

Handouts
Islamic Religion and Culture (R/ST 3311)

How to write the synthesis?

For some of the readings marked on the syllabus, you will write at least five pages. The first four pages and a half will be a restatement of the text's argument in your own words. You should write a summary with references indicating the pages summarized. The purpose of this section is to help you understand as fully as possible the structure and essential ideas of the author's argument. You should summarize the main points of the reading using your own words.

The second section in half a page is to be your own personal reflections to the readings. Analyze it, illustrate it through your own experience, refute it, get mad at it, question it, believe it, doubt it, go beyond it. I am looking for evidence of serious effort and engaged thought.

Read carefully the course outline for other details about the synthesis.

Grading criteria

You will be graded for the structure, the clarity and the quality of arguments, your capacity to summarize essential ideas, and your critical thinking.

Objectives of the synthesis:

- a) to develop familiarity with the thought, outlook, and culture of the Islamic world,
- b) be encouraged to think critically about religion
- c) learn about different viewpoints from diverse groups: Sunnīs, Shī'ites, Jurists, Theologians, Philosophers, and Sūfis.

How to write the proposal?

1. Choose a topic.

See the list of topics in the course outline.

Example: Life of Muhammad

2. Narrow it

Formulate a key question appropriate to this course, that will require a combination of library research and your own analytical skills to answer. The quality of your research paper will depend on the quality of your initial question.

Why is this an interesting question? Why is it problematic? Why is it significant? What do you expect to discover?

Define the problem as clearly as possible.

Example: Was Muhammad a revolutionary?

Start from a definition of revolutionary in a dictionary or an encyclopedia.

3. Write a thesis

The thesis will try to prove that Muhammad was a revolutionary by examining various achievements during his lifetime.

4. Make an outline

- i) Youth of Muhammad
- ii) Prophetic Mission in Mecca
- iii) Prophetic Mission in Medina

5. Find scholarly books or articles on the topic

Here you explain briefly the purpose of your investigation. What problem do you address? Why do you address it? You need to provide enough background to enable the reader to understand the problem being investigated. You should introduce your topic. Sometimes the introduction also includes a 'literature review' summarizing previous research addressing the same or a related problem.

Read carefully the course outline for other details.

Grading criteria

You are graded mainly on the clarity of your proposal and your capacity to find a list of scholarly books or articles about your topic. The objective of the proposal is to develop good research skills.

How to write the term paper?

For this course, I prefer essays with a top-down organizational structure: explicit thesis statement near the beginning; fully developed paragraphs with topic sentences; clearly mapped arguments with transitions. The term paper must have an introduction, a development, and a conclusion.

1. Starting point: perception of a problem

Define or articulate a problem.

Retake mainly ideas developed from the proposal, unless you changed your mind.

2. Exploration

The writer gathers data through library. He analyses, compares and reflects on these data.

3. Incubation

The writer takes time off from the problem and lets ideas cook in the subconscious.

4. Writing the first draft

The writer tries to get ideas down on paper in a preliminary form.

5. Reformulation and revision

Having gone once through the territory, the writer takes another look at the problem and think it through again.

Many writers reports dismantling their first drafts and starting afresh, often discovering their true thesis as the conclusion of their first draft.

6. Editing

Writers worry about unity, coherence, paragraphing, sentence structure, spelling and punctuation. Read carefully the course outline for other details.

Grading criteria

The Professor will give 70% for the structure, the clarity and the quality of arguments and 30% for the mechanical elements of the paper (bibliographical style, diction, grammar, etc.).

The objectives of the research paper are:

- 1) to develop familiarity with the thought, outlook, and culture of the Islamic world,
- 2) to use of the historical and phenomenological approaches to the study of the topic. Students will be encouraged to think critically about religion.
- 3) to be able to approach one aspect of Islamic philosophy, thought, and culture in depth.
- 4) learn about different viewpoints.