

# WHAT IS AN MA ESSAY?

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MA SYMPOSIUM DECEMBER 2015



# WHAT IS AN MA ESSAY?

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*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?

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# TRS M LEVEL SUBJECT BENCHMARKS (BA Hons BENCHMARKS PLUS:)

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- 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

The screenshot shows a Moodle course page for 'TH7047 - Advanced Research Methods in the Study of Religions' at the University of Chester. The page is titled 'WELCOME' and lists the module tutors as Dr Wendy Dossett and Dr Dawn Llewellyn. It includes contact details for both tutors, a cartoon illustration of a professor and students, and a welcome message for the first of two core modules for the MA Religious Studies. The page also features a navigation menu on the left, a list of standard links on the right, and a search forum section at the bottom right.

**NAVIGATION**

- Home
- My home
- Moodle
- My profile
- Current course
  - TH7047 - Advanced Research Methods in the Study of...
  - Participants
  - WELCOME
  - ASSESSMENT & ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION
    - Session 1
    - Session 2
    - Session 3
    - Session 4
    - NO SESSION
    - Session 5
    - Session 6
    - Session 7
    - Session 8
    - SESSION 9
    - Session 10
  - My courses

**ADMINISTRATION**

- Course administration
  - Turn editing on
  - Subscriptions

**WELCOME**

**Module Tutors: Dr Wendy Dossett & Dr Dawn Llewellyn**

**Contact details:**

**WENDY:**  
w.dossett@chester.ac.uk, +44 (0)1244 513075, Office: Hollybank CHB106

**DAWN:**  
d.llewellyn@chester.ac.uk, +44 (0)1244 511072, Office: Hollybank CHB109

**STANDARD LINKS**

- Module Feedback Survey
- Reading List
- eLibrary - eJournals and eBooks
- Module Descriptor
- Process for Submitting work in TRS
- Receiving feedback on your assessments
- Assessment Deadlines 2015/6
- Marking Criteria
- Guide to Referencing & Presentation
- Excessive Word Count
- Plagiarism and Academic Malpractice
- Process for Extensions And Deferrals
- MA Programme Pack

**SEARCH FORUMS**

Go

Advanced search

**LATEST NEWS**

- Add a new topic...
- Module Feedback Survey

**Welcome to the first of two core modules for the MA Religious Studies: TH7047 Advanced Research Methods in the Study of Religions.** This module provides an opportunity to clarify your own 'terms of engagement' as you embark on your Masters Level study of religions. Questions around how religion relates to culture, tradition and experience, and whether religion makes sense at all as an analytical category will be explored. Some of the most well-known approaches to the study of religion will be analysed, and you will be introduced to some key methodologies, methods and ethical concerns around all research, including field work. By the end of this module you be aware of debates around the nature of religion(s), a sense of the significance of your own

# TH7047 ADVANCED RESEARCH METHODS IN THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

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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

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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

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- Using assessment criteria when writing your essay.



# SUBMITTING (& EXTENSIONS/DEFERRALS)

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

# SUBMITTING

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- 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

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- **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?

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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?**



