

# READING COURSE

## ***COURSE TITLE: READING COURSE***

***COURSE FACILITATOR:*** Reading Course Supervisor (Professor)

## ***COURSE DESCRIPTION***

A three-unit course designed to give the student the opportunity to apply the steps in writing a book/article review from preparing to read and review, to reading the book/article, organizing concepts, writing the review and, finally, wrapping up the final report under the guidance of a supervisor. The course engages the student in reading and writing that call for the higher-level skills of critical thinking such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation. It will conclude with the submission of the Final Report deduced from a comparative study of the issues arising from the books/articles reviewed. The books/articles are reviewed in view of a chosen topic which will hopefully be a future dissertation topic.

Basically, this course is, therefore, a book/article review of the reading materials the choice of which is determined by an agreed, particular topic in view of considering it as a future, dissertation topic.

## ***COURSE OBJECTIVES***

1. To gauge, cultivate and acquire a comprehensive and critical knowledge about a particular topic and the different issues that surround it.
2. To be able to critically read and express one's thoughts systematically based on the principles of critical thinking given a particular viewpoint.
3. To be able to submit a Final Report.

## ***COURSE MECHANICS:***

This involves 5 reading materials (5 books or 3 books and 2 refereed articles). The materials should not be recent (published within the last five years).

### **Mechanics:**

1. *Tutorial:* The student and supervisor agree on the frequency of the mentoring to monitor the progress of the work.
2. There is no limit to the number of pages of the *Final Report* but a minimum of 20 pages is set.
3. **The mentor shall examine the student in at least one of the chosen readings for the course.**
4. The *Final Report* is to be submitted within a semester's time-frame.
5. The *Final Report* must follow the prescribed format.

## ***STEPS FOR FULFILLING THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE:***

1. The student enrolls in Reading Course. It is highly advised that the student should first enroll in it before enrolling in Thesis Writing IA.
2. The Dean meets the class as a group on the scheduled day to explain the course.

3. The Dean gives the students a copy of the Course Syllabus.
4. The student submits to the Dean **the list of reading materials** together with **the tentative title of his/her Dissertation**. The student may submit a list of names of prospective Supervisors (*secure the appropriate Form from the Office of the Ecclesiastical Faculties*).
5. The Dean formally assigns the Supervisor through a letter of appointment with a copy of the Syllabus accompanying the letter. The letter also contains the list of the reading materials to be reviewed. The student is furnished a copy of this letter of appointment.
6. The Dean's Office arranges the first meeting of the student and supervisor.
7. The student submits the list of reading materials to the Supervisor in their first meeting to decide with finality on the list.
8. The student and the supervisor decide on the frequency of their meetings.
9. The student and supervisor set the deadline of submission of the Final Report **and the examination on at least one of the chosen readings**. Once the Final Report is approved by the mentor, the student shall secure the endorsement form from the Ecclesiastical Faculties. Once the endorsement is signed, the student is expected to submit a copy of his Final Report (and the individual reviews for each of the five reading materials) together with the Endorsement Form signed by the Adviser.
10. After receiving the endorsed final report, the Office of the Ecclesiastical Faculties shall issue the grading sheet for the course. The Supervisor provides the student's grade for the reading course and submits it to the Dean's Office. He may also send the accomplished grading sheet through the student as long as it is placed in a sealed envelope.

### *STEPS IN WRITING A BOOK/ARTICLE REVIEW*

#### **I. Preliminary Information:** (*facts to be considered*)

About the author:

- ~ Who is the author?
- ~ To what school does he/she belong?
- ~ What other books/articles has he/she written?

About the book/article:

Book:

- ~ What is the title of the book?
- ~ What type of book is it? (fiction, nonfiction, biography, autobiography, and the like)
- ~ What is the theme of the book?
- ~ What is the background in writing the book?
- ~ Give some publishing information about the book.

Article:

- ~ What is the title of the article?
- ~ In what Book/Journal is it published?
- ~ What is the nature of the Book/Journal?
- ~ What type of an article is it?

