



Making Sense in Religious Studies A Student's Guide to Research and Writing, 2nd Edition

Northey, Margot; Anderson, Bradford A.; and Lohr, Joel N.
Oxford University Press, 2015

Book Review

Tags: religious studies | student learning | teaching writing

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This second edition, like the first, is part of a series of volumes directed towards beginning college students. Margot Northey is the first author of each volume, including the eighth edition of the general *Making Sense: A Student's Guide to Research and Writing*, and there is considerable overlap among the different volumes that focus on specific subject areas. Distinctive to this book is a short chapter, "Getting to Know Religious Studies," and the incorporation of examples from the study of religion into many of the other nineteen chapters. Nonetheless, the focus is primarily on those general processes of thinking and self-expression that are common to many college courses. Because it does not focus narrowly on a specific area of the undergraduate study of religion, this book could easily be recommended, or even required, reading in virtually any course. Some instructors might find some of the advice to be too elementary, but there is helpful material for almost any student, including chapters on "Common Errors in Grammar and Usage," "Punctuation," and "Misused Words and Phrases," as well as a glossary. Since scholarship on religion uses a variety of ways of documenting research, the chapter that outlines the requirements of the Chicago, MLA, and APA systems of reference and charts the differences among them could be especially helpful to beginning students.

Throughout the book, the authors urge students to think of themselves as "engaged learners" who aim to make the most of their education by taking careful notes, seeking out their teachers, preparing for writing assignments well in advance, and using feedback on their work to identify both strengths on which they can capitalize and weaknesses that need to be remedied. Consequently, the portrait of the ideal students to whom the book is addressed may strike some as insufficiently tempered by the harsh realities of sporadic attendance, bored

indifference, and atrocious time management with which so many teachers in higher education are familiar. Nevertheless, the authors offer concrete advice and some step-by-step procedures that can help any student move towards becoming the type of engaged learner that they envisage and who many would love to have in their classes.

The focus of this volume is squarely on writing, with more than half of the chapters devoted to some aspect of the writing process, including writing essays (with a separate chapter on comparative essays), writing book reports and book and article reviews, writing essays for tests, and "Writing with Style." Complementary chapters address finding and using appropriate sources and documenting them properly. Although the book briefly discusses reading religious texts, teachers who are looking for guidelines about how to introduce students to the kind of careful, patient, analytical reading of texts, objects, films, field observations, and other sources frequently used in the study of religion will need to look elsewhere. Nonetheless, this is a book that could be helpful to many teachers of religious studies.

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