Question

## Preparation

Analysis of  
the question

Reading  
narrowly

## Research

Tentatively  
committing  
to a position

Taking a  
position

Plan

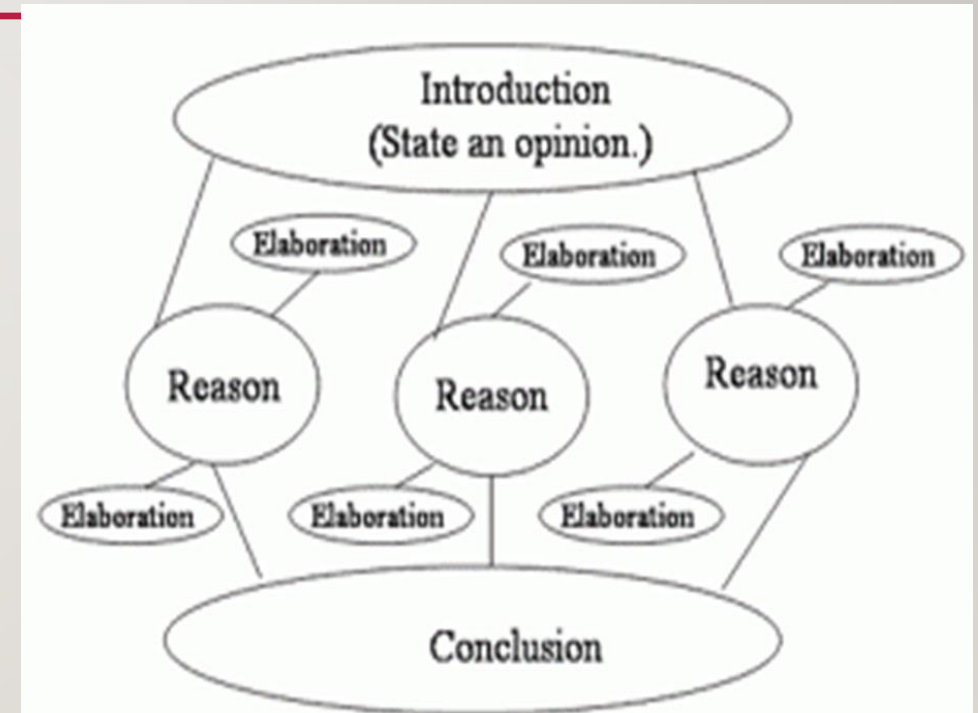
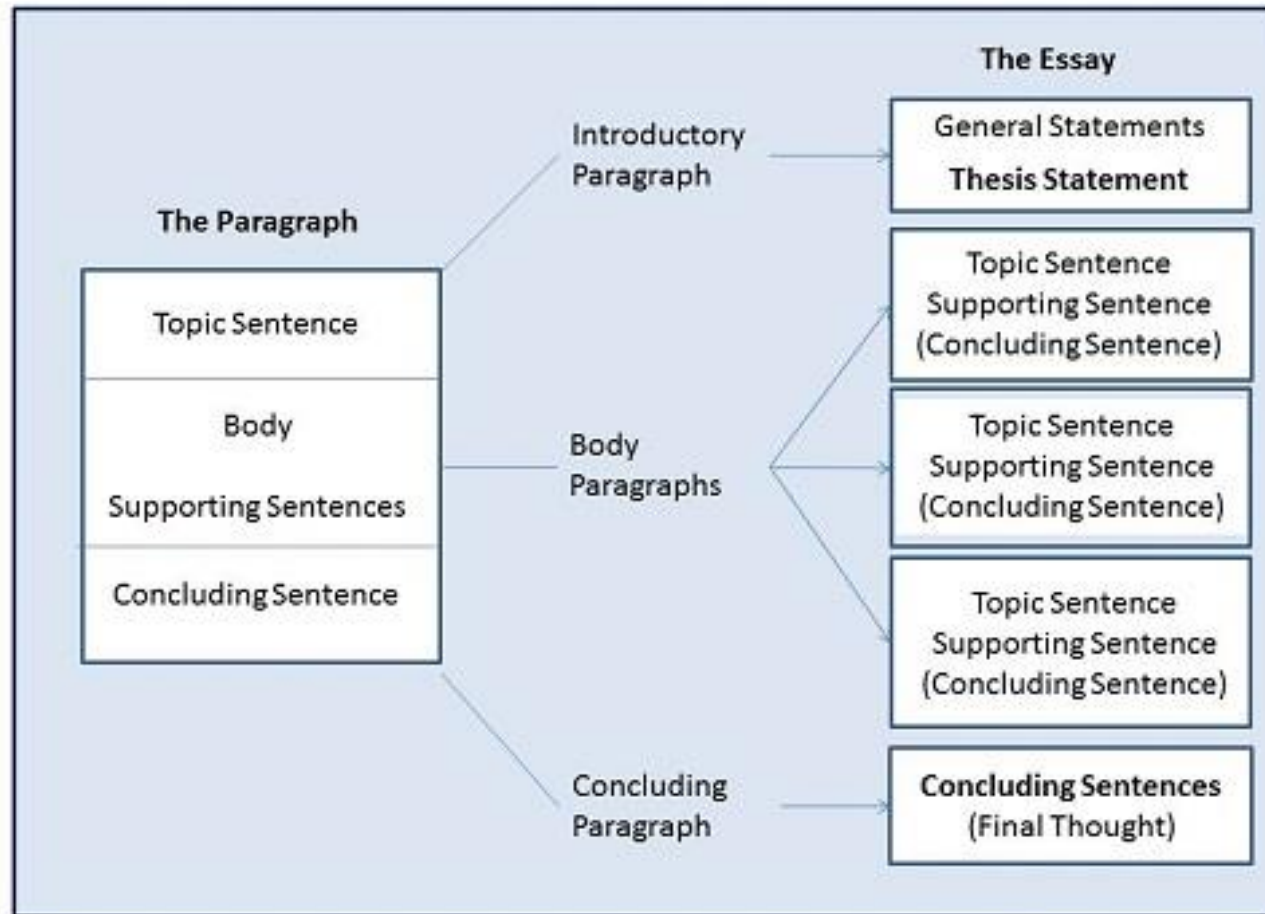
## Writing

