Academic Writing and Theological Research:
A Guide for Students

Kevin Gary Smith

with contributions from
Noel Woodbridge
Mark Pretorius

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Foreword

This book is an excellent guide to both students *and* supervisors.

Clarity in academic writing and research at all levels of academic endeavours is often striven after but not always attained. Very often the fault lies not with the student, but more with ignorance and confusion.

This guide is written in a simple yet engaging style. It aims to introduce the freshman as well as the postgraduate student to the academic requirements for scholarly writing required at college and university for term papers, projects, book reviews and reports. More importantly, this well written volume provides ample guidelines to the crafting of the all important research proposal. The section on the research plan is especially useful as it examines the design, methodology and the bibliography.

But it is also a useful book for supervisors and professors. The specifics and minutia of correct and systematic referencing for a wide variety of situations are not always at one's fingertips, even for seasoned academics, who invariably prefer to deal with the intricacies of the subject matter at hand!

As can be expected, the book deals clearly and systematically with a large body of technical aspects of scholarly writing. Herein lies its major usefulness.

The large number of helpful and illustrative figures and tables will help guide the novice and the seasoned student in the preparation of various aspects of their college and university scholarly writing.

A clearly written section is provided in terms of Exegetical Studies, Systematic Theology and Practical Theology. Each field of study is accompanied by a figure with an orderly plan of execution. The principles provided are adaptable to a number of other disciplines.

Although the book is written from the background experiences of a particular theological institution, the lead author and his co-authors adopt a realistic and inclusive approach to different systems of referencing, including methods of acknowledging electronic and internet sources. They do however call for consistency in referencing when any academic writing is undertaken.

I warmly commend to my academic colleagues this up-to-date guide to academic writing and theological research for their consideration, and possible recommendation to their students.

Prof. Arthur Song[1]

August 5, 2008

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[1] Prof. Song is the former Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Zululand (South Africa) and the former Head of the Postgraduate School at the South African Theological Seminary.

Preface

This book emerges from several years' experience working with both undergraduate and postgraduate students at the South African Theological Seminary. It has a *single purpose —to help theological students write better assignments and theses*. My colleagues and I have witnessed at first hand the struggles and pitfalls facing our students. We felt it was time to put the lessons we have learned on paper in the hope that they will empower future students to learn from their forerunners.

We have divided the work into two parts. Part 1 addresses academic writing in general. It should be relevant to all students, whether they are writing first-year assignments or a doctoral dissertation. Part 2 is written mainly for postgraduate students who are preparing to write a thesis or dissertation. It deals with intermediate to advanced aspects of theological research.

Although I am solely responsible (for better or for worse) for the final writing and editing of every chapter, I am deeply indebted to two colleagues at the South African Theological Seminary for their contributions. Dr Mark Pretorius, our senior assessor, did the research and wrote the first drafts of the chapters on assignment writing and plagiarism. Having

assessed countless assignments, he brings years of personal experience, to bear on the challenges of writing assignments and avoiding plagiarism. Dr Noel Woodbridge has successfully supervised many theses involving empirical research. He is better qualified than I am to write chapters on practical theology and descriptive research. I am grateful to him for having done it. He also contributed substantially to the chapter presenting a design for exegetical research.

Because of the valuable inputs from Noel and Mark, and the fact that the content of the work to some extent reflects the shared experience of the faculty at the South African Theological Seminary, most references to the authors are in the first person plural (we, us and our). When the references switch to the singular (I, me, and my), they point to my personal comments or experiences.

Since we serve at the South African Theological Seminary, our frame of reference comes from the South African higher education system. Although certain aspects, such as the preferred system of referencing and the requirements for length of thesis, reflect local norms, we believe most of the book is sufficiently generic to benefit theological students in general.

Since our framework is theology, we tend to use Bachelor of Theology (BTh), Master of Theology (MTh) and Doctor of Theology (DTh) when referring to the three levels of higher education qualifications. Please feel free to substitute alternate qualification titles, such as MA for MTh or PhD for DTh, if your institution uses these particular titles.

We use the term *thesis* freely for research reports at Bachelor's, Master's or Doctor's levels, while reserving dissertation for the doctoral level. Thus, we can speak of a DTh thesis or a DTh dissertation, but only of an MTh thesis. Some institutions reverse these names, speaking of Master's dissertations and Doctor's theses. This is simply a matter of institutional preference, so be aware that your institution may use these terms differently to the way we do.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to those who have helped make this work a reality: to Dr Reuben van Rensburg, for supporting the initiative; to Jenny Mason, for managing the logistics of publication; to my colleagues and advisers, Profs Arthur Song and Sam Kunhiyop, and Drs Dan Lioy and Frank Jabini, for significantly shaping my thoughts about theological research; and last, but certainly not least, to my beautiful wife, Lyndi, for her support and sacrifice.

Kevin Smith
28 May 2008

Part A:
Academic Writing

In the first six chapters, we deal with the fundamentals of good academic writing. How do I write a good assignment? How do I put a scholarly essay together? How do I reference my sources correctly? How do I maintain integrity in my writing? What should a properly formatted paper look like? These are essential questions for all students. The practical advice offered should prove valuable, whether you are fresh out of high school or you are writing a doctoral dissertation.

Chapter 1 deals with how to write a good assignment. We begin with the most common student pitfall—failing to read the question properly. Then we offer guidance on sourcing information to answer the question. Finally, we examine the three component parts—what goes into the introduction, body and conclusion respectively.

Chapter 2 discusses the do's and don'ts of good academic writing. We examine principles of structuring a coherent argument, look at tips for writing in a strong, clear style, and offer advice about the presentation of the paper.

In chapters 3-5, we turn to referencing sources, a vital aspect of academic writing. We outline the author-date system of referencing, devoting chapter 3 to in-text citation

and chapter 4 to preparing a bibliography. Chapter 5 tackles the thorny issue of plagiarism, which has become an epidemic in higher education due to the ease of copying and pasting information off the Internet.

Chapter 6, illustrating how assignments and theses should be formatted, ends Part A.

Chapter 1:
Writing Assignments

In most higher education programmes, written assignments are the primary form of assessment. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce you to the basics of good assignment writing. Writing an assignment involves two main steps: planning and writing. We shall discuss each stage.

Plan your essay

An English proverb says, 'More haste; less speed'. This certainly applies to writing assignments. The most common cause of resubmitted assignments is hasty writing. In their haste to *write* the essay, students fail to plan properly. As one lecturer said, "Failing to plan is planning to fail!" When you need to write an essay, invest time planning the assignment; you will save more time later.

Understanding the question

The first and most important part of planning an essay is to understand the question. We know this sounds so obvious that you probably will not pay much attention to it, but we have marked thousands of assignments in which the student simply

did not read the question properly. Read the question. Read the question carefully. Read it until you have a crystal picture in your mind of what you are being asked to do.

One helpful way of ensuring you understand the question is to take note of key words in the assignment instructions. The action words, in particular, tell what the examiner expects of you. Pretorius (2008) offers these examples of key words to note:

- *Analyse*: divide the material into sections or elements and discuss these in full.
- *Compare*: identify the similarities and/or differences between ideas, facts, viewpoints, and so on.
- *Contrast*: point out the differences between certain objects or characteristics.
- *Criticise*: point out good and bad characteristics, and give your own opinion after considering all the facts.

If you are not 100 percent sure what a key word means, look it up in a good dictionary. This is especially important if English is not your first language.

Sourcing relevant information

Once you understand the question, you must source relevant information to help you answer it. You may find enough information in the course textbook, reader or study guide to complete some assignments, but others will require extra research in the library and/or on the Internet. It is important to know which sources to use and how to use them.