## **STEPS (Guiding Principles)**

### **A. PREPARE TO READ AND REVIEW**

*Before you begin to read the book/article, consider the following pointers:*

***Purpose:***

Always bear in mind that the aim of a book/article review is to summarize its content and give a fair evaluation of its merit.

***Audience:***

Since this is an academic, course requirement, the audience is presumed to be one's own peers, i.e., students enrolled in the doctoral program. This will affect the aim of your review which is to present it with the prospect of going deeper into a topic as a possible future dissertation topic.

***Preliminary Sections:***

Question: *What does the title suggest about the main point that the author wants to make?*

Read the preface/foreword for clues to the author's argument, theological biases and methodology.

Study the Table of Contents to get a sense of its structure, i.e., of the author's central arguments and how he presents them towards the resolution of his main thesis/conclusion. *Note: The Chapter arrangement of a book hints at the "steps" the author uses towards the resolution of his main thesis/conclusion.*

***Field or Genre:***

*A knowledge of where this book/article fits into the "big picture" is essential.* The author's intention is to make a significant contribution to a particular field of research. Knowledge of the discipline may give insight as to where the author stands on key debates within the area. For instance, the author intends to present Christology from the perspective of liberation theology. It is understanding Christology based on the principles laid down by liberation theology. Awareness of this fact will help the reviewer discern the author's biases as well as evaluate his contribution.

### **B. READ THE BOOK**

As you read the book/article, do the following tasks:

1. *Read Critically:* Be a vigilant reader, not a casual observer. To do an effective book review one should be aware of the author's agenda (orientation/thrust) and how he/she promotes that agenda. In other words, skim the book/article to find its main thesis/conclusion and get a sense of its structure/agenda.

2. *Determine the author's main thesis/conclusion.* The author usually makes this apparent within the preface/foreword or general introduction of the book/article. The thesis statement is actually the main conclusion of the whole book/article to which all the subsequent clusters of arguments in the book/article tend to resolve.

*Note: In an article, the main thesis/conclusion is usually found in the beginning or end of the article, i.e., in the first or last paragraph. In other words, pay special attention to the opening and closing paragraphs, since the author will often tell you there what he intends to be arguing for. When you do figure out what the author's main thesis/conclusion is, try to restate it in your own words. This will help you to be sure that you really understand what the author is arguing for. Of course, the articles we read would not always have a straightforward structure. They would not always be of the form: "This is the conclusion I want you to accept. Here are my arguments for that conclusion..."*

3. *Analyze the author's argument.* As the book/article evolves, the author will attempt to persuade the reader to accept his main thesis/ conclusion. Your task is to determine whether the author has argued his case in a logical and accurate manner. That is to say, whether his persuasiveness has for its basis consistency of argumentation.

*Note: When you have figured out what the main thesis/conclusion of an article is, and what the overall structure of the article is, go back and read the article carefully. Pay attention to how the various parts fit together. Most importantly, figure out what the author's central argument(s) are. What reasons does he offer in support of his conclusions? Where in the article does he put these reasons forward? Also keep an eye out for the following:*

- a. *Notice where the author says explicitly what he means by a certain term*
- b. *Notice what distinctions the author introduces or argues for or against*
- c. *Take a special notice of any unargued assumptions you think the author is relying on*
- d. *Consider various interpretations of what he says. Are there any important ambiguities that his argument fails to take account of?*

*Read the article a number of times. You definitely would not understand everything in the article the first time you read it, and there may be some parts of the article you do not understand even after reading it several times. You should ask questions like: "What is going on on p. 20. Knox says X, but I don't see how this fits in with his earlier claim Z. Is X supposed to follow from Z? Or is he trying here to give an argument for Z?"*

4. *Weigh the evidence presented.* To support his argument, the author will provide central arguments (premises) from a number of sources, i.e., the Bible, ancient historians, archaeology, *Magisterium* and the like. At this step, consider the foot/endnotes very important. The reviewer must evaluate the central arguments on a number of fronts (accuracy, currency, relation to author's argument and the author's use of) and, not to mention, the presence of illogical reasoning in the form of fallacies.

