

Common Writing Errors of D.Min. Students

Below you will see multiple errors that we commonly see in written work. If you are a new student, please note these errors when they occur in your papers and work to correct them in future submissions. If you are a returning student, you will probably recognize that we have raised the bar when grading papers with these errors. These errors are unacceptable in doctoral writing and especially within the final written project; thus, we want you to learn to correct them now.

Style Errors

1. Capitalizing a word that should be lower-case; e.g., “I am the Pastor of the church.”
Have a clear reason for capitalizing.
2. Boldfacing or underlining words for no apparent reasons.
3. Failing to italicize (rather than underlining) book titles.
4. Using the symbol “%” instead of the word “percent” in the text of a paragraph.
5. Using split infinitives; e.g., “Be sure to quickly pay your bill” should read, “Be sure to pay your bill quickly.”
6. Using semi-colons incorrectly. A semicolon is generally used *in place of a conjunction* between two independent clauses; e.g., “John knew that missionary life would be difficult; he had served previously for two terms.”
7. Writing run-on sentences; e.g., “I need to do my work, please give me some time to do so”).
8. Writing fragments rather than complete sentences; e.g., “I remember great VBS experiences. *Like the time that I was nine.*”
9. Committing comma errors—particularly overusing them. Have a clear reason for using a comma.
10. Failing to begin a footnote on the same page as the footnote number.
11. Failing to note the speaker of a direct quote: “Many churches have low expectations” should read: Rainer says, “Many churches have low expectations.”
12. Writing a number less than one hundred in a paragraph as a numeral; e.g., “87” instead of the words “eighty seven”

13. Using the word “thing.” This word is nebulous and means little.
14. Using a “naked this”; e.g., “This is a good idea” should read, “This idea is a good one.” Always follow “this” with a noun.
15. Using incorrect footnote forms.
16. Failing to capitalize the words “Bible” and “Scripture.” The words “scriptural” and “biblical,” however, should not be capitalized.
17. Overusing passive voice; e.g., “The church was led by a good pastor” should read “A good pastor led the church”
18. Failing to use page numbers.
19. Formatting the cover page improperly. Be sure to follow the seminary style guide.
20. Failing to proofread. Errors that should have been caught with a thorough proofreading suggest too little attention given to the paper.
21. Using improper pronouns; e.g., “A Christian should read their Bible,” should read “A Christian should read his Bible,” or “Christians should read their Bibles.”
22. Misspelling “its” and “it’s.” “It’s” always means “it is” rather than the possessive.
23. Capitalizing divine pronouns (*His, He, Him*) in formal academic writing. Keep these words in lower-case.
24. Starting sentences with “there are” or “there is.”

Other Types of Errors (particularly in book reviews)

1. Giving too much summary and too little analysis. You should assume that we know the contents of the book. Summary should not exceed one page.
2. Failing to support conclusions. If you say that a book is not good, *tell us why*. Be specific, including citing page numbers from the text reviewed and Scripture references where appropriate.
3. Failing to think critically. No book is perfect; do not claim, “No weaknesses exist within this book.”
4. Overstating the case without evidence; e.g., concluding that “His opinion is deplorable,” without describing why you reach your conclusion.

5. Using “feeling” statements, e.g., “I feel that . . .,” “I believe that . . .,” “I think that . . .”
If you have written this paper, we can assume that the beliefs are yours.
6. Writing at a less than doctoral level. Colloquial statements, humorous statements, and slang words seldom work in doctoral papers.
7. Using too many extensive quotes from a book. Block quotations (though sometimes helpful) can appear to be filler.
8. Making *too much* application to your ministry setting. While we want you to make some application, this component of a book review should be concise.
9. Failing to cite specific page numbers from the text reviewed. Do so in parentheses in the body of the paper rather than in footnotes.
10. In general, you are permitted to use first person; however, there should be few times in a book review when first person is needed (introduction and conclusion only). Again, if the paper is yours, we assume that the opinions are yours.
11. Formatting issues should be observed closely in book reviews:
 - a. 2” margin on the top of the first page of the book review (preceding bibliographic information)
 - b. 1” for all other margins throughout the rest of the review
 - c. 0.7” indentation when starting a paragraph
 - d. Two single-spaced lines between sections of the review
 - e. Parenthetical references go *after the quotation marks* of the material being quoted and *before the ending punctuation*. EXAMPLE: Chuck Lawless avers, “DMin students must continually strive to communicate clearly and concisely in their writing” (42).

Final Considerations

1. Utilize the following formula for writing your book reviews unless directed to do otherwise by your seminar professor. Be sure to include headings to divide sections of the review:
 - a. **Introduction** – ½ page (one or two paragraphs)
 - b. **Summary** – 1 page (approximately 23 lines of typed text)
 - c. **Critical Evaluation** – 3 pages of text
 - d. **Conclusion** – ½ page (one or two paragraphs)
2. Be clear and concise. A five-page limit allows no room for wandering from your objective.

3. Use your spell-checker, but do not trust it. A spell-check will not catch the error in such sentences as “The whole church voted too pass the amendment.” Use your eyes as well as your spell-checker.
4. Proofread your paper. Finish the paper, and proof it. Lay it aside, and proof it again at a later time. If you do not catch your errors, someone else will.