Expectations in terms of the use of sources vary according to the level of your study. In a first-year assignment, you may get away with only two or three mediocre sources. This would not do in a third- or fourth-year term paper, where you would need to use at least 12 quality resources. In a doctoral dissertation, 250-300 scholarly works is about the norm.

When seeking sources for an academic paper, try to find recent, scholarly works. Scholarly works are well researched; they deal more in the realm of facts than opinions. Peer-reviewed journal articles are probably the best sources. Well-researched books are second best. Internet articles are often poor sources. Although there are many well-researched, scholarly articles on the web, there are also thousands of sub-standard ones. Using only Internet articles is not acceptable.

Authorship is a key to assessing its academic value. If the author is a respected scholar or an authority on the topic, the article should be useful. If the author is just a layman expressing personal opinions, be careful of using it. In Wikipedia, for example, *anyone* can edit the articles; there is a real danger that an article is written by someone who does not know a great deal about the topic. By contrast, most of the articles on www.bible.org are written by respected biblical scholars. Rather use bible.org than wikipedia.com.

Since you cannot always trust the information picked up from the web, here are a few questions to ask when trying to discern what information is reputable and what is not.

- Is the author identified?

- What makes him or her an expert (or at least a trust-worthy source)?
- Is the author with a reputable organisation?
- Is the information biased? Does it push a particular perspective?
- Is the site intended for a specific audience?
- If it discusses an issue, does it present both sides?
- Can you verify factual claims or statements from other sources?

How you use your sources is also important. At the BTh level, you can often get away with citing them uncritically. At the MTh and DTh levels, however, you cannot merely cite and affirm them. You must master your sources, interacting critically with them. At all levels, *interacting* with sources is important. Don't just quote them—discuss, explain and evaluate them. Don't accept everything you read. Decide whether you agree or disagree with an author and why.

Don't overuse a single source. This is a common mistake. Students find one good source and quote it as if it were the only and final word on the topic. Even experts hold different opinions about topics. Whenever possible, try to interact with several different sources, especially ones reflecting alternative views. If, for instance, you are Charismatic in your doctrinal views, don't use only authors who share your persuasion.

How many sources should you cite? There are no hard and fast rules. A fair rule of thumb is one unique work for each page; thus, a 5-page paper would have at least five entries in the bibliography, a 200-page dissertation at least two hundred.

This guideline works well for long papers, but for short papers, you should aim for more than one per page.

The two most important points to remember about using sources are to (a) use sound, scholarly works and (b) interact with your sources rather than just affirming them all. After you have understood the question and relevant information, all that remains is to write the assignment.

Write your essay

Every essay needs three parts—introduction, body and conclusion. The introduction and conclusion are arguably the most important sections of an assignment. Introductions and Conclusions *(*2001:1) states their value well:

> The introduction and conclusion allow a writer to address the overall purpose and significance of an essay. In general terms, the introduction states the intention, while the conclusion defines the achievement of an essay. Together they constitute the frame for your paper, providing the first and last opportunities to convince your reader of its value.

The body is the heart of the essay in which you develop and defend your ideas. To achieve its goals, it needs structure, unity and argument. Let's look at each section of an essay in turn.

The introduction

In most assignments, the introduction is a brief "statement at the beginning of your assignment, which shows how you understand the question and how you plan to answer it" (Pretorius 2008:4). In length, it should be less than 10 percent

of the essay; this usually means somewhere between one paragraph and one page.

Although there is no standard formula for writing the introduction, it should achieve a few basic purposes. To achieve these, you need to:

- *State the purpose (problem) of the essay*. The purpose of the essay is to answer a particular question, that is, to solve a problem. Your introduction should clearly state the problem and/or purpose.

- *Introduce the subject and the limits of the essay*. You must introduce the topic of the essay and indicate which aspects of it you will tackle and which ones fall outside the scope of the essay.

- *Present your central thesis about the topic*. A central claim (thesis) provides unity to a well-constructed essay. In one or two sentences, you should state the main point (central claim) you will attempt to support in the essay.

- *Preview the argument (structure) of the essay*. Give readers advance warning of the main thrust of the argument, that is, how the essay is organised, how the flow of thought unfolds.

After reading your introduction, readers should be able to state the topic of the essay (including its limits), the central claim you are making about it and how your essay goes about making that claim.

The conclusion

The conclusion should bring your paper to a suitable end. "[T]he goal is to make your reader feel that the argument has fully achieved the goals you have set in the introduction" (Introductions and Conclusions, 2001:3). You achieve this by two main techniques, namely, *review* and *summary*. You often begin by reviewing the purpose (and problem) as well as the thesis (main claim) that you set out in the introduction. After reviewing the purpose and thesis, you should summarise the argument and state your conclusions.

Like the introduction, the conclusion should be less than 10 percent of the essay, typically from one paragraph to one page. Pretorius (2008) offers three tips for the conclusion:

- Don't introduce new ideas!
- Don't use direct quotations.
- Don't give detailed explanations.

To prevent your conclusion feeling like a dull rehash of the essay, Introductions and Conclusions (2001:3-4) suggests a few things you can do to keep it interesting. These tips, however, only apply to advanced essays:

- Indicate how your main point fits into the larger field of study.
- Explain the implications of your research and interpretation.
- Make recommendations for future research on related topics.

The introduction and conclusion are so crucial to your essay that a reader should be able to offer a good overview of

the entire essay just by reading the beginning and the end. Therefore, don't be careless in the way you write them. Take time to ensure they embody all the essential information.

The body

The body is the main part of your assignment. It should take up 80-90 percent of the essay. Here you should develop your main argument, supporting your main idea with reasons and evidence. In this section, we shall discuss three essential characteristics of an essay's body:

- Structure
- Unity
- Argument

Structure. The body of an assignment needs a simple, clear structure. This typically needs one level of headings. In some cases, the assignment instructions give you the headings. For example, an assignment about what you can learn from David's sins as reported in 1 Samuel 11-12 and Psalms 32 and 51 might ask you to use the causes, character, consequences and cures as headings. If the instructions do not provide an outline, you must develop a simple set of headings that show the main sections and ideas.

Unity. "Any scholarly paper is, above all, an exercise in stating, developing and defending an idea … (or perhaps a closely related set of ideas)" (Developing a Central Idea, 1999:1). The main idea (or set of ideas) of your paper, often called *the thesis,* is presented in the introduction and developed in the body. The fact that the entire essay *develops*

the main idea gives it unity and coherence. You should ruthlessly cut out everything that does not help to develop your thesis.

Argument. The body of the essay not only develops a central idea, it develops the idea *in a logical way*. In academic writing, the logical development of the main idea is called 'the argument'. Developing an Argument (1999:1) explains:

> A scholarly essay is an exercise in developing and defending ideas. … This analysis and explanation of your claim is called an argument. In effect, the argument of your essay is an answer to the question *Why is the central idea or thesis of this paper valid or plausible?*

An essay written to answer a question typically has two main parts, the *what* and the *why*. The *what* states what you believe to be the answer. The *why* provides your reasons for proposing this answer. Your reasons need to be convincing. "For each step in the defence of your argument, you will need to provide sufficient *evidence* and an *analysis* of that evidence" (Developing an Argument, 1999:2).

Many assignments do not fit the model of one main idea presented in the introduction followed by a protracted argument (set of reasons) to support the claim. Instead, they weave an idea-argument (what-why) pattern throughout the essay. Each section or subsection starts with an idea (claim); the remainder of that section develops it by way of logical arguments (evidence and analysis). Returning to the example assignment based on David's sins, the section on causes might present four causes. Each cause represents a claim or

idea. Each one needs to be argued (that is, the author must present biblical evidence to prove the claimed cause contributed to his sin).

