REL 331 Online Research Paper

The minimum requirements are:

- MLA style
- 1,500 word count (no maximum)
- Five sources cited
- Word count stated on the first page (five points deducted if this is missing)

Refer to the Resources link for information on MLA style format.

The topics must be relevant for this course, but that is a very broad criterion.

Religion is a “field of fields”: it includes religious reflection, philosophy, history, literature, art, music, and so on. For this course, with its premium on personal experience, you may wish to write a paper on some meaning-related issue that is currently important to you. For example:

- “How do I relate my faith in a good God with all the suffering in the world?”
- “What about Christianity (or Islam, etc.) is most important for me?”
- “What sort of religious experience should I give my children?”
- “How can I as a gay person live a religious life?”
- “I’m divorced and remarried; what place is there for me in the Catholic Church?”

In these examples there would of course still be a need to cite relevant sources, give reasons, and try to justify your views.

There are the usual topics such as:

- Meditation, mysticism, psychology, and religion (William James, James Fowler, Ken Wilber).
- Music (ancient or contemporary – Gregorian Chant, Negro Spirituals, Praise songs) or architecture (cathedrals, Quaker meeting houses).
- A time period: Florence at the time of the Renaissance, the Sixties in the US.
- Individual persons and their challenges: Thomas Merton, Leo Tolstoy, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, John Kennedy, Lech Walesa, John McCain, Barack Obama.
- Ethical and social justice issues: capital punishment, just war, stem cell research, national health care, abortion, birth control, assisted suicide.
Grading Criteria

Characteristics of a very good paper:
- Integrates personal observation and knowledge in an insightful way.
- Provides concrete examples from the sources to support observations and interpretations.
- Integrates prior readings.
- Uses parenthetical documentation (MLA style) to show how the sources are being read and to document sources.
- Shows tolerance and humility.
- Has correct spelling and grammar.
- 1,500 or more word count.

Characteristics of a good paper:
- Integrates personal knowledge and observation in a relevant way.
- Refers to examples from the sources to support observations and interpretations.
- Refers to prior readings in a relevant way.
- Uses parenthetical documentation (MLA style) to show how the sources are being read and to document sources.
- Has largely correct spelling and grammar.
- Shows tolerance and humility to authors, classmates, and instructor.
- 1,500 or more word count.

Characteristics of an acceptable paper:
- Has a personal response to the sources.
- Alludes to sources to support position.
- Uses parenthetical documentation (MLA style) to show how the sources are being read and to document sources.
- Has spelling and grammar that need improvement.
- Shows tolerance and humility.
- Minimum of 1,500 words.

Characteristics of an unacceptable paper:
- Does not have a personal response but simply repeats material from other sources.
- Does not document sufficiently or at all.
- Does not have minimum word count.
- Is late without prior arrangements being made.