

Missouri Baptist Heritage Scholarship Research Paper Writing Guide

Southwest Baptist University (SBU) and Hannibal LaGrange University (HLGU) are cooperating with the Missouri Baptist Historical Commission to offer one \$2,000 scholarship to freshman or sophomore students attending SBU and one \$2,000 scholarship to freshman or sophomore students attending HLGU.

Each \$2,000 scholarship will be established through a \$1,000 donation from the MBC Historical Commission and a \$1,000 match from the school.

Applicants must do research and write a paper **on some aspect of Missouri Baptist history**. All papers must be submitted by no later than April 1 for the fall semester of that same year.

Paper Format Requirements

1. Use standard MLA format with the following exceptions
 - a. 14 point Times New Roman font
 - b. 1 inch borders
 - c. Footnote on each content page that contains Page number, persons name, and church
 - d. Title Page with the following included.
 - i. Title of Paper
 - ii. Author's Name, address and phone number
 - iii. College applied for (HLG or SBU)
 - iv. Church Attended and pastors name
 - v. Date Submitted
2. Require 10 pages minimum and 20 pages maximum content, does not include Title Page and Works Cited pages.
3. Have a clear propositional thesis statement (preferably on the first page) that states what you intend to accomplish with the paper. Use the body of the paper to establish your thesis and a conclusion to wrap it up. (Note: it is often a good idea to re-state your thesis in your conclusion and explain how the body of your paper proves it).
4. Require a minimum 4 primary and 4 secondary sources. If possible, never site an internet address. If you acquire a reference from the internet you must attempt to find its original source.
5. Deadline for submission is April 1 for the fall semester of that same year.
6. Submissions may be either a "hard copy" via paper or submitted via email or CD in .PDF, .doc, or .wpd formats.
7. Provided within this guide are Tips on doing the research, Tips on formal writing and Key features of a good research paper. These tips and keys are not merely suggestions. They will be used as a guide when grading the research paper.

Tips on doing the research

- ▶ Choose a very narrow and specific subject. Stay away from general themes.
- ▶ Start your research immediately, gathering information bit by bit and allowing time to thoughtfully read and digest it in your mind.
- ▶ Organize your research as you go to avoid redoing the same work.
- ▶ Develop a working outline early, but make it flexible. Let the research drive the shape of the outline, not the reverse.
- ▶ Begin by searching journal articles, and use the bibliographies provided in these articles to lead you to further sources.
- ▶ Include a significant amount of primary source material on your topic. These are sources that were written by the person under discussion, or during the time period under discussion.
- ▶ Never rely on a source that cannot be documented.

Tips on formal writing

- ▶ Use clear simple sentences with strong verbs. Sentences that are too long often lose clarity and focus.
- ▶ Avoid passive verbs. This makes your writing weak.
- ▶ Write in the third person. Do not slip into the informal second person “you” or the first person “I” or “we”.
- ▶ Write in the simple past tense.
- ▶ Do not trust grammar and spell checkers to catch every error. They cannot catch certain errors, such as the difference between *there* and *their*.
- ▶ Do not use clichés or slang.
- ▶ Do not use contractions (*do not* instead of *don't*).

Key features of a good research paper

1. **A clear propositional thesis.** This is a statement of opinion or interpretation. This is not simply a purpose statement. For example, the following is a purpose statement: “This paper will explore the life of the sixteenth-century German reformer Martin Luther.” A thesis statement is more like: “More than any other individual, Martin Luther was the catalyst that sparked the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth-century.” A thesis statement is a propositional/declarative statement that you seek to establish or prove with the rest of the paper. The thesis statement must appear within the introduction. Typically, it should appear toward the end of the introduction. After the thesis, a good paper goes on to supply supportive evidence and argument for it. NOTE! You will not form a thesis until you have done a good amount of your research. Most often a good thesis results from the research done to answer an interesting, investigative question.

2. **Good internal logic and organization.** A good research paper exhibits evidence that the writer has properly digested the material. This becomes evident, not just in a clear, well stated thesis, but also in the manner in which the body of the paper is organized. The paper should have a logical flow that leads the reader through a coherent progression of thought. Each major section should have a clear purpose for its inclusion in the paper. There is no rule about how many major sections of body you may need. Let the content of your research determine the logical and natural division of the body of the paper. The body should be free of logical contradictions of information that becomes confusing or ambiguous.

3. **Creative introduction and conclusion.** The “meat” of the paper is in the body where you unpack all your research and present the evidence and argument that supports your thesis. Your thesis should be stated at the end of your introduction and reworded in a restatement in the conclusion. However, at the beginning of the introduction you want to draw your reader in with some attention-grabbing statements or questions, which like a funnel will narrow until you introduce your thesis. In the conclusion, the paper should begin with a restatement of the thesis (reworded), and then finish with some broader statements about the subject. Again, this is where you may shine through your creativity.

4. **Evidence of research.** The majority of work in a research paper is the research itself, not the writing. You must spend the proper time in the library, discovering the relevant sources, and discerning what information to include. Your goal should be to discover all the sources you can that will inform you well on your subject, not to just reach the minimum of sources required in the assignment. Of course, it is not expected that your research is exhaustive, but only adequate for your topic. A paper will clearly demonstrate in its content, if you have done adequate research or not.

5. **Well written and conforms to proper style.** Although content is of major concern for your paper, proper grammar and style are not unimportant. A paper should be written in grammatically correct paragraph and sentence form. Do not list anything! A paper that is poorly written distracts from what could be good ideas and good research.

Have someone proof your paper. This is essential if English is a second language to you. Or, read your paper backwards by sentences, making sure that each sentence is free from errors, and that each one is clear by itself.

If you are serious about competent and scholarly work then two books are essential:

Bradley, James E., Church History: An Introduction to Research, Reference Works, and Methods. Eerdmans: G.R. Michigan, 1995.

Fischer, David Hackett., Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought. First Harper Torchbooks: N.Y, 1970.

If you have any questions about this writing guide you may contact commissioner Dr. Mark Carpenter at pastor@baylessbaptist.com. Please make sure any contact is well before the deadline of handing in the paper.

Note: The Historical Commission is not required to grant any scholarships. Thus, scholarships may be awarded provided any papers presented not only meet with the minimum requirements, but if they also receive consensual agreement from the commissioners that they deserve consideration.