Summary

Throughout your academic career, even if you only do a three-year BTh, you will write dozens of assignments. These will count for the majority of your grades. Mastering the basics of assignment writing will put you in a good position to score good grades. It may also save you hundreds of hours and lots of money on resubmissions. The first essential is to plan your essay before you start writing. In particular, make sure you understand the question correctly. When you get down to writing the essay, ensure that your introduction clearly states the purpose and thesis of the assignment. In the body, check for unity and sustained, persuasive argument. The conclusion should bring the assignment to a clear, decisive end.

Chapter 2:
Scholarly Writing

The goal of academic writing is scientific precision and clarity. You must say *exactly* what you mean, leaving no room for readers to misinterpret you. This demands that two things characterise your writing style—it must be *simple* and *specific*.

The skill of good academic writing does not come naturally to most. It is learned with practice through the pain of writing and rewriting until the product presents a clear, tightly argued and persuasive treatise. The best way to refine your skill is to write—practice produces progress! The second best is to read skilful writers and learn from them. Our objectives in this chapter are modest—to introduce you to some of the most important secrets and alert you to common pitfalls made by novice writers.

Some thoughts about structure

Structure is a key to clarity. A well-organised document that signposts the author's flow of thought at every level is easier to follow than one in which readers need to guess where the author is going and how his ideas relate to each other. This is especially true in academic writing, where the

content is often technical and the relationships between key ideas complex. To help their readers follow their argument, skilled academic writers employ several techniques:

- Triads
- Headings
- Bridging and summarising
- Footnotes

At first, mastering these techniques may seem demanding, but with a little practice, they will eventually become second nature. Let's briefly examine how each one can help you structure your paper for maximum clarity.

Triads

At every level, from an entire dissertation to a single paragraph, you should use *triads* to give your writing clear structure. The idea is simple—every unit of a document should have three parts: introduction, body and conclusion. Unity and progression should mark the journey from introduction to conclusion.

Triads apply at all levels. At the largest level, a thesis should have an introduction that sets out the research problem and plan, a body that systematically analyses the data pertaining to the problem, and a conclusion that summarises the findings. Each chapter of a thesis needs an introduction stating the topic and purpose of the chapter, a body logically presenting the content, and a conclusion summarising the findings and transitioning to the next chapter. Each section within a chapter should have a clear beginning, logical

development and appropriate conclusion. Triads even apply at paragraph level. Most paragraphs begin with a topic sentence that introduces the subject of the paragraph. The body of the paragraph develops the thesis sentence. The paragraph often ends with a summary or bridging sentence. You can apply the same principles to essays, book reviews, journal articles and just about every other kind of academic writing.

Triads at the thesis level. A thesis uses a three-part structure. The first chapter is an introduction, stating the research problem and objectives, describing the research plan and previewing the remainder of the study. The body of the thesis consists of a number of chapters presenting and analysing data. The final chapter is the conclusion. It summarises the findings of the study and makes suitable recommendations for action and/or further research.

Triads at the chapter level. The opening section of a chapter, typically from one to three paragraphs, serves as an introduction. It may position the chapter in relation to the previous chapters. It introduces the main topic, states the thesis of the chapter and previews its flow and structure. The chapter's body, which is typically divided into sections, presents a coherent argument in support of its main thesis. The closing paragraphs typically summarise the argument and bridge to the next chapter.

Triads at the section level. Each major section of a paper or chapter should have an introductory paragraph and a concluding paragraph. These form a frame around the body,

introducing the topic and summarising the main idea(s). The body, of course, presents and defends the main ideas.

Triads at the paragraph level. Most paragraphs have a thesis sentence, which is usually the first sentence. The body of the paragraph develops the thesis by way of explanation, illustration, persuasion or application. The paragraph ends with a summary, conclusion or transition sentence, although a formal ending is not always possible.

Triads mark the basic shape of a piece of writing. This is true at all levels, from a single paragraph to an entire book. However, within this basic framework, headings signpost the skeleton of the argument, making its main divisions evident. Let's examine how to use headings properly.

Headings

Headings, if effectively used, provide a structural skeleton that enables readers to see the logic and flow of a document at a glance. Underline the words *if effectively used.* Most students use headings. Only rarely do we encounter a student who has been taught that an essay should be one long string of text unbroken by headings (if you were taught this, now is the time to unlearn it). Many, however, use headings *ineffectively.* Here are some guidelines for using headings.

Ensure the headings are descriptive of the flow of thought. By surveying the headings, a reader should be able to see at a glance what the logical divisions of your topic are and how the material is organised. The headings summarise the argument. To do this effectively, they must be descriptive of

the content they represent. Consider the example below for an essay on Titus. By looking at the headings, you can tell exactly what each section of the essay will cover and how the essay will flow. The headings describe and summarise the content at a glance.

Use numbering or stylising to distinguish different levels of headings. Readers should be able to identify the heading level at a glance. There are two ways to help them. First, use different font and paragraph styles for different levels. For example, level one could be bold, centred, font size 14, while level two is italics, left aligned, font size 12. Second, you can number the headings. This example combines stylising and numbering:

1. **The background of Titus**
1.1 *The author of the book*
1.2 *The context of the book*
1.3 *The structure of the book*

2. **The themes of Titus**
2.1 *Appointing elders*
2.2 *Teaching sound doctrine*
2.3 *Silencing false teachers*

By using *both* numbers and styles, you can help readers to tell the level of a heading at a glance.

Keep the number of levels manageable. Using too many levels of headings confuses readers. We use headings to provide a clear outline of the argument. When a reader sees a heading numbered 6.2.4.2.8.3, she feels lost and over-whelmed. One or two levels of clearly marked headings

clarifies the flow of thought; more than this tends to obscure it.

How many levels are enough? It depends somewhat on the length of your paper. Excluding the title, two levels of headings are enough for most short papers (for example, essays, articles, and so on). Many book publishers limit writers to one or two levels within chapters. In doctoral dissertations, one may stretch to three or, at the most, four levels. Never go beyond four levels.

Ensure that there are no orphan headings.[2] Always pair headings. They divide sections into smaller sections. To have only one heading is like trying to cut a cake into one piece. Your headings divide your text into two or more pieces. Therefore, you cannot have only one heading at a particular level. Do not do this:

1. **The background of Titus**
1.1. *The author of the book*
1.2. *The context of the book*
1.3. *The structure of the book*

2. **The role of Titus**
2.1. *Titus was an interim pastor*

3. **The themes of Titus**
3.1. *Appointing elders*
3.2. *Teaching sound doctrine*
3.3. *Silencing false teachers*

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[2] Here we are talking about a heading that has no counterpart. There is another kind of orphan heading, namely, leaving a heading dangling at the bottom of a page, separated from the text which follows it. You should avoid both kinds of orphan headings.

In this outline, section 2.1. is an orphan heading. The author should either delete it or add a corresponding section 2.2.

Bridging and summarising

Academic writing requires protracted and, in many cases, complex logical argumentation. The techniques of bridging (also called hinging or transitioning) and summarising help readers to follow the argument. These techniques are so closely related that it is best to treat them as a single aspect of good writing.

Bridging refers to building a connection between two parts of the argument. The connecting sentences or paragraphs function like a bridge, ensuring a smooth transition from one section to the next. The alternative name, hinging, compares the function of these connectors to the way a hinge connects a door to its frame.

You need to build a bridge each time you bring one section of the argument to a close and shift to a new facet. At the very least, this means you need bridging sentences between main sections of an essay. The last paragraph of a chapter and the first paragraph of a new chapter often serve as bridging paragraphs, showing how the two chapters are logically related, how the logical flow of the book or thesis is developed across the two chapters.