*Note: Authors often provide auxiliary arguments, arguments for central arguments they appeal to in support of their main thesis/conclusion. For instance, the author's discussion may have the form: "The conclusion I want you to accept is A. My argument for this conclusion is as follows: B and C are true, and if B and C are true, then A must also be true. It is generally accepted that B is true. However, it is controversial whether C is true. I think you ought to accept C for the following reasons..." Here, the author's main argument is for the conclusion A, and in*

*the process of arguing for A, he advances an auxiliary argument in support of C.*

*Try to identify these auxiliary arguments, and the central arguments they are intended to support; and try to avoid mistaking one of these auxiliary arguments for the author's main argument.*

*Articles can be complex in other ways, too. Not everything the author says will be a positive conclusion or a premise in support of his conclusion. Sometimes he will be supporting his view with a thought-experiment. Sometimes, he will be arguing for a distinction which his positive view relies on. Sometimes, he will be arguing that another theologian's views or arguments ought to be rejected. Sometimes, he will be defending a view against somebody else's objections.*

*Keep an eye out for words (and their equivalent) like these when you are reading: "because, since, given this argument" "thus, therefore, hence, it follows that, consequently," "nevertheless, however, but" "in the first case, on the other hand." These signposts will help you keep track of the structure of the discussion. For example, one theology article might run as follows: "Theologian X advanced the following argument against process theology...The process theologians has two responses to X's argument. First...However, this response runs into problems, because...A Better response for the process theologian says...X might be tempted to counter as follows....However..." and so on. The words "first" and "however" and "a better response" are signposts making it easy for you to see where the discussion is going.*

5. *Acknowledge the author's biases.* Every author has his preconceived notions. You need to recognize these presuppositions and note how they influence the overall argument.
6. *Take Effective and Useful Notes:* You should have enough information to write an accurate review. Your notes should reflect the steps of the previous section. Here are a few suggestions to make your note-taking more effective:

*Make a flow chart of the author's argument.*

This can be done in a pictorial or written form.

- a. Begin with the author's main thesis/conclusion.
- b. Indicate how many central arguments do support the main thesis/conclusion. Enumerate them and justify each as arising from the book/article.
- c. Indicate any auxiliary arguments that do support any central argument. This procedure will help you to be cognizant of the author's main thesis/conclusion, and the way that his or her premise(s)/evidence(s) corroborate(s) that thesis/conclusion.
- d. You may make a quick outline of the article's argumentative "pieces." Draw arrows to diagram how you think those pieces fit together.

*Be on the look out for illogical reasoning in the form of fallacies.*

### **C. ORGANIZE YOUR THOUGHTS**

You may feel somewhat overwhelmed by the amount of information that you have about this particular book/article so much so that you may not know where to begin in

writing the review. To make the transition from researching to writing it is essential to organize your thoughts.

*There are two levels of organizing your thoughts:*

1. *Reconstruct* the structure of the book/ article, i.e., the way the author has arrived at the main thesis/conclusion. Take note that the following guide questions may proved to be useful:

- a. *What is the main/thesis/conclusion of the book/article?*
  - *Is the main thesis/conclusion explicitly stated? Were is it stated verbatim?*
  - *If not, what do you think it is? Justify your answer.*
- b. *What are the central arguments (premises) in support of the main thesis/conclusion?*
  - *Are they all explicitly stated? If so, state them.*
  - *If not, provide an inferential assumption as a central argument in support of the main conclusion.*
- c. *Show how each central argument (premise) is further supported by auxiliary arguments.*
  - *Keep an eye out for arguments explicitly supported by sources (Read footnotes)*
  - *Which arguments the authors states are not supported?*
- d. *What are the basic, philosophical/theological assumptions the author mentions explicitly? Are they any which are implied? Which are they?*
- e. *If the central arguments in support of the thesis/conclusion were made the basis for action, what consequences would follow if one central argument is missing? What effect will its absence bear on the main thesis/conclusion?*

2. *Evaluate* or make a critique, i.e., make a book/article review. In other words, you cannot evaluate or make a book/article review, unless you are able to reconstruct, based on your interpretation, the structure of the book/article. In evaluating:

a. *Establish the thesis of your review.*

It is important to unify your research on the book/article into a statement that describes your overall impression of it. This statement will be the central point that you wish to convey to the readers of your review.

b. *Outline the arguments that support your thesis.*

By drafting an outline of your review you will establish the major points of your argument about this book. This outline will enable you to organize your information.

