guidelines for essays and projects

The following notes regarding the presentation of essays and projects at Ridley are adapted from those supplied in the ACT student Handbooks. Even greater detail can be found in The SBL Handbook of Style. These notes represent the preferred style at Ridley as well as the guidelines to be followed in submission of essays and projects. This format applies to all written work at Ridley.

*Note that a substantial number of these expectations are new from 2015. There is considerable variation from what you may be used to from prior years.*

1 lodging assessment

1.1 electronic submission

From 2015, all assessment is to be submitted electronically. Every unit has an online space (on our ‘moodle’ platform); your enrolment details should automatically grant you access to every unit in which you are enrolled. Each assessment item should have an obvious link like ‘SUBMIT ESSAY’.

Documents should be uploaded as PDFs. The internal formatting of your document is spelled out below. The file name should always follow this format:

**student number_unit code_assessment type**

(eg. 201512345_OT301_essay)

Where there are more than one of the same kind of assessment, specify this in assessment type (eg, 201512345_TH601_essay2).

Assessment deadlines are automatically time-stamped. Most units will allow resubmission of documents, in case you make a mistake, but late (re)submissions will be flagged as such and penalised accordingly. Assignments that require resubmission, eg. because of poor formatting, are also subject to late penalties. Be aware that the due time of assignments may vary from class to class, though most are likely to have an 11:55pm deadline.

Assessments are not usually accepted by email or fax, and will only be allowed by prior arrangement with the Registrar’s Office. Difficulties with electronic submission (preferably before 11:55pm on the due date!) should be addressed to the Registrar’s Office.

1.2 penalties for late work

If an assessment is uploaded late (ie. without an extension, after any extension has expired, or for revision), then the following adjustments will apply. *These are new from 2015 and mandated by the Australian College of Theology.*

- Assessments are penalised at the rate of 3% for every day late - 3 marks will be deducted from every 100 for each 24-hour period past the deadline.

- There is no safety policy that prevents failing. It is a bad idea to submit four days late an assessment worthy of 60% (60% – 4×3% = 48%).

- An assessment may be submitted more than two weeks beyond its due date (or extended date), although a mark of zero is automatically recorded.

- Because all assessment items must be attempted, failure to submit an assessment will normally constitute an automatic fail for the whole unit.

Where a submitted assessment is not of acceptable length or format (see below), the Registrar’s Office will return the assessment to you. You must revise and resubmit your assessment and will incur any applicable late penalty.
1.3 extensions

Extensions are granted only in certain circumstances. Application is made to the Registrar’s office rather than to your lecturer, and is best done as early as possible. There is now an online form in the ‘Registrar’s Office’ page of the online learning site. The Australian College of Theology has released strict guidelines about the timing and circumstances of extensions which are detailed at http://www.actheology.edu.au/policy/files/Late Penalties Policy.pdf, hardcopies are also available from the Registrar’s Office.

2 presentation summary

Although your primary task is to think and write clearly, the presentation of your writing also impacts your reader/s. Writing that is clearly and consistently presented and referenced allows your marker to focus on your argument. The remainder of these guidelines (§§3–6) contain helpful details on formatting your essays and projects. The most salient points are summarised here in §2.

2.1 assessment elements

Every essay should include a title page, an abstract, the body of the essay, and a bibliography.

Watch especially the length of your assessment. The body of the essay should be within ±10% of the stipulated word count. For example, a 2,000-word essay should be between 1,800 and 2,200 words.

2.2 intellectual property

Virtually every essay should engage with primary and secondary sources. You need to reference these sources – whether from the Bible, other primary documents, or later writings – in an appropriate fashion.

Where you use someone else’s words, you must identify your quotation and acknowledge your source. You should mostly digest others’ ideas rather than quote them directly, but even then you must acknowledge where the ideas have come from.

Sources are indicated in footnotes. Footnote markers should ideally be reserved until the end of a sentence. You may include several references within a single footnote, separated by semicolons.

2.3 referencing summary

There are many kinds of works to reference, but four are the most common. You may need up to three different formats for each individual work you use.

2.3.1 books

2.3.2 essays in an edited book


2.3.3 journal articles


The *SBL Handbook of Style* lists the standard abbreviations for common journals. You are not at liberty to compose your own abbreviations. (The latest edition of the *SBL Handbook* allows you to abbreviate journals also in the bibliography.)

2.3.4 dictionary or lexicon articles


LATER FOOTNOTE: 39 Bird, ‘Christ’, 123.