Summarising forms a key part of bridging. When you write a bridging paragraph, it typically begins with a brief summary of the preceding argument and then indicates how what is about to follow is the next logical step in the treatment of the

topic. The opening paragraphs of a book or a thesis often illustrate this principle well. They present a brief review of the argument in the preceding chapter(s) and then state how the flow of thought leads logically to the topic for the new chapter.

Students often forget to make explicit the links between their thoughts. They have been living with and thinking about a research topic for a long time. In their minds, the connections between various elements are self-evident. They forget their readers probably have not thought deeply about the topic, so the relationships between ideas will not be clear to them. Do not leave your readers to infer the links; spell them out.

By regularly pausing to summarise your argument and draw readers' attention to the logical links between what you have said and what you are about to say, you help them follow your train of thought. The more protracted and the more complex the argument is, the more important it is to use the techniques of summarising and bridging to ensure the flow of thought is clear.

Footnotes

What role should footnotes play in academic writing? The answer will vary depending on two things: (a) the system of referencing you use and (b) the attitude of your professor, supervisor or publisher. Before we explore how these factors influence the role of footnotes, you need to understand that two different kinds of footnotes are used in academic writing,

namely, (a) reference notes and (b) educational notes. Reference notes credit the sources used, while educational notes supply additional information the author does not wish to place in the body of the paper.

The author-date referencing system does not use reference notes. In the author-date system of referencing recommended in this book (see ch. 3), you do not use footnotes to cite sources. Cite sources in-text by placing the author's name, date of publication and page numbers in parentheses. As a result, papers written using the author-date method of referencing use fewer footnotes than papers which cite sources in notes.

Professors and publishers have different attitudes towards the use of educational notes. At one extreme, some prohibit them—if something is worth saying, it is worth working into the body of the text. The opposite extreme holds that the real scholarship is found in the notes. These encourage extensive use of notes to provide technical information. The middle ground seems like a sensible attitude. Try to work as much as you can into the body of your paper, but, if the nature of certain material is either so technical or so peripheral that it would disturb the flow of thought, put it in a footnote. This means the number of footnotes will depend largely on how technical your paper is. A first-year assignment hardly ever needs footnotes, but a doctoral dissertation may require many.

Triads, headings, bridging, summarising and footnoting give your writing clear structure and logical coherence. Use triads—the three part structure of introduction, body and

conclusion—to structure your writing at all levels. Use two or three levels of descriptive, numbered, stylised headings to provide a clear skeleton of each chapter. The more complex your argument, the more you need bridging and summarising paragraphs to help readers follow the argument. Finally, if you use an author-date system of referencing, do not use footnotes to credit your sources; in-text citations do this. Work as much of your material into the main text as possible, reserving educational footnotes for material that would disturb the flow of thought.

In addition to structural guidelines, your academic writing will benefit by applying some stylistic guidelines. We shall explore a few of the more important ones in the next section.

A few tips concerning style

The style of academic writing differs significantly from everyday writing (for example, letters, e-mails, stories). In the past, an awkwardly formal style was standard. Today, the trend is towards a less formal style. Here are some do's and don'ts to apply to academic writing. Treat them as good general guidelines, not as hard-and-fast rules.

Keep your writing clear, concise and concrete. Formal writing used to favour long sentences, piling one prepositional phrase or relative clause upon another. This style is out of date. Keep your sentences short and simple—the modern way. Favour concrete nouns and active verbs. Do all you can to make your writing reader-friendly. Make it your goal to

write as clearly and concisely as possible. Master writers can say the most using the fewest and smallest words.

Write in a modest, understated manner. What you write is not the final word on the matter. Therefore, be cautious in your claims, tentative in your tone. Your writing should reflect a humble, open, teachable attitude. Don't make bold assertions. Avoid broad generalisations. Modest, understated arguments are the most convincing kind.

Restrained use of the first person singular is acceptable. Using 'I' in academic writing used to be forbidden. Writers were taught to use awkward phrases such as 'the author' or 'the researcher' in its place. Nowadays, using 'I' here and there is acceptable as long as you do not abuse it. Do not, however, use 'we' if you are the sole author of the paper.

Avoid generalisations and inexact statements. Do not use words such as 'all', 'always', 'none', 'never' and so forth unless you mean them literally. For example, do not say 'all scholars agree that …' unless you know there is not a single dissenting voice. Be specific. Say exactly what you mean. If you say 'most experts …', list several of them in a citation. Don't say 'approximately 80 percent' if you mean '77 percent'; be exact.

Beware of overusing bulleted lists. It is legitimate to use bulleted (or numbered) lists when you want to itemise a number of points. Beware, however, of overusing bulleted lists. Students tend to write bullets as incomplete sentences. As a result, they portray unclear, half-baked thoughts. Bullets become a crutch, a mask for a writer's foggy thinking and

lazy writing. Whenever possible, prefer to write your points in a flowing paragraph. When you do use bullets, make sure they express clear, complete thoughts.

Prefer the active voice to the passive. Academic writing must use the passive voice at times, but some fall into the trap of using it most of the time. This causes a dry, lifeless writing style. Whenever possible, write a sentence in the active voice. Try to write at least 80 percent of your sentences in the active voice.

Avoid clichés or colloquial expressions. The move away from overly formal style in academic writing does *not* mean slang or clichéd language is now acceptable. Vyhmeister[3] (2001:92) lists four levels of English (see Table 1) and suggests academic writing belongs in the category labelled 'standard'.

Formal	Standard	Colloquial	Slang
superlative	excellent	first-rate	cool
exacerbating	irritating	aggravating	burns me up
deranged	irrational	crazy	nuts

Table 1: From formal to slang style

For theology students, the great pitfall here is resorting to a preachy style. Do not preach in a research paper. Expressions

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[3] Nancy Vyhmeister's *Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology* is, in our opinion, the most practical general guide to theological research and writing. We encourage you to use it as a companion volume to this book.

like 'hallelujah', 'amen brother' or 'come Lord Jesus' belong in church, not in assignments.

Do not use abbreviations in the text of the document. Limit abbreviations to materials in parentheses or footnotes. In the body of your document, write out words like 'percent' (not '%'), 'that is' (not 'i.e.'), 'for example' (not 'e.g.'). Write out the names of Bible books as well; reserve abbreviations for parenthetical references.

Presentation is a third crucial aspect of academic writing. The way you present your essay can make it look professional or amateurish.

General advice about presentation

Your reader's first impression of your paper comes from its presentation. Does it look and feel like an academic essay? Does it seem like the writer knows how to write an assignment? In the case of assignments, your reader is your assessor. We suspect the impact of this first impression can be worth as much as 10 percent in your final grade because the message it sends up front is, 'Here is a serious, diligent student.' This topic is so important that we shall devote an entire chapter to it later, but a few introductory guidelines are in order here.

Formatting requirements vary from country to country and from institution to institution. Most academic institutions have a description of their formatting requirements. All we can offer here are general guidelines for formatting a paper.

You should adapt these guidelines to fit the requirements of your institution and/or professor.

Paper and margins. In South Africa, the standard paper size is A4, while Letter size is standard in the United States. You will presumably use one of these two paper sizes. For *unbound* research papers, you should leave margins of between 2.5 and 3.0 centimetres on all sides between the edges of the page and the main text (approximately 1.0 to 1.25 inches). For theses and dissertations, which need to be *bound* along the left edge, leave 1 centimetre extra on the left margin. Headers and footers should be set approximately midway between the edge of the page and the text boundaries.

Fonts, line spacing and line height. In South Africa, 12-point font and 1.5 line spacing is standard. In the United States, double spacing is preferred. In footnotes, reduce the font size to 10 point. Where institutions have preferred fonts, Times New Roman or Arial tend to be favoured. Find out what your institution requires.