*Note: The following guide questions may proved to be useful:*

- a. *Do you agree with the author's main thesis/conclusion? If not, what do you think is wrong with his reasoning?*
- b. *Does he appeal to some (central or auxiliary) premise which you think is false or doubtful?*
- c. *Is there some assumption which the author does not make explicit but which you think is false?*
- d. *Are there some fallacies involved in his reasoning? Which are they and why?*
- e. *What central arguments do you agree with? Why?*
- f. *What do you think is the over-all impact of the book/article in terms of:*
  - *Was the author successful in realizing the aim of the book/article?*
  - *Was his style of writing conformable to the over-al aim of the book/article?*

- *What can you say in order to improve the book/article?*

#### **D. WRITE THE REVIEW (ROUGH DRAFTS OF THE FINAL REPORT)**

*After reading, researching and organizing your thoughts, you are ready to begin to write the first draft of the review.*

- *Record the preliminary information.* List the complete bibliographical citation for the book (full title, author, place, publisher, date of publication, edition, pages, special features, price and ISBN).
- *Write a short note on the author. Writing a review follows basically the standard operating procedure in writing an essay: Introduction, Body and Conclusion.*
  - Write a compelling introduction.* The opening sentence should capture the reader's attention and state your thesis.
  - Present your argument in the Body.* Flowing out of your thesis statement will be supporting arguments that will be the essence of your review. Furthermore, the points of your argument should be supported by summary or citation of the books contents. In assessing a work properly, it is important to represent it fairly.
  - Make your conclusion.* If your thesis has been well argued, this should be the logical end of your review. This could include a recommendation on the value of the work or on the improvement of the book/article.
  - Revise your first drafts if necessary.* Carefully proof-read your review before submission.

#### **E. WRAPPING UP THE FINAL REPORT**

After reviewing separately the five reading materials in their final form, at this juncture, you are to present a summary of your findings:

1. What are the nuances (related) issues surrounding the different theses of the books/articles to your chosen topic? Enumerate them and indicate to what reading materials each belongs.
2. Indicate which among them show parallelisms/similarities; which among them show contrasts/differences? What are the bases for these parallelisms/similarities and which are the bases of their contrasts/differences?
3. Which among them do you think are new to you? Which among them are not?
4. How do the issues arising from these parallelisms/similarities and differences/contrasts bear on your prospective dissertation topic? Why?
5. Among these emerging issues, which do you think is of paramount importance to you? Why?
6. Are you suggesting that this most important issue is your probable, proposed dissertation topic? Why?
7. How was your experience in doing book reviews?

## FORMAT OF THE BOOK/ARTICLE REVIEW

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_  
          family name           first name    M.I.

*Degree sought:* \_\_\_\_\_.

### 1) Preliminary Information

*Author:* \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_.  
                  family name           first name    M.I.

### FOR INDIVIDUAL BOOK REVIEWS

*Title of Book/Article:* \_\_\_\_\_  
(please underline)

*Place of Publication:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Name of Publisher:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Date of Publication:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Title of Book/Journal:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Volume/Number/Issue* \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

*Year of Publication:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Pages:* \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_.

### 2) About the Author

### 3) About the Book/Article

### 4) Book/Article Review Proper

*Introduction*

*Body*

*Conclusion*

### FOR THE SYNTHESIS (Final Report)

*Similarities*

*Differences*

*Issues arising from Similarities*

*Issues arising from Differences*

*The most important issue(s)*

