yourself according to the new or adjusted structure of the paper. If all the material is on paper, you could start cutting and then arranging the cut-out pieces. (Remember to make copies first so that you still have access to your original notes!) You can also use index cards – a somewhat dated though useful approach – but these have to be used from the outset.

If you are working on a computer, it is very easy. (But always store earlier versions under a different name in a separate folder.) Of course you should regularly make back-ups of your work. If your entire thesis plus all your notes are lost because your computer crashes, the damage is all but irreparable.

The definite table of contents should give the titles of chapters, sections and other important parts (bibliography, summary, appendixes) including page on which they start.

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#### *5.1.3 Compiling a first draft*

On the basis of the adapted table of contents, you now proceed with a first draft of the actual paper. You divide the material in such a way that you know what belongs in which part of the paper.

The first division here is the familiar trichotomy: introduction, body and conclusion. The second division determines where to put what in the three main parts. Below we outline the things you need to pay attention to. Based on this allocation of material to the various parts of the paper, you compile a brief overview (possibly in telegram style) of the entire paper. Read through it carefully and decide whether the structure is coherent.

You then start writing your paper step by step based on this brief overview. You use your excerpts and notes as the basis for writing your text. You do not have to work from the beginning to the end. You can begin with the body of the text, starting with passages that you are most sure of or can write easily. Always indicate what should precede and follow each passage. Any passage that does not ‘work’ the first time round can be left for later.

## **5.2 Introduction**

The introduction should tell the reader concisely what the text is about. It can also contain additional, background information that is needed to understand what follows. Roughly speaking, an introduction contains:

1. An intro: the opening text.
2. The research problem and research questions.
3. The aim: the level and possibly the purpose of the discussion.
4. The sources used.
5. The method(s) used.
6. Overview of the structure of what follows (body and conclusion).

To begin with a rough draft of the introduction will suffice. Its exact contents will only be clear to you once the text is virtually completed. Then you can include whatever the reader needs to know in advance to be able to grasp what you will explain in the body of the text. Of course you can start writing the first draft of the introduction much earlier.

#### *5.2.1 The intro (opening text)*

The opening lines must persuade the reader that the rest of the text warrants reading. Clear, appealing sentences are therefore important. The simplest, most standard opening sentence is the announcement: “This paper is about...”. The opening sentence must make clear what the text is about. To make it more interesting you can start with an anecdote on the subject or your reason for writing the paper. You could also start with the context of the problem to be discussed.

#### *5.2.2 Research problem and research questions*

Sometimes a longer opening text is necessary and the research problem has to wait a while. But do not postpone it for too long. Make a distinction between the research problem and research questions. The problem to be discussed in the text can be explained in one or two sentences. There may be several research questions, depending on the research problem. You can differentiate the questions as much as you like. The only rule is: ask only questions that will be answered in the text. Any other questions are left for the conclusion, as they are still unanswered and may be dealt with in a subsequent paper.

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#### *5.2.3 Aim*

This is when you have to explain your reasons for writing on a particular subject. Why is the problem of interest? And why is it important to find answers to the question(s)? ‘Important’ sounds weightier than it really is. The point is to fit the research problem into a network of other possible research problems so the reader has some idea of what the subject relates to. You can highlight four points:

1. Your personal interest.
2. The prior history of your subject (*status quaestionis*).
3. Its possible interest for the reader.
4. The aim or integration in a broader framework.

It is often illuminating to mention the most important current viewpoints with respect to your research problem (2, the *status quaestionis*). In so doing you also introduce the authors that the reader will encounter in the body of your text. You can also identify current problems, lacunae or current debates in the field.

#### *5.2.4 Sources used*

If certain texts feature prominently in your paper, mention them in the introduction. This gives the reader something to go by. Naturally you are not supposed to summarise your entire bibliography here – that appears at the end of the paper. The introduction should mainly serve as an overall account. It therefore outlines only the most important sources for your paper, the research problem or your interest in the subject.

#### *5.2.5 Method(s) used*

You should briefly outline the method(s) used in the thesis. Your research questions and the literature will have told the reader where you are heading, but you could adopt different approaches for different aspects. A conventional method only has to be mentioned, as you can assume that the reader is versed in the discipline. If you are using an unconventional or completely new method, you need to explain it in more detail.

#### *5.2.6 Overview of the structure of the text*

The introduction should conclude with a few sentences telling the reader what the paper will deal with and in what sequence. This not only gives the reader more insight into the structure of the text than they can find by scanning the subtitles, but it can also announce the successive arguments that will eventually lead to the conclusion.

