An Ally Center Writing Guide

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS

Writing a personal doctrinal statement is both challenging and deeply valuable. Use this writing guide to plot out your writing journey to success. Remember, articulating your faith is not only needed to complete your theology classes, it is a necessary life skill.

THINK

Nearly every theology class at LBC requires the creation of a doctrinal statement. Although the purposes of writing these papers are similar, their formats may vary from class to class. Therefore, it is key to understand the prompt correctly. Some questions to answer before you begin writing your doctrinal statement are:

1. Do I need to structure my paper in a paragraph or bullet-point format?
2. Should my paper follow MLA, APA, or SBL formatting?
3. Am I required to write out of first or third person?
4. Has the professor given examples to visualize proper formatting?
5. Has the professor given me specific topics or do I have to break down general doctrinal categories?
6. What depth of biblical support do I need?
7. What type of resources (e.g. class textbooks, systematic theology books, etc.) am I required to use?
8. What resources are recommended? What resources am I not allowed to use?

Are any of these questions not answered by the assignment prompt in the syllabus? Then don’t hesitate to ask your professor. Many of these requirements are easy to follow at the beginning but are difficult to adjust when your first draft is complete.

OUTLINE & RESEARCH

Research for your doctrinal statement will happen in three primary categories.

1. Reference your **Bible** as the primary means to understand the various theological topics. When using Scripture, be careful that you are not reading into the text but rather letting key passages define your view on the required topics. Ask you professor to help you identify what verses connect to what topics.
2. Use the structured overview of **systematic theology books**. These reference works help you get a broad overview of the topics, find helpful Scripture passages, and will follow a good structure for your paper. Ask a librarian to help you identify solid systematic theology books.
3. Lastly, harness the resource of **historical doctrinal statements**. You are not the first Christian to undertake the challenging but valuable task of articulating your beliefs. There have been many individuals and groups that have written general and specific doctrinal statements in the form of creeds, confessions, and catechisms throughout the centuries. Both your professor and library staff can help you find these types of resources.

If you are struggling with identifying or interpreting research, be sure to schedule an appointment with an Ally Center theology mentor. They will help you overcome these kinds of content-specific hurdles.
As you might have guessed already, a typical doctrinal statement does not have an overarching thesis statement. Therefore, use this phase in the writing process to develop topic sentences for each sub-section.

An excellent topic sentence for any doctrinal statement makes one clear and concise claim about a certain topic. For example, in the topic of bibliology your topic sentence for inerrancy might be the following: **I believe that God’s Word is without error in its original manuscripts.**

This is your paragraph (or sub-section) mini-thesis from which you will explain your view, counter other beliefs, and explain the implications. A helpful way to effectively organize your thoughts is to group your acquired information and appropriate verses under the individual topic sentences of your paper. As you work through the phases of the doctrinal statement, feel free to adjust and modify your topic sentences.

Don’t skip over the thesis/topic sentence phase too quickly. The more work you put into defining your beliefs in topic sentences, the easier and faster you will be able to write out your content.

**WRITE**

After thoroughly understanding the prompt, creating working topic sentences, and doing broad research, you are finally ready to write the first draft of your doctrinal statement. Follow these three suggestions to make writing your first draft both efficient and effective.

1. Work hard to **keep your doctrinal statement clean, clear, and concise.** Depending on your professor, you will only want to devote around ten sentences to each topic. Finish your paragraph by including the Bible references instead of quoting the entire verses.

2. Be aware that “**orthodoxy happens in community.**” Join one of the Ally Center’s doctrinal statement writing groups, or gather a group of friends together to discuss the various topics in your statement. In those kinds of conversations you will find views, perspectives, and ideas that are vital to articulating your beliefs.

3. Remember **there may be a variety of orthodox positions on certain topics.** Your professor will likely discuss this tension when he explains the assignment. No matter your position, you’ll need to support your views from Scripture and church history. Don’t be afraid to articulate what you believe, just be sure to sufficiently prove it.

Follow your outline closely to provide sound structure to your draft. It may be difficult to say exactly what you want at this point, but remember, it’s the rough draft! The key is to start writing.

**EDIT & REVISE**

Have someone look over your paper with you, and “zoom out” to consider your position, support, and format. At this stage, you’ll want to revisit your topic sentences to ensure that they concisely reflect your belief on each topic. You’ll also want to identify the necessary changes in grammar, spelling, sentence structure, word choice, etc.

The final step is to make the necessary edits to your paper. This is where you’ll actually make the changes you’ve identified in the revision phase. You may need to repeat this process again in order to ensure that you’ve done your best work. The editing phase is an excellent time to schedule a visit at the Writing Center. Whether you come in person or connect with the writing services online, you will receive concrete steps and personalized feedback for your doctrinal statement.

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1 Francis A. Schaeffer, The Church before the Watching World (Downers Grove, 1971), page 62.