Writing a personal paper, such as a journal entry or a personal philosophy on a particular subject, often feels like a very open-ended assignment. With this guide, you can narrow your focus and keep a structured approach in your writing. The key to writing a Personal reflection or philosophy paper is to articulately express your perspective while maintaining a structured approach.

**THINK**

The first step in writing your personal paper is to clearly understand the specifics of the assignment. As you begin your assignment be sure to ask yourself the following questions.

1. What is the purpose of this assignment?
2. Should my paper follow MLA, APA, or SBL formatting?
3. What sources are we required to use for this assignment?
4. Am I required to write out of first or third person?
5. What depth of biblical background and support do I need?
6. Is a thesis required for this assignment?

If the answer of one of these questions is not found in the syllabus, then feel free to contact your course 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**

Begin by forming a thesis statement or overarching purpose to your paper. Depending on the length of the assignment, identify one to three primary areas of focus in your paper and list them in the introduction of your paper.

1. After you have identified your primary areas of focus, write out an outline putting down your overarching thoughts on the subject.
2. If needed, include biblical sources and any supporting evidences from books, journals, articles, etc. However, the main focus of the paper is what you think about the topic.
3. Detail your outline having a point for every paragraph of the paper. The outline is not something that is set in stone. As you write the paper, make changes to the outline and keep a structured approach.
**WRITE**

Now that you have laid the foundation of your paper, it is time to write. Remember this is just the rough draft and not everything needs to be perfect. Don’t expect yourself to write the final version the first time around.

1. Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence that clearly and concisely states the main point of the paragraph. Each topic sentence must relate to the thesis in some way and give a supporting point or argument.
2. Using your outline, write the first draft not overly concerning yourself with grammar and punctuation, instead focus on putting your thoughts on paper.
3. Focus on providing reflective and thoughtful statements about what you personally believe and think about the subject. If appropriate, use personal examples, and illustrative language to express your point of view going beyond clichés and general statements.

**EDIT & REVISE**

Editing is a very important stage of the writing process where you assess your writing making sure that it meets the requirements of the assignment. The rough draft is just the beginning of the process. Editing refines and improves your writing to become academic in tone.

1. Have someone look over your paper with you, and “zoom out” to consider your position, support, and format. At this stage you will want to revisit your topic sentences to ensure that they concisely communicate the supporting evidence and how it relates to the topic.
2. The main emphasis in the editing stage is answering the question, “Do I thoughtfully and personally respond to the assignment prompt?” Have someone read over the paper with you to determine if the concepts of your paper clearly communicate your intended purpose.
3. Once you are satisfied with the structure of your paper, focus on the grammar, punctuation, spelling, and formatting of the paper.

The final step is to make the edits to your paper. You may need to repeat the editing and revising process multiple times. This is an excellent time to schedule an appointment with the Writing Center. Whether you come in person or connect online, you will walk away with concrete steps to fulfill your academic writing potential.

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