## **5.3 Body of the text**

The part between the introduction and the conclusion contains your actual treatise: the answer to your research problem or questions. We refer to this as the ‘body’, but it is also referred to as the ‘corpus’. Here you record everything your reader needs to know to grasp and accept your conclusion. Following this principle too strictly may result in a rather dry text. On the other hand, if your explanations are too wordy, the readers might give up because they lose track too easily. There is no harm in informing your reader of transitions or connections, and of elaborations or digressions. It also shows that you have mastered the material and can distinguish between main and side issues.

The structure of the body depends greatly on the subject you are dealing with and the manner in which you do so. There are hardly any general rules for this. We have seen that the way the material is dealt with can range from minute textual analysis to an overview on sociological

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research, from abstract contemplations to practical proposals. Two accepted models for such a structure are:

- the *hourglass model*, which starts with a general problem, moves towards a specific case (analysis, test) and subsequently answers the general problem;
- the *orange model*, in which you discuss several views of one main issue and then draw conclusions based on a final discussion.

#### *5.3.1 Division of the body*

The body is the longest part of your paper, so it needs to be divided into sections and possibly subsections. The sections may have headings, all of which are listed in the table of contents at the start of the paper or thesis.

The division into sections or subsections is meant to give the reader a guideline to the structure of your argument. You can highlight every important step in the argument by assigning it a separate, identifiable place in the text. Ensure that the main steps are clearly distinguished as such (sections) and that the transitional steps are equally recognisable (subsections). Give sections and subsections clear titles. You should be able to follow the main line of the argument by reading the successive titles.

In numbering chapters, sections and subsections you could use either a decimal system (as in this study guide), or an alpha-numeric system, for instance Roman numerals for chapters, Arabic numerals for sections, and lower case alphabetic characters (a, b, c, etc.) for subsections.

#### *5.3.2 Target readers, style and opinions*

In deciding on a writing style and the complexity of argumentation and reasoning it is helpful to have some idea of the target readers.

A paper or thesis is not aimed only at the lecturer or members of the Board of Examiners with their specialised knowledge of the field. Your paper may also target interested readers who are fairly well versed in the subject, such as fellow students. In that case you can assume some basic knowledge of the subject.

The paper must be at an academic level, but many styles are possible. Trying to write at a high academic level induces some students to use convoluted language. This is not the point. Writing at an academic level is more about being lucid, well organised and precise. Subjective interjections (exclamations, expressions of antipathy) are inappropriate. If you have an explicit viewpoint or opinion that is pertinent to the argument, make sure you substantiate it well. Furthermore, try to avoid using too many abbreviations. When reading academic texts (e.g. papers by fellow students), pay attention not only to content but also to composition and style. Also try to judge the style of publications in other languages. A personal style is a precious asset.

An objective style is generally preferable for papers and theses. If in doubt about stylistic issues, you can refer to *Manual of Style and Usage. The Official Style Guide* (New York 1999).

#### *5.3.3 Guidelines for the reader*

The structure of the main body should not only be evident in the division into sections and subsections and the accompanying headings and subheadings. You should make the argument flow using various sentence structures that help the reader follow your train of thought. In a manner of speaking these serve as signposts (or, to use a modern analogy, a navigation system). In studying the literature you have already seen examples of devices that authors use to help

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readers follow their reasoning. Various markers in the texts you studied enabled you, as the reader, to grasp the structure of the text and the author's train of thought. Now you are the author and you have to provide your readers with similar tools. We confine ourselves to general guidelines here.

The sentence structures we are referring to inform the readers of which stage of the argumentation they have reached. They could be general indications of the structure, place specifications ("you have now reached such and such a point") or references to preceding or subsequent text.

1. General indications of the structure of the argument are explicit statements about the *sequence* in which the building blocks of your argument will be presented. For example: "Schillebeeckx uses the term 'evil' in three different senses. I will deal with each meaning separately, while considering the different texts in which they feature. Then I will examine the relationship between these meanings in greater detail." Such a comment tells the reader what to expect. You can expand it by briefly listing the three meanings. That should form part of the introduction to the body of the text (see above).
2. If you give such general indications, you must come back to them later. For example: "We now look more closely at the second meaning of the term 'evil'. This meaning features mainly in *Jesus: an experiment in Christology*. I will start with part I of the book, as that is where it is the clearest." To show *sequence* and *contrast*, common markers are used such as "firstly, ... secondly, ...", "on the one hand, ... on the other hand...", "in contrast...", "but..." and the like.
3. The reader already has a rough idea of what the paper is about from the introduction and therefore knows in which direction the author is moving. But it does no harm to make it more explicit now and again. Especially in the case of a lengthy elaboration or a digression you should tell the reader that it will be relevant later on. For example: "Here it may be interesting to note that..."; "I shall return to the point below, but I first need to comment on...".
4. A *summary* can be used to remind your readers of what they have just read. At the end of a section (e.g. a discussion of certain arguments) it is important to interrupt the text, look back on the section and indicate how you will proceed. For example: "We have noted the three senses in which Schillebeeckx uses the term 'evil'. Firstly, ... Secondly, ... Thirdly, ... Now what is the relationship between the three meanings? Is there a relationship? We will consider these questions in the next section."
5. It provides clarity for both you and the reader to conclude each chapter with a summary or a provisional connection to the research problem.
6. If you mention persons, for instance a specific author, in your text, give their first names or initials the first time it occurs. After that the surname is sufficient.

