

## Writing 20 – Writing About Religion and Politics

Seth Dowland

### E1 – Coming to Terms

Over the last week, you have read various journalistic accounts about the intersection of religion and politics. Our class discussions have focused on several elements one should identify when reading these pieces: tone, evidence, key words and phrases, contextual details, and point of view. Additionally, you have written blog posts or comments (or both), in which you must quickly and fairly capture other people's arguments, even as you articulate your own. None of this is especially easy, even though the reading we've done thus far is relatively "light."

For this assignment, I'd like for you to "come to terms" with one of the articles we've read together as a class (i.e. not one that showed up only on the blog). As you will discover while reading *Rewriting*, coming to terms involves highlighting the pieces of a text that are important in *your* reading. For this assignment, what that means is that I don't have an "answer key" for each of the articles we've read; I'm not looking for you to hit upon the most important point or describe a given article in a particular way. Rather, I want you to draw a picture of the article you choose in your own words, taking care to highlight how and why the author you're analyzing writes in the ways that he does. Keep *Rewriting* close by as you're writing a draft of this essay; I'll expect you to "define the project of the writer in your own terms, note keywords or passages in the text, and assess the uses and limits of this approach" (Harris, 15). Remember that coming to terms with a text requires interpretation and analysis; it is *not* simply a restatement of an author's thesis. Rather, you're trying to capture the author's *project*; doing so means that you must discuss not only the thesis but also the author's intent, which is implied by the article's structure, use of evidence, and point of view.

Judging intent can quickly become subjective, so I encourage you to focus on using *specific examples* from the text to illustrate your points. And when you use an example, don't simply drop it in the paper and move on. Tell readers *why* that particular example is important and how it advances your analysis. Also, be sure to cite both direct quotations and paraphrase; use parenthetical citation in your essay, like this (FitzGerald, par. 6). And finally, don't forget to set aside time for editing and proofreading. After reading your first draft, you may want to re-arrange your argument or select new evidence. But you need to allow time to do that – and you also want to make sure to fix grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, and typos.

**Purpose:** Coming to terms is a necessary first step in academic writing. Being able to articulate *your* perspective on a piece of writing without shortchanging it is both difficult and essential. So consider this assignment a chance for you to practice "coming to terms" before moving on to the more evaluative writing moves we'll work on in coming weeks.

**Logistics:** E1 should run **500-750 words**. It is due at **12:00 noon on Wednesday, September 10**. Please save your file as <lastname – 9.10.08.doc>, post it under "Assignments" on Blackboard (click SUBMIT, not SAVE), and bring a hard copy to class.

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### E2 – Forwarding

As you read David Chappell and William Martin’s accounts this week, I hope you noticed some features that distinguish academic writing from other types of writing. One of those features is overt references to the work of other writers, usually found in parenthetical citations or footnotes.

But citation of other sources does not mean academic writers are simply repeating what others have already said. Rather, academic writers attempt to build on other scholars’ work in order to make new arguments, to press beyond what’s already been said. That’s what I’d like for you to do in this assignment. I want you to *forward* the work of Chappell or Martin in an analysis of an article about religion and politics. (You may choose an article that we’ve read for this class, an article that appeared on the blog, or an article you found on your own. The only requirements are that the article is reasonably substantial (400 words or more), published by a news organization, and not the same as the article you wrote about in E1 or BP1.) Successful essays will both *come to terms* with the article and *forward* Chappell or Martin in the analysis of the article. Thus, you should choose an article that covers a topic related to the issues discussed in *Stone of Hope* or *With God on Our Side*. As you read Harris for Tuesday’s class, think about how you might *illustrate, authorize, borrow, or extend* Chappell or Martin’s work in an analysis of the article you’ve chosen.

Although I am asking you to draw on Chappell or Martin, I encourage you to make your references to them seem natural rather than arbitrary or forced. Help readers see why the analysis (or examples, or terms, or themes) of Chappell or Martin can help make sense of the article you’re analyzing. Your final draft should provide a succinct account of the article, identification of a particular issue the article raises, forwarding of Chappell or Martin, and a coherent point of view that runs throughout the essay. As usual, take time both to *revise* and *edit* your essay.

**Purpose:** Using other scholars’ work to advance your own projects is an important part of academic writing. It is also self-conscious way of acknowledging the reality that good academic writing depends on the work of others (and on careful reading of said work!). So use this assignment to practice “forwarding” the work of Chappell or Martin. This move will become increasingly important as you take on bigger projects.

**Logistics:** E2 should run **750-1000 words**. It is due at noon on **Wednesday, September 24**. Please save your file as <lastname – 9.24.08.doc> and post it under “Assignments” on Blackboard (click SUBMIT, not SAVE). Cite sources in MLA format and include a works cited page at the end of your essay.

### E3 – Countering

In the third chapter of *Rewriting*, Joseph Harris writes, “Countering looks at other views and texts not as wrong but as *partial*—in the sense of being both interested and incomplete. In countering you bring a different set of interests to bear on a subject, look to notice what others have not” (56). Your job in this assignment is to use some of your knowledge about the relationship between religion and politics to *counter* Chappell or Martin.

Here’s what I’d like for you to do. First, you should look through some of the primary documents I’ve put up on Blackboard (under Course Documents). There are extended selections from Martin Luther King, Jr., and Jerry Falwell, key leaders of the civil rights movement and of the religious right, respectively. Choose one of these men to focus on, and analyze how they treat a particular issue (e.g. abortion, nonviolent resistance, family values, black power – there are plenty to choose from). Then, go back over sections of *Stone of Hope* (if you’re looking at King) or *With God on Our Side* (if you’re looking at Falwell) to see how Chappell or Martin approaches that issue. As you review their work, think about how your view may differ from Chappell or Martin’s, based on your reading of the primary documents. Next, you should construct an essay that *counters* Chappell or Martin. You can do this in a number of different ways; Harris describes three of them in his chapter (arguing the other side, uncovering values, and dissenting).

