

Understanding the Value of Writing Assignments

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1. A grade represents a **measurement** of the student's ability to fulfill a specific assignment—there is a direct parallel in Christian ministry as one fulfills specific assignments under the guidance of, and accountability to church leaders.
2. Education provides a 'return' that is directly proportional to how much of yourself you invest in the learning process. Therefore, **push yourself—be a steward**—don't let it be said of you, "When it came to education, he or she didn't care about receiving his or her 'money's worth.'"
3. The pressures faced in school are a **microcosm** of the pressures one will face in ministry. Your university studies provide experience in **balancing the Christian life**. Therefore, grades do factor in when recommending a person to a ministry position. Faithfulness in Christian ministry will require faithfulness in laboring in the Word, and faithfulness in fulfilling the day to day responsibilities of life. Avoid the temptation to pit one set of responsibilities against the other.
4. One of the key skills learned in writing assignments is **communication**. The more effective you become at expressing yourself—the greater will be your effectiveness in **spoken word** and **written word** ministries. Writing represents a learning opportunity in which biblical concepts and convictions are committed to specific language. Writing involves critical thinking (what something is, is not, and how related to other things, and why it is vitally important). Writing is a discipline required of us in order to excel in communication.
5. Ministry is the **spiritual influence** of others—whether by teaching; by leading; by counseling; or by sacrificial service. Christian education is a **God-ordained spiritual opportunity** to become better equipped for ministry (for the spiritual influence of others). If you see education in that way, it will affect your study habits—it will change the way you view assignments, and it will help you study with a view to equipping yourself for effective ministry. Students with spiritual 'vision' will reject the notion that writing assignments are busy work. Instead they will **"connect the dots"** so to speak between writing assignments and increased effectiveness in ministry. Effective Christian writing is 'logic on fire'—the persuasive communication of biblical truth to be believed and applied.

6. Writing ability is a neglected skill in today's world. Good writers are urgently needed in today's workplace. The curriculum at TMU is designed to foster good writing skills. Those learning to write effectively will benefit from the mastering the skill of **outlining**. **Learning to construct a simple outline** is the best way to overcome the 'fear factor' when faced with a writing a paper. The discipline of outlining pays big dividends. Outlining is the best way to begin a research paper—it will keep you on track as you follow the writing objectives contained in the description of the assignment. Excellence in writing requires this step.

7. Most of your theology at this stage of your Christian life is a collection of 'second hand convictions'—in other words you have built your understanding of doctrine on what you have been taught. You probably haven't researched each and every theological point in Scripture as the Bereans did in Acts 17:11.

You must strive to go further in your comprehension of Bible doctrine until through diligence in study you learn to build 'first hand convictions.' The development of 'first hand convictions' is the intent in all of our reading and writing assignments. Why are 'first hand convictions' so valuable? It is difficult to lay a theological foundation for all of life on 'second hand convictions.' **It is 'first hand convictions' that are needed in order to construct a working foundation of doctrine that translates into spiritual wisdom in all of our daily life decisions. You must learn to write so that your 'first hand convictions' appear in your paper as backed up (not by your authority) but by the authority of Scripture.**

8. Presently your theology is under construction so to speak. Your 'first hand convictions' are being fleshed out—these are the convictions from which you will teach, preach, disciple, defend, and counsel in your ministry. **Building effective writing skills is the number one way to develop first hand theological convictions.**

9. The opportunity you have now to pursue your studies through The Master's University is priceless. There are countless believers around the world who envy the privilege you have of gaining a Bible-based education. You ought to regularly think about how to maximize your educational experience. Through diligence in your studies, you will be building a skill set for lay for ministry. **Central to this skill set is the art of learning to express yourself in writing and speaking.**

10. Consider that 75% of leadership in ministry is verbal communication. The ability to motivate others to obedience rests upon the skill of using verbal communication effectively. **Those who are making the most impact in ministry today are those who are masterful in communication and who tend to surround themselves with those who are effective at articulation of truth—they have learned the skill of verbal communication.** Learning to write well is the number one skill necessary to gain skill in verbal communication.

11. **Effective communication is built, established, and honed through the process of learning to write well.** Powerful writing skills lie just beneath the surface in the most effective ministries that involve the spoken word. Excellent writing is more than just filling pages with words—compelling writing is critical thinking in action. That means that the writer has learned to define his or her terms; draw correlations between concepts; demonstrate the consequences of ideas; produce understanding; and convince and persuade his or her readers of the value of what is being said. These abilities only come with time, patience, and practice.

12. **Your ‘hire-ability’ and/or effectiveness in lay ministry, depend in part upon your contribution as a team member in ministry.** Those forming a ministry team are looking for the very qualities you will be developing through your studies at The Master’s University. Those qualities may be summarized as follows:

- Analytical in thought
- Creative in problem solving
- Proactive about obstacles (solution oriented)
- Effective at writing
- Skilled in verbal communication

13. What may not have crossed your mind in the recent past is that your writing assignments are designed to build these skills into your ministry ‘tool box.’ In fact, the three most difficult ‘dots to connect’ in your education experience here are these: **(One) your assignments—(Two) which are intended to develop writing skills—(Three) are the means by which you will grow to be a spiritual influencer of others through effective communication.**

14. This of course means that **your assignments must not be viewed as busy work, but are to be viewed as a God-ordained ‘pathway’ to effective communication** (which leads to greater potential for the spiritual influence of others—which is ministry!).

15. Maximizing your educational experience requires humility. **Here’s the reason why—writing assignments are a humbling task! They expose our weaknesses in the area of communication.** And, in order to grow from our writing assignments, we will have to admit how far we have to grow in order to become proficient at communication. Of course, this is just the opposite of the ‘hamburger flipper’ mentality which says, “Hey, I showed up, where’s my grade?”

16. **Now for students who have been away from academics for a while, one of the most loathsome aspects of writing is outlining (as a preliminary stage to composition).** But, as a pastor who has crafted and preached hundreds of sermons, I want to commend outlining to you as a skill indispensable to good writing. Outlining before you write can be as simple as jotting down 5 or 6 lines in pencil on a piece of scratch paper—or it may be as complex as a typed formal outline with roman numerals and indents. The value of outlining must be stressed though, or many of you will never take the time to do it.

The immediate value of outlining is as follows:

- It provides the STRUCTURE for your paper

- It provides the SEQUENCE of the thoughts you will communicate

- It provides the CONTENT for the body of your paper

- It provides the LOGIC for the argument of your thesis

- It provides the APPLICATION of the truths you are explaining

- It provides the CONCLUSION as the summation of your thought

17. **Without the benefits of outlining listed above, most attempts at writing are loosely joined ramblings at best that do not move purposefully from thesis to premise(s) to conclusion.** Once you get a ‘taste’ of the writing success that comes through the discipline of outlining; you will never go back to a formless style.