Writing Assignments

During this semester, there will be three writing assignments due. None of the assignments are long; however, be sure you plan them in advance as I expect you to write well-organized papers that show genuine thought and understanding. I also expect correct grammar and spelling in your papers.

Format

Your papers should be double-spaced with one-inch margins. Use 12-point Times New Roman font. You may use your favorite form for references as long as it contains enough information that I can find the source myself.

I want you to submit your papers electronically as attachments to an email. Microsoft Word, Word Perfect, or Open Office files are acceptable. If you wish to use another program, please check with me in advance. Submit your papers to me at Lawrence_Rees@byu.edu. All papers are due at midnight on the dates indicated.

Context Paper

| Topic due: | Sept. 11 |
| Class discussion: | Sept. 18 |
| Paper due: | Sept. 23 |
| Length: | 2 ½ to 3 pages written text (format as described above) |
| Topic: | Some aspect of history or culture in the United States during the period of 1830–1844. |
| Images: | Optional, but do not count as part of the 2 ½ to 3 pages. |

To understand the Doctrine and Covenants, it’s important to gain some appreciation for the history, ideas, beliefs, and lifestyles of the period. Although this won’t be the primary focus of our class, I want you to gain a little knowledge about some aspects of life in the 1830s and 1840s. On Sept. 11 I’ll have you tell me the topic you have chosen. Based on these topics, I’ll divide the class into groups of about five students each. On Sept. 18 you will give an informal presentation on your topic to your group. Your presentation should last seven minutes. A three-minute question and answer period will follow. The written paper will be due Sept. 23.

The range of topics can be quite broad and should reflect your personal interests. Try to find a topic that would have application to the Church’s early years. Some possible ideas include:

- **Style:** Women’s clothing, men’s hairstyles
- **Humanities:** Popular music, hymns, American novels, folk art
- **Politics:** Whigs, Democrats, Jacksonian democracy, Martin van Buren
Economics: The Panic of 1837; bartering, credit, and hard cash
Everyday life: food, homes, family life, holiday observances, firearms
Religion: seekers, Shakers, desists, Campbellites
Social systems: communitarianism
Science and engineering: medicine, Henry and induction, transportation
History: westward expansion, slavery, states’ rights and threats of secession

This paper is due early in the semester so that we can have this contextual background as we begin our readings. Hence, I don’t expect a lot of in-depth research in this paper. Internet sources are acceptable as long they seem reputable. I want you to have fun with this assignment; don’t agonize over it.

**Topical Guide**

Topics due: Sept. 4
Begin writing: Now!
Paper due: Dec. 11 (the last day of class)
Length: At least 6 pages (format as described above)

Before you start your reading of the Doctrine and Covenants, you need to choose three topics as follows:

- Topic 1: Something you don’t know much about.
- Topic 2: Something that seems specially interesting to you.
- Topic 3: Something that is fundamentally important to you or that you are passionate about.

I would suggest looking through the Topical Guide in your scriptures or online at [http://scriptures.lds.org/en/tg/contents](http://scriptures.lds.org/en/tg/contents). Find a topic with a number of references in the Doctrine and Covenants Sections 77 – 138, so you will have enough to write about. Choose some serious topics (probably not “hair,” for example). I want your topics submitted by next class period!

After you have chosen your topics, I want you to look carefully for references to these topics as you do the required readings from the Doctrine and Covenants. (I expect you to find more references than are listed in the topical guide!) Each time you find a reference write down a one line entry such as you find in the Topical Guide. Following that write a sentence or two about what the scripture means. For example:

D&C 98:10  *honest* men and wise men should be sought.
In seeking redress for grievances, the Lord directed Joseph Smith to seek and uphold honest and wise men in political offices.

I would suggest writing your Topical Guide daily while you’re reading, otherwise a simple (and hopefully enjoyable) assignment will turn into something that’s frustrating. I’d also recommend backing up your work regularly.
For this paper, I want you to choose one of the three topics from your Topical Guide and tell me about the insights you gained during the course of the semester. By “insight,” I mean something new that you learned or came to believe during the course of the semester. These insights may come from reading the scriptures, pondering, hearing ideas in talks or classroom discussions, etc. I expect the sections of the Doctrine and Covenants that we study to be a significant source of your insights.

Your insights should be concrete. It’s fine to write that you received a deeper conviction of the Law of Tithing and how much more you appreciate it now, for example. But I also expect you to write about what you learned about tithing and why you gained a deeper conviction. For example, you might say that tithing is consecration, and that consecration is the law upon which Zion must be built. That is, concentrate on ideas, not feelings. (I don’t discount your feelings, but for purposes of the paper, I really want to know about your ideas.)

The paper isn’t just a “report” on a topic. It’s fine to quote sources such as general conference addresses or devotional speakers when those quotations helped you to receive insights about the gospel. But you need to discuss the insights that came from the quotation.

There are a few more things I don’t want in this particular paper: 1) I do not want this paper to be about experiences from your past; I want it to be about insights you gained this semester. 2) I do not want you to discuss (except perhaps very briefly) the history of your writing the paper. 3) Don’t add “filler” because the paper is short. That is, don’t add material that doesn’t contribute to the development of the ideas in the paper. For example, if your topic is consecration, don’t devote a paragraph to how important the scriptures are because they teach us about consecration.

This differs from the Topical Guide Paper in two ways: 1) you may include any sources that help you gain a deeper understanding of the principle you chose, and 2) you need to synthesize your ideas into a coherent, well-developed paper rather than just make a list of disconnected thoughts.