#### 5.3.4 Conclusion

The conclusion to your paper need not be long. After all, 'everything' has already been said. We work on the principle that the conclusion should not contain any new information. Its purpose is to definitely convince your readers and invite them to read a possible follow-up. A good conclusion comprises the following four components:

1. It starts with a brief summary of your argument: "We have seen that the three senses in which Schillebeeckx uses the term 'evil' ultimately boil down to just one meaning. Whereas evil appears to assume different forms at various levels, essentially we are dealing with the same phenomenon. What does that imply for current interpretations of Schillebeeckx?"
2. This part of the paper focuses on the conclusions you have drawn from your research. You will compare this with your working hypothesis. What was the outcome of the research?

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Was the working hypothesis confirmed, refuted or somewhere in between? Have the research problem and research questions posed in the introduction been answered or clarified? Usually they have been answered to some extent, and this must be explained precisely.

3. You can expand the summary of your thesis into an evaluation from a ‘meta-viewpoint’. Such a viewpoint should indeed already have featured in the body of the text. It amounts to a commentary on your own argumentation, such as remarks about your agreement or disagreement with certain views, interpretations or facts. Particularly when you are not sure about something you have written, it is better to be forthright about this. This doubt is brought up again as a modification in your conclusion.
4. Following from the conclusion, you can finalise the paper with a general evaluation of your research and the writing process. What have you learnt? What should the reader learn from your text? What new questions have arisen? A pithy statement, for example ‘the moral of the story’, could be a good way to finish.

#### *5.3.5 Finishing touches*

##### **5.3.5.1 Editing and formatting the text**

It is not enough to write a well structured paper. The sentences must also be correct and in the right order. The reader should be able to concentrate on the substance of your argument and not be distracted by mistakes in spelling or grammar, an irritating page layout, misleading subheadings and the like. It is not just what you write or say, but how you write or say it. Finally and most importantly, an academic paper should show the integrity of your research. That requires thorough revision and proper source referencing. What are the important points?

1. Your paper should start with a title page that includes the title, your name, the date and other relevant details (e.g. student number, degree programme and the subject, the name of the supervisor).
2. Ensure that the table of contents follows the title page at the beginning of the text and corresponds with the actual headings and page numbers in the text.
3. Write your text in meticulous English (or another language after receiving permission). Language and spelling errors are avoidable. Also pay attention to punctuation (commas, full stops, etc.).
4. Use paragraphs, sections, chapters, headings and the like to make the structure of the text visible to the reader.
5. Use gender-neutral language. A simpler method than constantly repeating she/he or s/he is to use the plural form.
6. Number the pages and use a pleasant layout (margins not too narrow, possibly 1.5 line spacing).
7. Use the same font throughout. Vary font size only when it is functional in the text.
8. Clearly indicate when you are quoting (quotation marks) and where the quotation can be found. When you paraphrase or sum up a text the reference should also be given in a footnote.
9. It should always be clear who is speaking: you or the author of some other text. An example: “Kant claims that: ‘...’ (KRV, 237). This can be understood as follows: ‘...?’” 10. Use a consistent style for titles and abbreviations.
11. The paper or thesis should end with a bibliography.
12. In a thesis, the bibliography should be followed by a summary and possibly by appendixes. Word processing programs can be very helpful in formatting and editing your text. They provide fixed formats for sections and subsections, footnotes or endnotes and a spell and

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grammar check. If you are not familiar with all the necessary functions of these programs, ask experienced fellow students or consult the computer's help program.

#### 5.3.5.2 Source references and bibliography

To begin with we must answer a two-tiered question: firstly, when should you give a source reference, and secondly, how should you do it? Sometimes it is difficult to decide which information should or should not be acknowledged. Knowledge that your fellow scholars (lecturers, also fellow students) clearly possess need not be acknowledged.

You do have to refer to a source when your own text in some way depends on another author. Not acknowledging that source (in extreme cases) counts as *plagiarism*, a form of theft. The aim of a reference is not merely to indicate that you have drawn from a text, but also to enable readers to consult the source themselves. The academic requirement to acknowledge sources also applies to information deriving from the internet. Plagiarism of websites is easily detected. Which rules should generally be observed?

