Hermeneutics and Communication

Regina Matthews

Omega Graduate School

September 24, 2024

Professor

Dr. James Strecker

Write a 5-page paper about the need for hermeneutics, or how to intelligently read

the scholarly subject literature and published social research about the topic of your

research interest. Explain why learning how to read scholarly literature is needed to

learn how to do scholarly writing about your research interest. Cite sources from the

seminal course resources and find at least two articles about a topic of your interest.

The student should direct developmental readings from Assignment #2 on the issue of

hermeneutics and a subject of their research interest for this assignment.

2. Paper Outline

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.

b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.

c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

d. Use a minimum of ten scholarly research sources (NOTE: Use at least

five books provided in course resources and the remaining scholarly

peer-reviewed journal articles).

Hermeneutics significantly influences the interpretation of scholarly literature, as it filters texts through personal belief systems, regardless of their origin or authorship. According to Duvall and Hays (2012), “One is engaged in hermeneutics whenever one tries to grasp the meaning of something—be it a conversation, a newspaper article, a Shakespeare play, or an account of past events” (p. 55).

At the beginning of the class, the students had to set aside their misconceptions about hermeneutics. They had previously associated it solely with reading faith-based literature and did not recognize its relevance to scholarly texts. However, they soon discovered that using a faith-based lens still influences how we interpret any literature, as hermeneutics involves analyzing texts through their historical context, intended audience, and the author’s perspective. Hermeneutics is not just an academic or specialized activity but a universal human capability and necessity. It allows us to recognize that interpreting meaning is central to our interactions with the world and with each other.

Educators with a high level of experience often teach students about the author's point of view, but never fully grasped that this concept includes hermeneutics. An author's perspective inherently reflects their beliefs, prior knowledge, and experiences, including their views on religious constructs. Educators may not realize they are guiding students in a hermeneutical approach. As Duvall and Hays (2012) note, "After you have a good sense of the background of the book that contains your passage, you need to identify the historical-cultural context of the passage itself. This involves examining any elements of history and culture that are connected to or mentioned in the passage (e.g., geography, politics, religion, economics, family life, social customs)" (p. 72). This strategy is essential in teaching, as it encourages students to engage with a text by connecting it to their background knowledge and using their existing schema.

Faith-based individuals often seek underlying themes in texts that connect to biblical beliefs and principles. We read scholarly works and later often reflect on our faith based biblical connections. However, adopting a faith-integrated approach while engaging with all types of literature can significantly alter our perspective. For example, if we focus on God being in control of our universe, it impacts how we as faith-based individuals interpret science theories. Regardless of the author’s intent, we must consider the source, cultural background, and beliefs influencing the text.

For example, C.S. Lewis (1898–1963), a British writer, theologian, and scholar, is renowned for his works on Christian apologetics and fiction. His writings are consistently infused with Christological symbolism and deeper messages. Yet, how often do we engage with literature that is not explicitly authored by individuals of faith but still contains covertly spiritual themes? It is necessary to delve into the past of the author and background and connect to their writing. Lewis serves as an excellent model for why we must approach all texts with a hermeneutical lens, carefully dissecting them not only for the author’s purpose but also for our own perspectives.

Our posture when reading all texts inevitably shapes our views and biases. Therefore, it is essential to approach these texts critically, dissecting them and applying practical methodologies to fully understand their content. When we read scholarly texts, we inevitably bring our preconceived ideas and embedded philosophies into our study. Therefore, it is crucial to take a step back and adopt a hermeneutic approach to ensure that we are considering all perspectives, not just our own. In mainstream biblical scholarship, whether historical-critical or narrative-critical, the arrow of communication often fails to reach the real reader positioned "in front of" the narrative text box; they exist outside of it, yet ostensibly in the arrow’s direct path (Moore, 2024).

Leaders in public education must lead both adults and children. Understanding the differences between pedagogy and andragogy significantly impacts how we learn and read. Adult learners and adolescent learners interpret text differently due to their prior knowledge and reason for learning. Teachers teach students various strategies for reading, enabling them to apply these skills as adults to engage with more complex literature. However, adults truly embrace a hermeneutical approach, they can deepen their comprehension of all forms of literature.

Each reading of an article or research piece will compel one to consider the intended audience, the historical context, and the purpose behind the writing. You must study the impact of preserving the rights of Christians in education while remaining faithful to one’s beliefs and upholding the civil rights of everyone within the educational system. Focusing on this area will require one to examine the historical components of education, civil rights, and the laws that have shaped our judicial system for decades. For instance, it will be necessary to adopt a hermeneutical approach grounded in a faith-based worldview to understand the parallels between these two areas. How can one group be granted rights while others are denied? Who was the intended audience when those laws were written? If individuals truly viewed laws, rights, and societal norms through a hermeneutical lens, they might arrive at different truths and interpretations.