The *SBL Handbook* lists the standard abbreviations for major dictionaries. You are not at liberty to compose your own abbreviations. It also permits you to provide just the abbreviation in the bibliography as well, but providing full details is good practice for other resources.

The many variations on these four kinds of works are detailed in the coming sections, including any electronic resources. Teaching staff are also usually happy to give advice.

Remember that Bible references are included within your sentences, like this (John 3:16), and are not placed in footnotes (unless you have a really long or complex list). You don’t need to list the Bible in your bibliography.
3 presentation details

3.1 introduction

Your essay is marked primarily on content. However, presentation is important and the format and presentation should reveal clear thinking and careful organisation. Using a standard format such as the one outlined here will assist both you and your marker/s. In addition to what follows, careful attention should also be given to spelling, grammar and punctuation.

3.2 word limits

As previously stated, your assessment should keep to the set length, within 10% variation. For example, a 2,000-word essay should be between 1,800 and 2,200 words. This count includes everything from the introduction through to the conclusion, including quotations and in-text references and any headings. The count does not include title page, abstract, footnotes or bibliography. Footnotes may not exceed 25% of the prescribed essay length. Failure to keep within the requirements for length shall be considered grounds for returning the essay for revision and resubmission.

Special word limits apply for MDiv and MA projects and for research theses.

Be aware of how your word processor calculates your word count. For example, Microsoft Word defaults to counting the whole document and including footnotes. You may need to select only the body of your essay and ensure that ‘include footnotes’ is disabled.

3.3 basic formatting

Electronic submission means that many issues of formatting are less relevant than with a physical presentation. Still, give due thought to the following matters of spacing:

- Double space the body of your essay. This gives your marker/s space to annotate.
- Generous margins (2–3cm) also provide useful space.
- Block quotations should be indented from both margins. They don’t need quotation marks.
- Footnotes and block quotations can be single spaced.

Providing page numbers is usually helpful, even on an electronic submission.

Use standard fonts to ensure your work displays well on markers’ and moderators’ screens.

Your filename should not include your name, and should always follow this format:

**student number_unit code_assessment type**

(eg. 201512345_OT301_essay)

Where there are more than one of the same kind of assessment, specify this in assessment type (eg, 201512345_TH601_essay2).

3.4 general components

An essay should consist of the following essential components, each to begin on a fresh page is ideal.
3.4.1 title page
The title page should contain your ACT number, your course and unit, the full title or topic of the essay, the due date, the prescribed number of words and what you believe to be the actual word count in the body of the essay.

Student Number: 201512345
Course: MDiv
Unit: OT301
Title: What are the main themes of the Joseph story?
Date due: 17/9/2015
Prescribed word count: 2,000
Actual word count: 2,071

Please note that your name should not appear anywhere within your document (eg. in headers/footers, in filename, in document information).

3.4.2 abstract
The second page of your submission should contain an abstract. An abstract is a piece of continuous prose, not numbered or bulleted points, and should be about 150 words in length. It is not an introduction but is designed to give a synopsis/summary of the argument of the essay (ie. a bird’s-eye view of the whole).

3.4.3 the essay proper
The essay proper should consist of the following three elements:

• A clear introduction: This introduction should identify how you understand the question, the issues that will be discussed, and the method of approach that will be used. It is appropriate to disclose, in advance, the conclusion towards which you are arguing.

• The body of the essay: This should set out in a clear and concise way the subject under discussion, and follow the outline already foreshadowed in the introduction.

• A conclusion: This summarises what you have said, restating major findings.

While you are developing your essay-writing skills, it can be particularly helpful to include 3–6 headings throughout your essay.

The essay should be in your own words. Avoid lengthy quotations of primary or secondary sources. Where a quotation contributes to your argument then the author’s words should be quoted exactly, in (single) inverted commas. Where an author’s argument is expressed in your own words or alluded to, acknowledgment must also be made.

In terms of the art of essay writing, there are many useful resources, for example:

3.4.4 bibliography
After your essay proper, you should include a bibliography. A bibliography includes all works you have used (not just those you have cited), though the Bible is presumed and does not need to be listed. Detailed instructions on the content and format of your bibliography are provided below (§3.9).

3.5 spelling
The best advice on spelling is consistency. Choose an appropriate dictionary and stay with it. The recommendation of the Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers is the latest Macquarie Dictionary.
3.6 quotations and quotation marks

In accord with the recommendations of the Australian Government Style Manual, single quotation marks are preferred for quotations. Double quotation marks – which you will often see in American publications – should be reserved for a quotation within a quotation.

Punctuation should occur outside quotation marks unless it is part of the quotation itself.

