

The *Summa Theologicae* (Compendium of Theology) or *Summa* for short, is a massive work of philosophy and theology. It was written as an outline of theology for students of theology. Reading the *Summa* is a daunting task. Part of the difficulty for students new to the text is making sense of the structure of the work.

### Structure of the *Summa*

#### The “Parts”

The *Summa* has three main divisions or Parts. Part I deals with God, Part II deals with Humanity (or Man), Part III deals with Christ. Each Part is composed of a large number of Questions. Part I has 119 Questions. Part II itself has two parts. The First Part of Part II has 114 Questions. The Second Part of Part II has 189 Questions. Part III has 90 Questions.

#### The “Questions”

Each Question is answered or addressed through a series of Articles. There are typically four to eight Articles per Question. You might think of each Question as being similar to a single issue of a magazine or journal that looks at a particular theme or issue or “question”, e.g., “Should the Death Penalty be Abolished?” Such a journal issue would naturally be composed of papers or “articles” by various authors. With the *Summa*, Thomas is the sole author.

#### The “Articles”

Every Article has the same format. The Articles are divided into five (unnumbered) sections:

1. The “title” of the article is given in the form a question (not unlike Jeopardy!).
2. A series of plausible, but either completely or partially incorrect, answers is given. You might think of this as Thomas debating himself. These are labeled “Objections”. These are views that Thomas eventually will reject either completely or will explain in what way they are deficient.
3. Next, Thomas prepares to present his view. He starts off by writing “On the contrary”. This is the *sed contra*. Here Thomas briefly offers the opposite position from those held in the objections. Remember Thomas is not contradicting himself. He’s simply offering both positions on a question. In the *sed contra* he appeals to some authority.

4. Thomas now delivers his full view. This portion always begins with the statement “But I say that” or “I answer that”. This is the *respondeo*. It is here that Thomas gets down to presenting his argument.

5. Last, Thomas returns to clean up the loose ends by offering a reply to each of the “Objections”. This is called the *adversus*.

In each of the five sections of the *respondeo*, Thomas both utilizes philosophical arguments and appeals to “authority” in presenting either the antithesis (the opposing view) or his own thesis or position. The authorities are drawn from four sources: (1) Christian scripture, (2) earlier Christian writers such as Augustine, (3) the Philosopher – a nickname or shorthand Thomas uses for “Aristotle”, and (4) Jewish, Islamic, Hellenistic and Roman commentators on Aristotle or other philosophers. The Islamic philosopher Averroes played an incredibly influential role in the Thomas’ work such that Averroes is typically referred to by Thomas simply as “the Commentator”. Thomas does not always agree with Averroes, but he shows “The Commentator” great respect.

### Citing passages from the *Summa*

When you cite passages from the *Summa* you give the Part number, Question number, and Article number. When referring to a specific reply to an objection, you cite reply by abbreviating *adversus* – “ad” – and then the number of the reply. Hence, the reply to objection 3 would be cited as “ad. 3”. Altogether, then, the citation would look like this:

ST I, Q 2, Art. 2, ad. 2

or simply write:

ST I, 2, ii, ad. 2

or even:

ST I, 2, ii, a.2

Once you’ve got the formula down, it’s easy to figure out the reference: Part, Question, Article, reply to an objection.

Here’s a [table of contents](#) for the entire *Summa* that illustrates its tremendous scope. And from another site, [this](#) gives the titles of each of the Questions and Articles.

So, to sum up the *Summa's* structure:

Question

Article 1

Objections

“On the contrary,” (an authority)

“I answer that” (Thomas’ own arguments)

Question

Article 2

Objections

“On the contrary,” (an authority)

“I answer that” (Thomas’ own arguments)

and on and on and on...