Countering is inevitably adversarial, but your goal is not to make Chappell or Martin seem stupid. (They’re not!) Rather, I want you to select some piece of their project that seems incomplete or even misguided, and I would like for you to write about *why* that piece of *Stone of Hope* or *With God on Our Side* seems to miss the mark. As Harris writes at the end of chapter 2, countering typically requires more attention to a text’s claims and phrasings. I expect that you will spend longer analyzing (and deconstructing) a particular piece of the book you choose to counter than you did in the previous assignment. At the same time, you’ll need to draw on the primary documents to support your countering. That is, don’t simply say that Chappell (or Martin) is wrong; show why you think their argument is incomplete by drawing on other sources you’ve read. You may also use secondary texts to support your argument. (You can, in fact, draw on Chappell to counter Martin, or vice versa.)

The goal of this assignment is for you to construct an argument that makes the case for a reading of an issue that differs in some meaningful way from Chappell or Martin’s reading. Don’t think you have to “disprove” their books entirely; you can’t do that in a short paper (nor would it be wise to try). Instead, focus on building up a case for a different understanding of one aspect of the relationship of religion and politics.

**Purpose:** Countering is among the most difficult moves that academic writers use, and yet being able to disagree with another intellectual in meaningful and gracious ways is crucial in establishing your own voice. Use this assignment to practice tactics and strategies for countering that you will weave into bigger projects down the road.

**Logistics:** E3 should run **750-1000 words**. It is due by noon on **Monday, October 6**. Please save your file as <lastname – 10.6.08.doc> and post it under “Assignments” on Blackboard (click SUBMIT, not SAVE). Cite sources in MLA format and include a works cited page at the end of your essay.

## ME1 (Major Essay 1) – Revising Your Work

The essays you have written thus far have asked you to practice various “moves” characteristic of academic writing: coming to terms, forwarding, and countering. I assigned these essays because I thought it was important for you to focus on writing moves one by one. But academic writers rarely make these moves in isolation, and the boundaries among them are fluid. A writer may, for instance, come to terms with and counter a text simultaneously. Moreover, as we discussed in class, these writing moves are tactics rather than strategies. Coming to terms, forwarding, and countering are only worthwhile insofar as they help you pursue your own intellectual project.

So, for your first major essay, I’d like for you to construct your own intellectual project that incorporates the writing moves, texts, and discussions we’ve covered in the first half of the semester. To begin, I suggest you choose one of your three essays to serve as the basis of your revision. Choose a piece to work on that still interests you, one that you feel you can do more with. As you plan your revision, ask yourself how you might add to, reshape, and refine your first draft. What more might you say about the issues or texts you are discussing? Are there examples you could add, sections you could move or delete, paragraphs you could rework or sentences you could rephrase? And don’t just focus on the points and examples from that essay; work on including other texts and points you made in other essays and blog posts. You may even draw from other students’ writing as you shape your essay. As you revise, you might find that your major essay draft bears little relationship to your shorter essay. Or you might find that your major essay becomes a revision of two different essays. Or you might find that you want to revise a blog post you wrote, because that’s the most interesting piece of writing you’ve done this semester. All of those things are OK! I want you to think about ways you can *broaden*, *deepen*, or *redirect* your initial analysis. Revising your writing in such a thorough way acknowledges the evolving nature of your thinking and writing, and I want to give you as much space as possible to pursue lines of thinking that interest you.

Successful essays will provide a **strong argument** that guides the reader throughout the essay, offer **compelling evidence** (including some historical evidence) that supports the argument, employ a **logical structure** that builds to a climax and significant conclusion, and draw on **multiple texts and writing moves** (please use at least one additional text that you didn’t consider in the original piece). The goal of this assignment is for you to produce a sophisticated and polished piece of academic writing about the relationship of religion and politics.

I will ask you to take your writing through a number of stages:

1. Submit a complete **first draft** no later than **noon on Wednesday, 10/15**. You should post this draft on the Discussion Board. This draft should run 1500-2000 words, and it should be edited and proofread thoroughly. Two of your peers will write extensive workshop critiques of your draft in preparation for small-group workshops on **Thursday, October 16**. I want your group-mates to focus on your argument, evidence, and structure – so please minimize spelling and grammar errors.
2. Bring a **revision plan** to a one-on-one conference with me. (Conferences will be held on Monday, 10/20, and Tuesday, 10/21, in lieu of class on Tuesday, 10/21.) A revision plan is a short document in which you identify the main critiques raised by your peers during the workshop and offer concrete ideas about how you will revise your essay in response to these critiques (e.g. one of my peers thought I needed more evidence to support claim X, so I’ve decided to write paragraph Y and insert it after paragraph X).

3. Make revisions and submit a **final draft** no later than **9:00 am on Friday, 10/24**. You should post this draft under Assignments. It should run 1500-2000 words. This draft should include proper citation and a works cited page, and it should follow syllabus guidelines for written work. Additionally, you should submit a brief (<200 words) memo that explains how your piece evolved from essay to first draft to final draft (please just append this memo to your final draft and save it as one file).

**Logistics:** MP1 should run 1500-2000 words. Please use proper MLA or Turabian citation (details to come in class), and include a Works Cited page. As you write your essay, feel free to draw on previous in-class writings, other short essays, and/or class conversations.