All quotations should be accurately reproduced, including original spelling, punctuation and abbreviations. Where there is a misspelling, it should be indicated by adding ‘[sic]’ immediately after the error.

Wherever possible, footnote indicators should be placed at the end of a sentence. They should come after – not before – any punctuation, like this.27 Remember that you can refer to several items within a single footnote. You should avoid piling up several adjacent footnote indicators, like this.28 29 30

A longer quotation may be presented as a block quotation. This is a separate paragraph with space both above and below, and also indented at both left and right margins. If you present a quotation as a block quotation you do not then also have quotation marks.

If some words are omitted from the original source, the omission should be indicated by three stops ‘…’ known as an ellipsis.

References to biblical quotations should be placed within parentheses within the text of the essay ie. (Rev 21:4) rather than being placed in footnotes.

Quotation marks can be used to refer to meanings or definitions of terms or to highlight words which are being used in an unusual way. Italics should be reserved for titles of books and periodicals, for foreign words or phrases not common in English and, sparingly, for emphasis.

3.7 notes and bibliographies

There is a growing trend to employ bibliographic software like EndNote or Zotero or the built-in features of some word processors. Such software does not work miracles and is only as accurate as the data fed into it. In particular, data from library catalogues conforms to different conventions and is guaranteed to breach expectations.

You remain responsible for the accuracy of what is produced. If you use software, ensure that its input data and output styles match Ridley expectations. It may be wise to complete your first few assessments manually so that you are familiar with what is required.

3.7.1 purpose & plagiarism

Footnotes are used for a number of purposes:

• To specify the sources from which you have derived facts, opinions or quotations.

• To add comments, explanations, examples and allusions to differing views of other authors – though these often belong in the body of the essay.

• To supply evidence of facts stated in the text and other material which is relevant to the argument but which would interrupt its flow if included in the main text.

You include a bibliography to indicate the scope and parameters of your research. It informs your reader about the relevant sources you have cited or consulted. Again, it is not necessary to refer to the Bible in the bibliography.

Failure to acknowledge your sources is a serious breach of academic standards and may be considered plagiarism. You should ensure that all direct quotations and indirect allusions to the work of others are acknowledged.
Plagiarism is when you take someone else’s words or ideas and present them as your own. Plagiarism may be deliberate or inadvertent but it is always regarded seriously. Common examples of plagiarism include:

- You quote an author’s exact words without showing (with quotation marks and a footnote source) that this is what you are doing.
- You follow another person’s ideas or views or structure without acknowledgment (with a footnote source). You can plagiarise another scholar’s ideas even if you summarise them in your own words.
- You plagiarise another student’s work, presenting it as your own. In this event both students may be penalised.
- You submit work written by someone else.

Plagiarism may result in minor or major penalties applied to your grade. Repeat offences are recorded and published through TAMS (Theological Academic Management System) across the Australian College of Theology and may impact your candidature.

3.7.2 presentation

The information included in a footnote and subsequently in the bibliography contains the same information. Note in the examples below that the presentation of that information varies between the two. You ought not simply copy between one entry and the other.

The convention outlined below is the one preferred at Ridley and should be used in all assessments. Even as you learn to tweak some of the finer details, it’s especially important to be consistent in your presentation.

3.7.4 abbreviations

You should only abbreviate biblical books when they occur in parentheses (or footnotes); if describing Leviticus 18:5 in a full sentence, retain the full title of the book. Further, you only abbreviate the book if it is followed by both chapter and verse (Lev 18:5; not Lev or Lev 18). Conventions differ as to whether or not the abbreviated book is followed by a stop (1 Cor. 13:3); the trend is to omit such punctuation (ie. 1 Cor 13:3).

Abbreviations for biblical books and journals and commentary series are not random. Although some publishers invoke their own conventions, the current authorised list is provided in The SBL Handbook of Style, available in the library.

3.7.5 greek and hebrew

If it is relevant to include Greek or Hebrew terms, these should be given in full, foreign font. (They should only be transliterated if you’re citing a transliteration from another author). Hebrew does not need to be pointed unless the pointing is exegetically significant. Greek should include all breathings and relevant accents.

3.8 format for referencing and bibliographic citation

Ridley’s preferred style is sourced primarily from The SBL Handbook of Style, along with The Style Manual for Authors, Editors, and Printers as recommended by the ACT. The SBL Handbook has been devised with theological disciplines in mind, and contains many more details than those summarised here. The primary difference is that Australian presentation usually uses single quotation marks rather than double.