- *When you quote a text verbatim.* The citation appears in double quotation marks ("..."). When you omit part of the text, then resume the quotation, insert three dots between the two passages (e.g.: "So ist es z.B. klar, dass der gegenständliche Hintergrund ... wirklich erlebnissmäßig ein gegenständlicher Hintergrund ist."). Then you give the reference in a footnote, together with the page number(s) where the text appears.
- *When you summarise a passage (or present a piece of text in your own words: paraphrase).* Although this is not a verbatim quotation, you cannot pretend that the passage reflects your own thinking. The reader should be able to check the original version. A reference to the source and the pages where the summarised or paraphrased text appears will suffice. If you summarise a lengthy passage, you should give several references (depending on the steps you take and the length of the passage).
- *When you use a concept, distinction, classification or something else from another author.*

The following three types of references are acceptable:

1. *Footnotes* A number in the text itself refers to a note at the bottom of the page. The footnote gives the source and the relevant page. See section 4.5.3 for the format of bibliographic data. In the case of a paraphrase you may want to include the original text in the footnote. The same applies to translations of quotations in the text: if the translation is your own, it is often advisable to include the original in a footnote.
2. *Endnotes* A number in the text refers to a note that appears at the end of the entire text (or the chapter). The further procedure is the same as for footnotes.
3. *Text notes* In the text itself the quotation, paraphrase or concept is followed by a note between brackets with the author's name, publication date and page number(s). This note also refers to the bibliography. For example: (Terpstra 2004, 64). In the bibliography it is listed as: Terpstra, M.J. (ed.) (2004), *Onderzoeken, lezen, schrijven, spreken*, Nijmegen (Faculty of Philosophy).

Footnotes and endnotes can also contain text other than source references or quotations. Comments, references to other passages, additions, alternative interpretations, etc. that would disrupt the flow of your text can be included in a note. Many authors use notes to provide readers with information they cannot or do not wish to incorporate into the main text. To some extent this is a matter of taste. Avoid including too much additional information in notes. Sometimes it actually belongs in the main text, or after further consideration it turns out to be redundant.

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The academic world has no standard form of bibliographic referencing in academic texts. There are various systems. Bibliographic references do not always give the same information (some include more, others less). Every academic discipline has a preferred referencing style or styles. Whatever the case may be, use the chosen reference style consistently and properly. We refer you to the *Chicago manual of style: quick guide*. It contains examples of the most common reference styles and bibliographies: [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

#### 5.3.5.3 Final edit and summary

Once the main text and conclusion have been approved you begin working on the final edit. The introduction is finalised. You compile the bibliography, write the summary and, last of all, a foreword. The final edit includes checking the overall structure of your text:

- Are all the essential parts you have announced in your text present and identifiable?
- Are there no gaps in your argument?
- Are there no unnecessary passages?

Sometimes you may find that some further text is required or that you need to delete parts. As a general rule, deleting parts in earlier versions contributes greatly to the coherence and readability of a text. A text is also made more readable through the use of lively and varied language (e.g. by avoiding the passive voice) and the inclusion of examples in suitable places.

In the final edit you must always check language (style, spelling, sentence structure). As a rule you should put the text aside for a day or two. In this way you can take a more fresh and critical look at it. Print out the full text now and again as it is easier to read than on the screen. If possible, get someone else to read the text. You could also ask the person to make corrections and give their opinion about the content. After all, the text is not written only to suit you. You are presenting it to others, your readers.

The *summary* should be a half to one full page in length. It should contain a concise account of the research problem, method and your main findings or conclusions. This entails condensing passages from the main text into just one sentence.

#### 5.3.5.4 Common abbreviations

- *cf.*: confer; compare, see.
  - *idem*:
    - the same work (see loc. cit.) -
    - ed(s)*:
      - editor(s) of a book
- *f.*, *ff.*: following
  - *Hg.* (*hg.*), *Hrg.*: Herausgeber/herausgegeben: see *ed(s)* - *ibid.*
  - (Latin), *ibidem*: referring to a previously cited source.
  - *infra*: below.
  - *l.c.*: loc. cit.
  - *loc. cit.*: (Latin) loco citata.
  - *o.c.*: op. cit.
  - *op. cit.*: *opere citato*.
  - *passim*: in various places; the reference to the text contains no page number, because the material in question appears throughout the text.

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- *pro manuscripto*: the text should be regarded as manuscript, not as a final, published or publishable version.
- *s.*: siehe: see
- *supra*: above
- *s.v.*: (Latin) *sub verbo*, under the word or keyword; especially in references to encyclopaedias and dictionaries the keyword (lemma) is given rather than the page number.
- *t.a.p.*: *ter aangehaalde plaats*: the same place as was mentioned earlier (in a footnote or the text): sometimes exactly the same place, sometimes the same book/article; in that case with a page indication.
- *t.II*: (French) *tôme II*: volume II
- *v. voir/voyez*: see ...
- *vgl.*: compare