Theological papers often use Hebrew and Greek text. Standard font sets do not include all the characters needed to type in Hebrew or Greek. Therefore, even if Arial or Times New Roman is the preferred font, you need to use specialised fonts for biblical languages. We recommend *unicode fonts*. For Hebrew, we suggest SBL Hebrew or Ezra SIL; for Greek, BibliaLS or Arial Unicode MS.

One problem you will encounter using these fonts is that they are 'taller' than most normal fonts. As a result, if you set your line spacing on 1.5, lines containing Hebrew or Greek

characters will be higher than those without such characters. This example illustrates the point, using Arial for the English characters and SBL Hebrew for Hebrew script.

> Military terminology pervades the psalm (see Croft 1987:46; Gerstenberger 1988:53; Brettler 1993:140). The superscription presents David 'fleeing' (בְּרֹחַ, v. 1) from Saul. בְּרַח is a distinctly military term (Kalland 1999:131; cf. Richards 1985:282), in the Hiphil meaning 'put to flight, cause to flee' (6 times in Masoretic Text) and 'flee' in the Qal. It occurs three times in the Psalter, once in the superscription of Psalm 57 in the identical phrase בְּבָרְחוֹ מִפְּנֵי־שָׁאוּל ('when he fled from the presence of Saul') to Psalm 3:1.

As you can see, the lines with Hebrew script are taller than lines without. This looks untidy. To solve the problem, do not use a setting such as '1.5 spacing'. This varies from font to font. Instead, set your line spacing *exactly*. Go to your paragraph settings and, under line spacing, select 'exactly'. Then enter a value equivalent to 1.5 spacing. For Arial 12 point, this would be 'exactly 21 pt'. This keeps all lines the same height. Here is the same example as before, but now looking much neater:

> Military terminology pervades the psalm (see Croft 1987:46; Gerstenberger 1988:53; Brettler 1993:140). The superscription presents David 'fleeing' (בְּרֹחַ, v. 1) from Saul. בְּרַח is a distinctly military term (Kalland 1999:131; cf. Richards 1985:282), in the Hiphil meaning

‘put to flight, cause to flee’ (6 times in Masoretic Text) and ‘flee’ in the Qal. It occurs three times in the Psalter, once in the superscription of Psalm 57 in the identical phrase בְּבָרְחוֹ מִפְּנֵי־שָׁאוּל (‘when he fled from the presence of Saul’) to Psalm 3:1.

Justification. Should you set your paragraphs for *full justification* or *left alignment*? This depends on institutional requirements. Although full justification looks neater and most published books prefer it, many seminaries and universities still abide by an age-old tradition of requiring left alignment. We consider either perfectly acceptable but, once again, it is best to check if your institution specifies.

Spelling and punctuation. English spelling varies from country to country. Set your word processor to fit the regional settings required by your institution and use the same forms consistently. For example, if you use ‘English UK’ as your default, you should use ‘colour’ instead of ‘color’ throughout. Consistency is vital. Do not, however, change direct quotations. If it falls in a quotation, leave ‘color’.

In South African and British English, punctuation marks are placed *outside* quotation marks (inverted commas) *unless* the punctuation mark is part of the quotation. In American English, periods and commas are always placed inside the closing quotation mark. Furthermore, in a list of items, US English places a comma before the final item, but UK English does not (for example, ‘salt, light and yeast’ in the UK, but ‘salt, light, and yeast’ in the US).

Even if English is your fifth language, there is no excuse for having the kinds of spelling and punctuation mistakes in your assignment that the 'spelling and grammar' checker on your word processor will identify. If, referring to a shopping centre, you type 'maul' instead of 'mall', it is forgivable because the spell checker will not flag the error ('maul' is an English word); 'maal', on the other hand, is unforgivable. It shows careless or lazy work because any spell checker will flag it as an error.

We shall return to the subject of formatting in chapter 6. Before we do so, we need to look at a crucial aspect of academic writing, namely, crediting the sources you use. This is so important that we shall devote three chapters to it, beginning with in-text citations.

Summary

The goal of academic writing is precision and clarity. Structure is one key to achieving this goal. Using triads, headings, bridging and summarising properly adds clarity to your writing and helps your readers follow your argument. Style and presentation are also important; they either help or hinder your article from achieving its purpose. Try to keep your style strong and simple. Make sure you format the document properly, in a way that says, 'This student knows what she is doing'—it may add 10 percent to your final grade.

We now turn our attention to a critical aspect of academic writing—crediting the sources you use. We shall devote chapters 3-5 to this topic, beginning with in-text citations.

Chapter 3:
In-text Citations

In academic writing, it is imperative that you credit the sources you use. Failure to credit your sources is a form of stealing; we call it plagiarism (see ch. 5). This chapter is devoted to explaining the essentials of how to cite sources using a system called in-text citing. You should study it together with its companion chapter about how to compile a bibliography.

The advantages of in-text citations

Our preferred method of citing sources is known as *in-text citation* or *author-date referencing*. In the past, theological publications used a footnote-based referencing system. In the old system, whenever you cited or alluded to a source, you would add a footnote indicating your source. The new method indicates the source in parentheses in the text of your paper. This explains the name in-text citation. Since the in-text citation typically consists of the name of the author(s) and the date of publication, some call it the author-date method.

Why are many scholars moving from footnotes to in-text citations? There are two main reasons. First, in-text citations take less space than footnotes. If you read academic articles

which use footnotes, you often find footnotes taking up half the document. A 20-page article may have as many as 100 footnotes. Even if the note only has a few words, it occupies two lines of text. In-text citations occupy less space. Second, footnotes disrupt the flow of the document more than in-text citations do. Each time you encounter a footnote, you need to break your train of thought and look at the bottom of the page to obtain essential information about the source (endnotes are worse—the information is not even on the same page). In an economical way, in-text citations alert you to the essential information right where you need it.

The elements of in-text citations

In-text citations provide answers to three questions: (a) Who? (b) When? (c) Where? They indicate *who* you are quoting, *when* the source was written and *where* in the document your quotation can be located. Therefore, a complete in-text citation usually has three parts:

(a) *Author*: the first part of an in-text citation gives the surname(s) of the author(s). This immediately credits the people whose ideas you are using. It also helps readers locate the full source in the bibliography, which is arranged alphabetically according to authors' surnames.

(b) *Date*: the date of publication follows the author's name. This aids the reader in two ways. First, it distinguishes different sources by the same author.

Second, it indicates how recent the cited source is; recent works carry more weight than older ones.

(c) *Page*: when you are quoting from or referring to specific parts of a source, insert page numbers to help readers locate the relevant portion. If you are referring to the entire source without special reference to selected parts, you may omit the page numbers.

Putting the three parts together, a standard in-text citation would look like this: Wilson 2004:132. A single space separates the author's name and the date of publication. A colon divides the date and page number.[4]

How to add an in-text citation

There are two ways of adding an in-text citation to your paper.

If the name of the author appears in the text, place the date and page number in parentheses either after the name or after the quotation. Here are some examples:

Wilson (2004:132) explains, "A series of linking words connect these three psalms."

Montgomery believes "Psalm 73 stands at the theological centre of the Book of Psalms" (1999:149).

Long and White (2006) did not find any conclusive evidence of purposeful redaction in Luke 9:51-19:27.

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[4] There are variations on this style of author-date citations. For example, some add a comma between the author and the date (such as, Wilson, 2004:132); others prefer to separate the date and page number with a comma (such as, Wilson 2004, 132). These minor variations are not important; the most important thing is to be consistent in your method.

