COM 803 Hermeneutics and Communication

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Professor

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**Assignment #3 – Essay**

1. 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).

**NOTE:** I acknowledge using ChatGPT (iPad App) to find sources for and clarify this essay.  I entered the prompt: “The Need for Hermeneutics in Reading Scholarly Literature to Learn Scholarly Writing.” Then, after writing the essay, I used the prompt: ‘clarify the subject matter.” I used the output to edit this final draft.

**The Need for Hermeneutics in Reading Scholarly Literature to Learn Scholarly Writing**

In academic writing, effective engagement with scholarly literature is crucial for developing critical thinking and producing well-argued, clear, and impactful scholarly works. One of the most effective methods to navigate and understand the depth of academic texts is hermeneutics, the theory and methodology of interpretation (Zimmerman, 2015). Traditionally associated with analyzing religious, legal, and literary texts, hermeneutics has expanded into various fields, particularly the social sciences and humanities. As scholarly communication has grown increasingly complex, the demand for tools that promote deeper literature comprehension has become more pronounced (Zimmerman, 2015). Hermeneutics has gained increasing attention as a vital tool for improving scholarly writing by fostering an interpretive engagement with texts. As a method of profound textual interpretation, hermeneutics plays a crucial role in understanding scholarly literature and developing effective academic writing, as it fosters critical engagement with texts, enhances comprehension of complex ideas and contexts, and informs the structure and clarity of scholarly arguments.

Researchers write not just to share their work but to improve it before they share it with others. Researchers write for three main reasons: first, to remember what they have read; second, to see the larger pattern in what they read; and third, to get the information out to others (Booth et al., 2016). In delving deeper into the significance of hermeneutics in scholarly reading and writing, it becomes essential first to understand the historical and philosophical foundations of this interpretative method. Only by grasping the evolution of hermeneutics can the researcher fully appreciate how it became integrated into the modern academic landscape, influencing the interpretation of texts and how scholars approach their work (Booth et al., 2016).

Initially rooted in theological studies, Hermeneutics has developed into a broader interpretative framework applicable to diverse forms of literature, including scholarly texts. Over time, the focus of hermeneutics shifted from religious exegesis to a more general philosophy of interpretation (Zimmerman, 2015). Key figures such as Friedrich Schleiermacher emphasized the importance of understanding a text within its context, paving the way for hermeneutics to expand into fields such as history, law, and sociology. Philosophers like Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur built upon these ideas, contributing significantly to the broader application of hermeneutics by arguing that the process of interpretation is a dialogue between the text and the reader. The dialogue between the text and the reader is influenced by both the author's intent and the reader's preconceptions, positioning the reader as an active participant in the meaning-making process (Schmidt, 2006).

This dynamic interaction between text and reader aligns with the ever-evolving nature of scholarly writing. In literary works, writing is not merely a passive act of summarizing or presenting established knowledge but an active engagement that seeks to expand, critique, and reinterpret existing literature. Therefore, understanding hermeneutics as a foundational element of interpretation offers invaluable insights for those aiming to learn scholarly writing. Reading academic texts is not merely about extracting information (Gadamer, 1997). Still, it involves an interpretive act that connects the text's meaning to contemporary contexts and the reader’s intellectual horizon. This reflective process, often called the "fusion of horizons," allows the reader to engage with texts in ways that transcend surface-level comprehension (Booth et al., 2016).

Moving beyond its theoretical foundations, hermeneutics offers concrete strategies that scholars can use to engage deeply with texts. These strategies are taught to enable students to better understand how texts are written and function within their disciplinary contexts. Students can see the relevance of hermeneutics for reading and improving their writing (Haack, 2009).

Building on interpretation as a dialogical process, hermeneutics is vital in scholarly reading by revealing the underlying assumptions, methodologies, and historical contexts that shape academic arguments. Literary texts, particularly within specialized fields, are often dense and written within specific disciplinary conventions. Hermeneutic reading allows students and researchers to go beyond surface-level comprehension and engage deeply with the layers of meaning embedded in a text (Duvall, et al., 2020).