The SBL Handbook and the ACT allows students to use the Author-Date system rather than the Note system. This places references within the body of your essay (so Bird 2013, 122–123). This system is discouraged by Ridley – and it consumes your precious word count. If you wish to use it, details are given in the SBL Handbook (§6.5)
3.9 standards and conventions for notes and bibliographies

Full details and examples are given in the *SBL Handbook*. What follows here are some specific details for those wishing to glean the most important matters of consistency.

### 3.9.1 included information

Remember that the following conventions are almost always not followed in library catalogues. Whether compiling your references manually or through automated software, it is your responsibility to ‘translate’ between the differing conventions. Do not merely copy-paste from some other source.

- **Authors’ and editors’ names:** Full names may be preferable to initials. If you use initials, include a space between them.
  - *best:* John R. W. Stott
  - *acceptable:* J. R. W. Stott
  - *avoid:* J.R.W. Stott

- **Title:** Despite how it’s presented in the source, a colon should precede every subtitle and all words should be capitalised except articles, conjunctions and prepositions. (The *SBL Handbook* offers other conventions if you cite a title in a foreign language).

- **Publishers:** Names should be abbreviated to the simplest word or two. Mentions of ‘Press’ or ‘Publishing Company’ and the like should be omitted – except in the case of University Presses. Despite some conventions, the trend is away from listing (American) states; you certainly do not mention country of publication.
  - *correct:* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans
  - London: Cambridge University Press

If you’re unsure, the *SBL Handbook* now carries a long list of examples (§6.1.4.1).

- **Volume and page numbers:** All numerals should be Arabic, not Roman. Volume and page numbers are separated by a colon (eg. 1:96–97). Give a full range of pages; don’t use p. or pp. or f. or ff.

Most Latin terms once used in referencing (eg. ‘ibid.’, ‘loc. cit.’, ‘op. cit.’) have lost favour. The following examples show how you should treat repeated references to an earlier source.

### 3.9.2 examples

The *SBL Handbook* offers twenty pages of worked examples (§§6.2–6.4)! Most Ridley assessments will use only the four basic kinds of resources already summarised (§2.3 above).

Additional information or variation is collated here for convenience, but special variations may need to be explored in that *Handbook*.

- **Multiple authors (and editors):** If there is more than one author, only the first has their surname reversed and only in the bibliography.


• **Commentary/book series:** If the book belongs to a recognised series, you should include the authorised abbreviation. If there is a volume number, include that too.


It is sometimes important to distinguish between the book title and series title. The middle example might sometimes (unhelpfully) be listed as *The NIV Application Commentary: Job.*

Series editors are typically ignored for such commentary and book series.

• **Multiple publishers:** Where a work has been simultaneously produced by two publishers, you may choose to list only one of these. If you list both, it should be in the following format (which automated software typically handles badly!).


• **Journal issues:** Most journals have consecutive pagination, so you need only cite the volume number and not any specific issue. If you need or choose to include a specific volume, use a stop.


• **Ancient documents:** You will usually need to cite both the ancient document and its modern source. Standard collections and abbreviations can be specified.

44 Augustine, *Letters of St. Augustin* 28.3.5 (NPNF 1.252).


### 3.9.3 electronic sources

While many theological resources can now be accessed electronically, virtually all the reputable ones still have a print equivalent. The current scholarly expectation is that you will cite (and sight) that print equivalent. You should thus be able to use one of the formats above, as if you have been using the print version. (Page numbers can be derived from many PDF or eBook versions. Resourceful students can discover real scans and thus page numbers via Google Books or Amazon previews, or print versions may be sighted at the library.)
Where an electronic resource is unable to provide a real page number, specify that you are using an electronic edition and provide the most useful navigation information:


General websites should be used cautiously. Where you deem such material relevant, include the title and URL of your source. If there is a production date (e.g., for a blog post) include that, but there is no longer any need to include an access date.


4 non-discriminatory language policy

The ACT requires students (and lecturers) to avoid discriminatory language. Avoid language that discriminates or vilifies individuals on the basis of their gender, colour, ethnicity, age, disability, race or religion.

Detailed explanations are available from the ACT Handbooks (hardcopies available in the library and Registrar’s Office, and from www.actheology.edu.au/handbooks.php. The most common example is the now old-fashioned use of ‘man’ to mean ‘humanity’. Students are encouraged to consider more inclusive language. (Although some progressive contexts seek to remove gendered language for God also, both the ACT and Ridley recognise the suitability of referring to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit as ‘he’. We do not capitalise these divine pronouns.)

5 resources

Further guidelines for the format of essays and projects can be found in the following resources.

The current Australian College of Theology Handbooks.