Njamini (2002:132-148) explored several potential reasons for
the rising divorce rate amongst Xhosa pastors.

The first two examples contain direct quotations; they illus-
trate the two positions in which the date and page can be
added, either after the author's name or after the quotation. As
a rule, the first option is preferred. The third example refers to
an entire work, so page numbers are unnecessary. Although
the last example does not contain a direct quotation, the page
numbers indicate the portion of the work where the relevant
information can be found.

*If the name of the author does not appear in the text, place
the author, date and page number in parentheses at an
appropriate place in the sentence*. Consider these examples:

There "remains little doubt that Luke 9:51-19:27 depicts a
literary journey rather than a literal one" (Bosman 1992:94).

The majority of commentaries (for example, Williams 1984;
Bond 1991; Long and Brown 1995; Mahlangu 2002; Smith
and Ngi 2006) believe Paul wrote Ephesians.

The allusions to illness in Psalm 6 "may be metaphors for
spiritual or national suffering" (Mills 1999:24; cf. Jabini
2004).

The full citation typically follows a quotation (first example).
The period (full stop) comes *after the citation*; other than the
closing inverted comma, there is no punctuation mark
between the end of the quotation and citation. The middle
example lists a number of sources without any direct
quotation. In the last example, the direct quotation comes

from Mills; Jabini is a second source supporting the same idea.

When you include a block quotation, the same two approaches can be used. The citation could look like either of these examples:

> Pollock (2007:198) clarifies the approach as follows:
>
> > When faced with an ambiguity in the Greek text that he cannot retain in translation, the translator should place the likelier interpretation in the text and the alternate rendering in a footnote.
>
> It is not always possible to translate word-for-word.
>
> > When faced with an ambiguity in the Greek text that he cannot retain in translation, the translator should place the likelier interpretation in the text and the alternate rendering in a footnote (Pollock 2007:198).

In each of the examples so far, the source had author, date and, where necessary, page numbers. Sometimes your source does not have all three elements. Here are some tips for handling variations.

How to handle variations on the main elements

Not all in-text citations follow the standard formula of author, date and page. What if a book has six editors instead of an author? What should you do if no author is named, as often happens with websites? What if there is no date? Electronic books often do not include page numbers; what then? How should you reference a chapter or a section?

We cannot look at every possible problem you might encounter, but we can explain how to handle common problems. If you understand the principles involved, you should be able to solve other problems.

Problems related to *the author*

You will encounter two opposite problems with respect to the author part of an in-text citation: no author and too many authors.

If the work has no author, substitute the title for the author. If the title is long, abbreviate it. The example shows how you could cite an anonymous Internet article called 'The doctrine of salvation in the preaching of George Raymer'. Please note the abbreviated title and the comma after the title.

> "Jesus died to atone for our sins" (The Doctrine of Salvation, 2007:3).

For the sake of clarity, you may choose to capitalise the title like a heading (for example, The Doctrine of Salvation, 2007:3) or place inside inverted commas (such as, "The Doctrine of Salvation", 2007:3). As usual, what really matters is consistency.

If the work has 3-5 authors, list all the names in the first citation; thereafter, cite the first author followed by 'and others' (or et al.).

First citation:	Brown, Smith, Wilkins and Rebuli 1998:14
Later citations:	Brown and others 1998:29
or	Brown et al. 1998:29

If the work has 6 or more authors, cite it using the first author followed by 'and others' (or et al.).

> "If we abandon our belief in the doctrine of creation, our belief in the atoning work of Jesus makes no sense" (Flanagan and others 2004).

Occasionally you will use source documents that have an *organisation as author*. This often happens with government bodies, organisational reports and institutional documents. In such cases, substitute the name of the organisation for the author. If the name of the organisation is long, write it out in full the first time, but place an abbreviation in square brackets after it; thereafter, use the abbreviation to cite it.

First citation:	South African Theological Seminary [SATS] 2007:12
Later citations:	SATS 2007:19

Many students err when citing *an article from an edited book*—they cite the editor(s) of the book rather than the author of the article. You should cite by the author of the article. For example, Wood was the senior editor of the third edition of *The New Bible Dictionary* (1996), while Dunn wrote the article 'Baptism'. If you cite from this article:

Incorrect:	Wood 1996:120
Correct:	Dunn 1996:120

The only time you may substitute editor(s) for the author is when the source does not indicate who wrote the article; in such cases, you may substitute either the editor(s) or the title for the author. If a Bible dictionary was edited by Young and

Kunhiyop, but gives no indication who wrote the article 'Baptism' you could cite it in either of these ways:

(a) Young and Kunhiyop 2006:423
(b) Baptism, 2006:423

When citing by title, a comma separates the title from the date (see example b). Whichever option you choose, your bibliography entry must match. These would be the corresponding entries.

(a) Young LP and Kunhiyop S (eds) 2006. *The African Bible dictionary,* 420-428. …

(b) Baptism. 2006. In LP Young and S Kunhiyop (eds), *The African Bible dictionary,* 420-428. …

Problems related to *the date*

Most problems related to *the date* spring from the rise in electronic media. Websites often fail to indicate the date an article was written or published. Electronic books (e-books) may give two dates, namely, the date the printed edition was published and the date of the electronic version; which one should you cite? The content of an online article may change regularly (for example, Wikipedia), so the *exact* date on which you accessed it becomes crucial. Using the examples below as guidelines, you should be able to work out how to handle most situations.

If a source gives no indication of the date it was written or published, you may use the abbreviation 'n.d.' for 'no date'. This is the traditional way of referencing books that give no publication date.

Example of 'no date':   Tucker n.d.:249

If an e-book gives publication information for both the printed edition and the electronic edition, use the date of the electronic edition. Cite the version you are using, that is, the electronic edition. For example, the Logos edition of Warren Wiersbe's book *Be Holy* indicates that the printed edition was published in 1994, but the electronic edition in 1996. The correct form would be:

Correct: Wiersbe 1996:31   (date of electronic ed.)
Incorrect: Wiersbe 1994:31   (date of printed ed.)

If a website does not indicate the date the source was written or uploaded, you may cite it by the date you accessed it. This is not ideal, but it is better than citing it as 'no date'. If you accessed a dateless online resource on 14 January 2006, you would cite it in-text as 2006.

Where do you locate the date of publication in a book? Usually on the left-hand page behind the title page. If you look at this page in Johann Mouton's *How to Succeed at Your Master's and Doctoral Studies,* this is what you will see:

Published by Van Schaik Publishers
   1064 Arcadia Street, Hatfield, Pretoria
   All rights reserved
   Copyright © 2001
   . . . .
   First edition 2001
   Second impression 2001
   Third impression 2002
   Fourth impression 2003

Which date should you cite? The publication date is the date of the copyright or the edition, in this case 2001. The other dates are simply reprints. If a book has been through more than one edition, you may see something like this:

> First edition 1984
> Second edition 1993
> Third edition 2004

In this instance, cite the latest edition, namely, 2004.

Problems related to *the page*

The purpose of including page numbers is to help readers locate the relevant section of the source. Page numbers are not the only way to point readers towards a particular section of a source. Here are some variations on the use of page numbers.

In some circumstances, you may omit any reference to a specific part of the source. In these cases, you simply give author and date (for example, Cook 2004). These are common situations in which this guideline applies:

- You are referring to the whole source rather than to a specific part of it.
- You are citing a work without any page numbers and none of the other guidelines apply.
- You are citing a commentary's discussion of a specific scripture.

In many sources, section numbers provide an ideal means of referencing. Many documents number sections. We have seen this in web documents, theses, grammars, lexicons and

legal works, to name just a few. If a source contains both page and section numbers, you may choose to cite it by page or by section. Use the symbol § to point to a section number.

