

Dominican School of Philosophy & Theology Rubric for assessing academic research skills

The following table is intended to guide students and faculty in connecting skills related to professional academic research and writing. Flowing from the skills related to the institutional goals, these overarching skills serve as the guideline for research papers and, where relevant, thesis work.

CATEGORY	Failure	Unacceptable	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
Familiarity with current debates/discussions related to a topic of interest, especially with those deemed experts on the topic [IGA1, MAO2-3]	Unable or unwilling to gather sources from identified experts, regardless of their position; a limited understanding and approach to the area	Has a basic knowledge of an area, but reticent to explore a variety of opinions from experts	Has a good knowledge of the area, and identified, but not sufficiently, some experts whose work can support a topic of research	Has a thorough working knowledge of scholars related to the topic of interest but lacks a good balance of pro and con opinions. Too readily focuses on those who agree with reader's perspective	Has a thorough working knowledge of scholars, and chosen a balanced set of experts, whose works will add quality to the proposed topic of inquiry
Ability to develop a thesis sentence that is creative, relevant, and contributes to the current state of research on a topic [IGA2, B1, MAO4-5]	Unable or unwilling to engage the area sufficiently to engender creative thinking; remains unreasonably entrenched in a perspective(s)	Has grasped enough of the area to synthesize information into an interesting thesis sentence but lacks focus.	Has generated a variety of ideas about a topic and there is evidence of the student's attempt to integrate these into a particular thesis sentence. However, the research generally repeats previously disseminated ideas.	Has developed a creative topic drawing upon the work of experts; willing to investigate innovative ways of synthesizing or critiquing current work from various perspectives.	Has defined a creative thesis sentence that flows from current research in such a manner that it contributes to the conversation, by offering original thinking
Familiarity with relevant professional publications (journals, series, books, etc.) [IGA3, MAO3-5]	Has failed (or refused) to take the time to read broadly on the history and ongoing development of a topic	Has some knowledge of the relevant literature, but tends to skew reading in one direction, to the exclusion of other important sources	Has a foundational knowledge of the topic that is balanced, though also skewed or limited in some manner.	Is able to locate and engage with relevant source material so as to formulate a balanced argument	Engages not only with the most relevant sources on the topic, but also with sources that bring new perspectives to the topic
Familiarity with and ability to use relevant online databases [IGA3, MAO3-5]	Has failed (or refused) to take the time to read broadly on the most recent trends and discussions on a topic	Has a basic but insufficient knowledge of most relevant databases and how to use them for research	Is able to use relevant databases to generate useful information to guide research	Is able to explore, identify, and locate a variety of resources within the immediate topic	Has the skill to explore different resources in order to garner the most recent information on the topic of interest and related fields, even outside the immediate discipline

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Ability to locate, review and properly summarize primary sources, presenting the main argument and conclusion [IGA1, MAO 1-3]	Unable to grasp the fundamental argument (thesis) in a work, and/or is often lost in the details	Grasps aspects of an argument, but not able to go beyond the most basic interpretation	Can properly identify and summarize the main argument, though misses important secondary points and/or nuances	Has the capacity to identify both the main argument and secondary points, with an expressed willingness to learn more	Has a sophisticated grasp of the argument, with the ability to relate the information to other arguments within the topic, from a variety of perspectives
Ability to incorporate secondary references (English and other research languages) into research projects in ways that advances the conversation [IGA1-A2, B1, MAO4-5]	Unable or unwilling to read broadly and incorporate opinions outside of one's own paradigm	Reluctant to engage with contradictory opinions, or with contemporary interpretations of primary historical sources	A basic capacity to identify and engage with scholarly interpretations of a primary source(s)	An ability to engage a broad spectrum of opinions and interpretations of a primary source(s)	Engages secondary sources in a manner which promotes a thesis in a balanced and nuanced manner
The ability to formulate an argument, using and expanding comprehensive outlines [IGA3, IGB1, MAO 4-5]	Unable or unwilling to identify a topic that is both scholarly and doable	Able to formulate a topic but unwilling or unable to adjust the topic into a doable project	Creates a doable project that has a clear trajectory as identified by a clear outline	Has a doable thesis statement that is structured into a coherent project with a proper outline	Uses a good outline structure in an iterative manner to develop a thesis statement into a coherent and engaging project
An ability to modify original ideas and conclusions in light of research, producing a fair balanced argument [IGA3, B1, MAO3-5]	Unable or unwilling to synthesize information into a professional research project	Able to synthesize information, but in a limited or biased manner such that foregone conclusions are reinforced	Achieves a coherent argument that incorporates the results of balanced research but lacks nuance and/or innovation	Offers a clear and well-argued conclusion that draws upon balanced sources in an even-handed manner	Presents a clear and balanced argument that contributes to the conversation, even offering new and creative interpretations.