WHAT IS AN MA ESSAY?

MA SYMPOSIUM DECEMBER 2015
WHAT IS AN MA ESSAY?

CAVEAT – WHEN IS AN ESSAY NOT AN ESSAY?

Discussion:

1) What is the difference between a BA and an MA essay?
2) How do you find out?
WHERE ARE THE GOAL-POSTS?
TRS M LEVEL SUBJECT BENCHMARKS (BA Hons BENCHMARKS PLUS:)

- a high degree of independence and self-direction in learning, taking responsibility for their own learning experience
- a high degree of engagement, interaction, and independent thinking and ability to find their own source material and literature
- knowledge of appropriate research methods and adoption of adequate research skills, with good use of academic journals as well as books
- an advanced ability to use relevant original/primary sources as well as secondary literature
- skills necessary for the production of original research (although the degree of originality appropriate to doctoral research is not expected at this level of study),
- with an ability to adopt a critical distance from their source material and to evaluate it critically, reaching their own independent conclusions
- awareness of the complexity of the subject matter, and the range of sources that are appropriate to their work
- critical reflection on their own particular standpoint, and a good understanding of the methodological and hermeneutical issues that are raised
- an ability to be critically reflective, with integration of academic literature relating theory and practice, where students are drawing on practical experience
- an understanding of the ethical issues raised by their research, and compliance with relevant codes of practice
- skills necessary to make full use of electronic resources, including primary sources and web-based study tools, to evaluate them critically, and where appropriate, to develop their own technological resources.
(PROGRAMME AND) MODULE LEARNING OUTCOMES
TH7047 ADVANCED RESEARCH METHODS IN THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

Students will be assessed on their

1. Awareness of the norms, methods and ethical considerations of empirical research in the field of religion.

2. Awareness of the peer-reviewed journals and professional bodies in their field of scholarship.

3. Ability to write a monograph review and literature survey of publishable or near publishable standard.

4. Ability to scope a realistic empirical project using appropriate methods, and to write a plausible proposal.
TH7046 BUDDHIST CONCEPTS OF AWAKENING

Students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate thorough knowledge of the diversity of schools of Buddhism, and their varying understandings of the nature of awakening/enlightenment

2. Explain philosophical and historical connections across a range of Buddhist concepts

3. Evaluate strengths and weakness of insider, outsider and reductive approaches to the phenomena

4. Engage critically with Buddhist interpretations of reality

5. Explore orientalist bias in western receptions of Buddhist ideas about enlightenment/awakening
ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

• Using assessment criteria when writing your essay.
SUBMITTING (& EXTENSIONS/DEFERRALS)

- 14th January 2016
- 14th April 2016
- 14th July 2016
- 29th September 2016
SUBMITTING

• Please submit your assignments in .PDF file format. (Turnitin can’t cope with unusual file formats).

• **The deadline is 2pm on the due date.**

• Do not leave it until the last minute to make your submission. Do it ahead of time to ensure there are no glitches. Late penalties are automatic, unless a known problem with Moodle can be demonstrated.

• Make sure you upload the correct version of your assignment.

• [https://portal.chester.ac.uk/registryservices/SiteAssets/Pages/onlinesubmission/Student_Guide_To_Online_Submission.pdf](https://portal.chester.ac.uk/registryservices/SiteAssets/Pages/onlinesubmission/Student_Guide_To_Online_Submission.pdf)
EXTENSIONS AND DEFERRALS

• Extension (submitted in time for marking before the January or June Module Assessment Boards)

• Deferral (if length of time you need will take you beyond the next Board)

Making sure you have supporting evidence (medical, letter from employer etc). It is your responsibility to download, complete and submit the appropriate form, along with evidence: https://portal.chester.ac.uk/registryservices/Pages/extensions.aspx
HOW DOES THE MARKING WORK?

• First marker and second marker discuss
• Module Award Boards in December and June.
• External Examiner
• Marks are provisional.
WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BA AND MA

• Disciplinary awareness
• Getting on top of the current scholarship.
• Getting beyond the ‘quote to back-up my point’ mentality
• Appropriate selection and deployment of primary and secondary sources
• Indicating your awareness of a field by multiple references
• Relationship between ‘theory’ and practice/examples/case studies
• Staging an argument
MAKE AN ARGUMENT

• Argument as ‘making a case’ (judicial)
• Argument as construction of building or bridge (logical)
• Argument as dialogue between ideas (cooperative)

WHAT MAKES A GOOD ARGUMENT?
RESOURCES TO HELP

• Manchester Academic Phrasebank
  http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/introducing-work/ - useful especially for ‘signposting’ phrases

TRS Video Resources

• Dr Ben Fulford – How to stage an argument

• Dr Paul Middleton – How to write a dissertation in 90 minutes
DISCUSSION

• What does an introduction do (and not do)?
• What does a conclusion do (and not do)?
WHAT TO AVOID

Check out Dr Paul Middleton’s How to Avoid Academic Malpractice video (& standard links)

- Copying from a source without acknowledging it
- Using someone else’s ideas without referring to the author
- Improper paraphrasing
- Presenting someone else’s work as your own
WHAT TO AVOID

• Don’t begin with an unanswerable/vague question (especially if you are negotiating your own title). ‘Was the world created?’

• Don’t fail to state your position in your introduction

• Don’t stray from the focus of the question (especially in the conclusion)

• Don’t use rhetorical questions. ‘Why do the texts indicate the Buddha’s initial reluctance to ordain women?’ Don’t ask – tell. ‘The texts indicate a reluctance on the part of the Buddha to ordain women. This may be explained by/ X argues this is because/ the reasons for this are unknown/ this may be understood in terms of
WHAT TO AVOID

• **Subjective statements**  ‘I believe Richard Dawkins’ grasp of the nature of religious language is limited.’  **SO WHAT?**  You need to argue/demonstrate it, not ‘believe’ it.

• **Colloquial language** – obvs.

• **The use of ‘we’** – in all sorts of respects! The authorial ‘we’? No! How ‘we’ might benefit from this revelation, text, interpretation? No! Who IS we? Avoiding making the assumption that your reader shares your worldview. Possible disciplinary differences here.
BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOFTWARE

• Endnote
• Zotero
• Mendeley
• Delicious