Example from Strong's lexicon: Strong 1996:§1499
Example from a dissertation: Smith 2007:§2.3.2

You may cite a chapter number instead of a page number. This happens in two situations: (a) if you are referring to an entire chapter rather than a specific part of a chapter or (b) if an electronic source has chapters, but not pages. When citing by chapter, use a comma instead of a colon to separate date and chapter number. You may choose to write out the word 'chapter' or to abbreviate it as 'chap.' or 'ch.' Here are some examples:

Wilson 2002, chapter 3   or   Wilson 2002, chap. 3
Ndlovu 1997, chapters 3-7 or   Ndlovu 1997, chaps 3-7

When citing dictionaries or lexicons, you can use the Latin abbreviation 's.v.' (meaning 'under the word') followed by the entry. The citation below means you can find the relevant information under the lexicon entry for the word '*eimi*', section 2.a.

Kirsten 1997, s.v. *eimi* 2.a

Remember, the goal is to help readers find the right part of the source as easily as possible. As a rule, page numbers are the most helpful way to achieve this goal. However, if page numbers are not available or there is a better way to achieve the goal, use another way of pointing readers to the right place.

Some loose ends

There are four loose ends we need to discuss: (a) how to cite scripture, (b) how to order groups of citations, (c) how to punctuate in-text citations and (d) how often to repeat an in-text citation.

How to cite scripture

The standard way to cite scripture is to indicate the book of the Bible followed by the chapter and verse like this: Matthew 16:18. Note that the chapter number and verse number are separated by a colon. Here are some important rules for citing scripture verses:

- In the text of the document, write out the names of Bible books in full; in parentheses, abbreviate the book names.[5] Compare these two examples:

  > Matthew 18:16 promises, "If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven" (NIV).

  > The word of God promises, "If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven" (Matt. 18:16, NIV).

- Whenever you quote directly from a Bible translation, you need to indicate which translation you are using. Use standard abbreviations for this purpose (for example, NIV for New International Version in the

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[5] Several systems of abbreviations exist. For example, Genesis can be abbreviated Gen, Ge or Gn; 1 Corinthians as 1 Cor or 1Co. Be consistent. If you choose 1Co, you should use 1Ti instead of 1 Tim for first Timothy.

above examples). If you primarily quote from the same translation, after the first quotation add a footnote like this: 'Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from the New International Version.' Then you do not need to add 'NIV' when quoting it.

How to order groups of citations

To emphasise that the consensus of scholarly opinion regards Psalms 9-10 as a single poem, the author of the example below cites twelve scholars who concur with that judgement. This is a common practice in academic writing.

> However, Psalms 9-10 were originally a single psalm, so the heading of Psalm 9 subsumes Psalm 10 (Bratcher and Reyburn 1991; Motyer 1994; Craigie 1998; Broyles 1999; Strugnell and Eshel 2001; Wilcock 2001; Richard 2002; Wilson 2002; Terrien 2003; Miller 2004; Goldingay 2006; Labuschagne 2007).

When you need to cite multiple sources in support of a point, how should you order them? Here are three guidelines:

- You may arrange citations in alphabetical order based on the authors' surnames.
- You may arrange them in chronological order, ascending or descending, based on the dates of publication.
- When citing scriptures, it is standard to list them in canonical order, that is, in the order of the Bible books.

The next aspect we need to discuss is the punctuation of in-text citations.

How to punctuate in-text citations

In ordinary citations consisting of author, date and page, use no punctuation between the author and date, and use a colon between the date and page (for example, Williams 2002:26). If you substitute a title for an author, use a comma between the title and the date (for example, The Names of God, 2007). When substituting other designations for page numbers, replace the colon with a comma before chapters (for example, White 2004, chap. 4) and volume numbers (such as, Wilmot 2003, 4:428), but not before sections (for example, Woods 2005:§4.2).

Use a simple dash (minus sign; for example, 12-14) to denote an unbroken series of pages or verses; do not use an em-dash (12—14) or an en-dash (12–14). If the pages or verses are not consecutive, separate them with a comma.

> (White 2007:19–34 and 94) is incorrect for two reasons: it uses an en-dash between the page numbers; it uses 'and' before the final page number.

> (White 2007:19-34, 94) is correct; it points the reader to pages 19-34 as a consecutive sequence as well as to page 94.

> (John 14:1-4, 9-10; 15:1, 7, 10) is the proper way to cite selected verses from John 14 and 15.

Separate citations with a semicolon. Do not separate them with a comma and do not use 'and' before the last entry in a series.

Incorrect: (Smit 1996, Thom 2001 and Williams 2004)
Correct: (Smit 1996; Thom 2001; Williams 2004)

Incorrect: (Matt 16:18-21, Luke 14:12-14 and John 8:1-11)
Correct: (Matt 16:18-21; Luke 14:12-14; John 8:1-11)

When you work extensively with certain sources, how often must you provide a full citation? This is the topic for the next section.

How often to repeat an in-text citation

When working extensively with a source, must you repeat the in-text citation every time? *The rule is that you must start fresh in each new paragraph.* When you start a new paragraph, you must provide full citation details even if you are still referring to the same source as you were in the previous paragraph. The two paragraphs below show correct practice. Although the citation in the second paragraph is from the same source and the same page as the one in the first, it needs to be repeated in full because it occurs in a new paragraph.

Van Wyk (2001:43) explains that there are three ways we might interpret Psalm 6: as a composite of two fragments, namely, verses 1-7 and 8-10; as the prayer of a sick king whose enemies are exploiting his crisis; or as a national prayer in which the allusions to illness are metaphors for national suffering.

"In my view," declares Van Wyk (2001:43), "the evidence favours the second option." He offers four reasons for this view. First …

Within the same paragraph, these rules apply:

- If a different citation does not intervene, it is not necessary to repeat the citation for subsequent references. If it comes from the same page (or verse or section), the second quotation needs *no* citation; the original citation is assumed to apply. If the second citation refers to a different page, only the new page (or verse or section) number needs to be given. Do this by using the following abbreviations: p. for one page, pp. for than one; v. for one verse, vv. for more than one; § for one section, §§ for more than one.

  > p. 14 = page 14 | p. 14-19 = pages 14 to 19
  > v. 7 = verse 7 | vv. 7-11 = verses 7 to 11
  > §14.1 = section 14.1 | §§14.1-3 = sections 14.1 to 14.3

- If a different citation intervenes, you must provide enough of the citation to make clear what you are citing. The situation occurs when you cite source A, then source B, then source A again. For the second citation from source A, you may give only the name and page number as long as this leaves no doubt about the source's date. If there is any potential for ambiguity, provide a full citation.

  > Mills (2007:144) announced, "A literal interpretation of Genesis 1-3 is no longer tenable." In response to Garrison's (2003:13-27) "case for a literal interpretation", Mills claims, "Dawkins has proved the foolishness of belief in creation" (p. 152).

Summary

Academic integrity demands that you credit your sources. We prefer the *in-text citation* style because it is less space consuming and less disruptive than footnotes. Each in-text citation should answer three questions: Who? When? Where? In most citations, these correspond to author, date and page, but there are many variations on the standard citation.

On their own, in-text citations do not provide enough information to enable a reader to find the source. The in-text citation has a companion entry in the bibliography, which provides more complete information about the source. So how does one compile a bibliography?

Chapter 4:
The Bibliography

Every academic paper ends with a bibliography, a list of resources (for example, books, articles, interviews) used in writing it. In this chapter, we shall discuss how to compile a bibliography.