Draft

Redraft

Final  
edit

Reading  
broadly





# RESOURCES TO HELP

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- **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

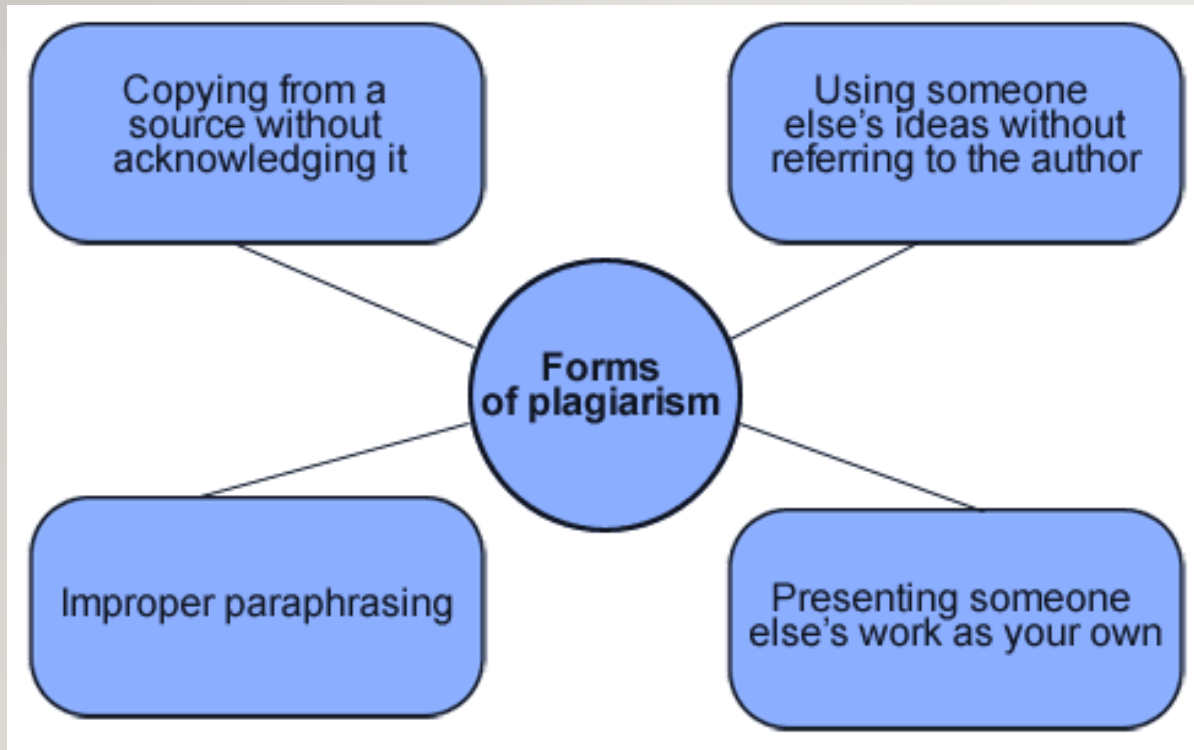
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- What does an introduction do (and not do)?
- What does a conclusion do (and not do)?



# WHAT TO AVOID

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

# WHAT TO AVOID

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- **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

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- **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

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- Endnote
- Zotero
- Mendeley
- Delicious