Rita Felski argues that authentic scholarly engagement requires more than a superficial understanding of what a text concludes. Instead, scholars must examine how arguments are constructed, how evidence is used, and how texts position themselves within broader academic conversations (Felski, 2015). Hermeneutics thus encourages readers to consider not just the "what" of a text but the "how" and "why" behind its creation. The interpretive approach fosters critical engagement with academic literature, enabling readers to appreciate scholarly texts' form and function.

Hermeneutics facilitates the identification of patterns and structures within texts that may take time to be apparent. For instance, by utilizing a hermeneutic approach, a reader can examine the conditions under which knowledge was produced critically. It is essential in fields like history or cultural studies, where the context of production plays a pivotal role in shaping the interpretation of evidence (SpringerLink, 2024). Rather than passively accepting the text as authoritative, the reader, through hermeneutic methods, learns to scrutinize how authors use rhetorical strategies, build arguments, and engage with other scholars. This process is essential for scholars-in-training, as it provides models for effective academic writing (ATLAS.ti, 2024).

Hermeneutics is particularly useful in qualitative research, where understanding complex phenomena often depends on interpretative methodologies. The iterative process of reading and re-reading texts allows scholars to refine their understanding and contribute more critically to their fields (Sire, 1978). This is especially evident in disciplines such as law, medicine, and social sciences, where narratives are often layered with meaning and require a careful, reflective approach to unpack.

The benefits of hermeneutics extend beyond reading into the practice of scholarly writing itself. Scholars learn to approach their writing rigorously and transparently by engaging with texts through an interpretive lens. This is particularly important in academic contexts, where the communication of complex ideas must be both precise and accessible. Engaging with scholarly literature through hermeneutics provides students with a blueprint for structuring their arguments and writing (Zimmermann, 2015). As scholars read texts with an eye toward interpretation, they learn the content and gain insights into how the text is organized, how arguments are constructed, and how conclusions are framed. This reflective process is crucial for developing writing that is not only coherent but also persuasive. As scholars create their work, they can draw on these models to shape their arguments and organize their writing in ways that resonate with academic standards (Schmidt, 20020).

For example, postmodern hermeneutics, which emphasizes the plurality of interpretations and the influence of power dynamics in textual analysis, teaches scholars to remain aware of their writing biases. This awareness fosters a more reflective writing process, where scholars acknowledge their positionality and the limits of their interpretations (Rodrigues, 2024). The importance of reflexivity cannot be overstated, as it contributes to the transparency and rigor expected in academic discourse. Integrating this reflective process into writing can lead to more critical, self-aware academic contributions (Rodrigues, 2024).

The iterative nature of hermeneutic interpretation allows scholars to refine their arguments through multiple drafts. Scholars can develop more robust, coherent arguments by revisiting texts and re-evaluating their writing, considering new insights. This process mirrors the hermeneutic circle, where understanding is deepened through repeated engagement with a text (Felski, 2015).

Despite the clear benefits of hermeneutics for both reading and writing scholarly texts, there are also challenges to its application. The interpretative process is time-consuming and demands high engagement and critical reflection (Zimmerman, 2015). For students new to academic writing, the emphasis on context and the necessity of understanding a text from multiple perspectives can be daunting. Furthermore, the subjective nature of interpretation in hermeneutics may lead to conflicting readings of the exact text, confusing novice scholars.

However, these challenges also present significant opportunities for intellectual growth. The complexities of interpretation encourage students to engage in deeper critical thinking, a fundamental skill in scholarly writing. As students become more comfortable with the hermeneutic method, they can appreciate the richness of literary texts and the diverse ways knowledge can be constructed and communicated (Malan, 2020). Moreover, grappling with different interpretations fosters intellectual resilience, an essential trait for those pursuing academic careers.

Hermeneutics plays a crucial role in both reading scholarly literature and learning scholarly writing. By emphasizing the interpretative process, hermeneutics encourages students and researchers to engage deeply with academic texts, uncovering their underlying meanings, assumptions, and methodologies. This deeper understanding enhances comprehension and informs the development of critical writing skills, particularly in argumentation, structure, and reflexivity. While the hermeneutic approach presents challenges, it ultimately fosters a more thoughtful and rigorous approach to reading and writing in academic contexts. As scholarly communication continues to evolve, the need for interpretative methods like hermeneutics will only become more pronounced, offering valuable tools for future scholars.

**References**

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