Our country was founded on the principles of freedom of religion. Therefore, it’s necessary to study biblical principles and scholarly literature to conclude a precise understanding of how the two should interact, using the biblical inductive approach. “The Inductive Bible Study is a flexible and comprehensive approach to interpretation. It enables the student to follow the evidence within the text and consider various aspects of its existence as necessary to answer questions raised by careful observation (Boyd, 2023).”

It is impossible to adopt a hermeneutical approach to any literature without recognizing that use of the hermeneutics originated from the desire to uncover the core texts of the time, namely, the Holy Bible. If this is the case, then it becomes essential to apply these original principles to all texts to gain a clearer understanding of literature. A key aspect of hermeneutics is the historical and cultural context of a passage, which is crucial for interpreting texts in a way that integrates knowledge of their original context with contemporary understanding. As George (2021) states, “broadly, however, the concept of the hermeneutical circle signifies that, in interpretive experience, a new understanding is achieved not on the basis of already securely founded beliefs.” This key factor reinforces that there is still space for the reader to include their own thoughts and preconceptions when reading any text.

In Grasping God, Duvall and Hays examine the concept of the principlizing bridge, which helps us connect the author's purpose with the main theological theme of the text. They explain that “in it you are looking for the theological principle or principles that are reflected in the meaning of the text” (Duvall & Hays, 2012, p. 52). When using the principlizing bridge enables readers to understand the writer's intent and the historical context in which the text was created, allowing the audience to connect it to our present time. When applied to all literature, this approach encourages readers to consider not only who wrote the text but also who the intended audience was, facilitating meaningful connections for the reader.

In education, teachers continually strive to help students interpret texts, answer questions while reading, and debate the validity of their findings. Familiarity with debates in hermeneutic theory can enhance our appreciation for the interpretive complexities we encounter daily and enable us to become more thoughtful interpreters (SAGE Publications, 2014). Hermeneutics plays a role in all areas of study, and the social impact of the time of the writer integrates into the writing. A distinctive characteristic of hermeneutics is that it is not merely a discipline but rather a body of knowledge and debate that arises from issues in various fields of study (Hodge, 2024).

A fundamental goal of hermeneutic is the interpretation of text, however societal norms, beliefs, and knowledge we possess will impact perspectives as well. Hermeneutics encourages the interaction of multiple criteria in interpretative activities, and it is beneficial to view hermeneutics as fostering a range of dialogues concerning key aspects of the interpretive practice. While examples are drawn from the Christian tradition and its engagement with biblical texts, it is important to acknowledge that each tradition formulates specific issues differently and that hermeneutics can extend beyond texts in the study of religion (Briggs, 2016).

Hermeneutics will always be essential for exploring texts, as interpretation is inherently subjective and shaped by societal norms, cultural influences, and religious beliefs. Consequently, interpretations can vary widely from person to person. A scholarly text may be understood through a faith-based perspective, depending on the audience and the individual analyzing it. Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur are two of the most influential thinkers in hermeneutics. Both philosophers viewed interpretation as fundamental to human understanding, emphasizing that it is always contextual and shaped by cultural and historical factors that often operate beyond individual awareness (McCaffrey et al., 2022). Hermeneutics is a defining trait of our humanity and serves as a foundational element in every field of human knowledge (Zimmermann, 2015). I appreciate the importance of using a "hermeneutical lens," which has transformed my approach to research.

WORKS CITED

Boyd, R. (2023). Allowing the final form full voice: Inductive bible study method.*Religions, 14*(9), 1128. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14091128>

Briggs, R. (2016). *Hermeneutics and interpretation*. Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004249707_vsr_COM_00000350>

Duvall, J. S., & Hays, J. D. (2012). Grasping God's word: A hands-on approach to reading, interpreting, and applying the Bible (3rd ed.). Zondervan.

George, T. (2021). Hermeneutics. In The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2021 Edition, E. N. Zalta, Ed.). Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/hermeneutics>

SAGE Publications. (2014). Hermeneutics.

Hodge, S. (2024). Curriculum work and hermeneutics. The Curriculum Journal, 35, 6–19. <https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.214>

McCaffrey, G., Wilson, E., Jonatansdottir, S., Zimmer, L., Zimmer, P., Graham, I., Snadden, D.,

MacLeod, M. (2022). But is it Hermeneutic enough? Reading for methodological salience in a scoping review of hermeneutics and implementation science. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211070408>

Moore, S. D. (2024). *Biblical hermeneutics without interpretation? After affect, beyond representation, and other minor apocalypses. Religions, 15(7), 755.* [*https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15070755*](https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15070755)

Zimmermann, J. (2015). Hermeneutics: A very short introduction. Oxford University Press