Types of bibliographies

There are four main types of bibliography: 1) works cited, 2) works consulted, 3) selective bibliography and 4) annotated bibliography. You should select the one that is most appropriate for your paper. When you have selected it, label it appropriately. Do not use 'bibliography' as the heading. If it is a list of works cited, call it 'works cited'. If you use an annotated bibliography, the heading should be 'annotated bibliography'. Let us explain how each kind of bibliography works.

1) *Works cited.* In an author-date system of reference, the bibliography is usually a list of works cited. All and only the works cited in the text of the document are listed in the bibliography, which is headed 'works cited'. The purpose of the works cited list is to enable readers to locate the sources

cited in the paper. Do not list works you consulted, but did not cite.

2) *Works consulted*. This format is more extensive than a list of works cited; it includes all the works you consulted, whether or not you cited them. It indicates all the works that influenced the writing of the paper. Use a list of 'works consulted' to provide your readers with a comprehensive list of works on your topic so that they know all the crucial works you used.

3) *Selective bibliography*. The purpose of a selective bibliography is to list only the most important resources on a topic. It simply points readers to key works.

4) *Annotated bibliography*. In an annotated bibliography, the author adds a few notes after each entry. The annotation provides some information about the resource and/or its significance for the paper. Annotations enrich documents such as research proposals and reading lists.

When writing papers or theses which use an author-date system of referencing, assume that the bibliography should be a list of *works cited* unless you are specifically told to use a different kind of bibliography.

How to compose a bibliography entry

Each entry in a bibliography needs to convey four main pieces of information:

a) who wrote it?   the author

b) when was it published?   the date

c) what is it called?   the title

d) how can it be accessed?   the publication details

There are well-established guidelines for formatting bibliography entries. Although we cannot provide a full discussion of the kinds of sources you will encounter, we shall provide advice for the following common types of entries:

1. Books
   1.1. Standard entries
   1.2. Edited books
   1.3. Editions of a book
   1.4. Translated, revised, expanded or updated books
   1.5. Volume in a series
   1.6. Multi-volume works
   1.7. Article in an edited book
   1.8. Electronic books
2. Journals, magazines and newspapers
   2.1. Journal articles
   2.2. Magazine articles
   2.3. Newspaper articles
3. Online resources
   3.1. The standard format
   3.2. No date available
   3.3. No author indicated
4. Other sources
   4.1. Theses and dissertations
   4.2. Interviews
   4.3. Book reviews
   4.4. Academic papers

Bibliography entries *for books*

1.1. These are the *standard entries for a book* with one, two or three authors. The entry lists each author by surname and initials (no commas or periods except between authors), the date, the title (italicised), and the publication information (place and publisher).

> Smith KG 2007. *How to interpret the psalms: an exegetical guide.* Cape Town, South Africa: Christian Academic.
>
> Smith KG and Tucker LP 2007. *How to interpret the psalms: an exegetical guide.* Cape Town, South Africa: Christian Academic.
>
> Smith KG, Tucker LP and Erdey ZL 2007. *How to interpret the psalms: an exegetical guide.* Cape Town, South Africa: Christian Academic.

1.2. If it is *an edited book*, insert 'ed.' or 'eds' in parentheses after the editors' names.

> Smith KG (ed.) 2007. *How to interpret the psalms: an exegetical guide.* Cape Town, South Africa: Christian Academic.
>
> Smith KG and Tucker LP (eds) 2007. *How to interpret the psalms: an exegetical guide.* Cape Town, South Africa: Christian Academic.

1.3. If the book is not a first edition, add *details about the edition* in parentheses after the title. Use these abbreviations: '2nd ed.' for second edition; '3rd ed.' for third edition; 'rev. ed.' for revised edition; and so forth.

> Smith KG 2007. *How to interpret the psalms: an exegetical guide* (3rd rev. ed.). Cape Town, South Africa: Christian Academic.

1.4. If the book has been *translated, revised, expanded* or *updated* by someone other than the original author or editor, indicate it in this format:

> Smith KG 2007. *How to interpret the psalms: an exegetical guide.* Translated by LP Tucker. Cape Town, South Africa: Christian Academic.

> Smith KG 2007. *How to interpret the psalms: an exegetical guide.* Revised and updated by LP Tucker. Cape Town, South Africa: Christian Academic.

1.5. If the book is *a volume in a series*, such as a commentary series, indicate this after the title. If the series is well known and has a standard abbreviation (for example, Word Biblical Commentary), you may use the abbreviation (that is, WBC).

> Smith KG 2007. *The book of Psalms.* New evangelical commentary 12. Cape Town, South Africa: Christian Academic.

1.6. These examples show how to cite one volume in a *multi-volume work* and how to cite the entire multi-volume collection.

> Smith KG and Tucker LP 2007. *The Book of Psalms* (vol. 1). Cape Town, South Africa: Christian Academic.

> Smith KG and Tucker LP 2007. *The Book of Psalms* (3 vols). Cape Town, South Africa: Christian Academic.

1.7. When you use *an article in an edited book*, you enter it under the name of the author (not the editor) and the title of the article. Thereafter, indicate the editor(s), the title of the book and the page numbers of the article. If the article is unsigned, list it by the title (see last example).

Tucker LP 2007. How to analyse a psalm's canonical context. In KG Smith (ed.), *How to interpret the psalms* (2nd ed.), 114-127. Cape Town, South Africa: Christian Academic.

Tucker LP 2007. How to analyse a psalm's canonical context. In KG Smith and others (eds), *How to interpret the psalms* (rev. ed.), 194-206. Cape Town, South Africa: Christian Academic.

Tucker LP 2007. The book of Nehemiah. In KG Smith (ed.), *The SATS encyclopaedia of the Bible* (vol. 3), 344-345. Johannesburg, South Africa: SATS Press.

The book of Nehemiah. In KG Smith (ed.), *The SATS encyclopaedia of the Bible* (vol. 3), 344-345. Johannesburg, South Africa: SATS Press.

1.8. For *electronic books,* there are often two sets of publication information: the details of the original paper version and those of electronic edition. The first example below illustrates how to cite a book when only the details of the electronic edition are available. The second example is for a book that has both a paper and an electronic edition. The date in square brackets is the date the paper edition was published. Publication details are provided first for the paper edition, then for the electronic edition. There are many variations on these examples; consistency is crucial.

Tucker LP 2007. *A commentary on the gospel of Matthew*. Johannesburg, South Africa: Rhema Electronic Books, www.rhemabooks.co.za.

Tucker LP 2007 [2004]. *A commentary on the gospel of Matthew*. Cape Town, South Africa: Christian Academic. Electronic edition: Rhema Library Resources, www.rhemabooks.co.za.

Bibliography entries *for journals, magazines* and *newspapers*

2.1. *Journal articles* are referenced with these elements: author; date; title of article; name of journal; volume (and issue) number; page numbers of the article.

> Woodbridge NB 2007. The use of worship songs in youth ministry: a postmodern paradigm. *Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 10(3):314-327.

The title of the article is written in regular typescript (not italicised); the name of the journal is italicised. The volume number of the journal follows its name (without any punctuation marks between them), and a colon separates the volume number from the page numbers. Many journals are published two, three or four times each year, and each issue is numbered; the notation above, 10(3):314-327, refers to volume 10, issue 3, pages 314-327. Not all journals use issue numbers. By the way, the bibliography entry is identical whether the journal is published electronically or in print.

2.2. *Magazine articles* are cited similarly to journal articles, except that volume and issue numbers do not apply. Instead, the specific edition of the magazine is identified by adding the date of the issue—month if released monthly; exact date if released weekly.

> Woodbridge NB 2007 (December). The use of worship songs in youth ministry. *Christian Worship Magazine,* 34.
>
> Woodbridge NB 2007 (14 April). The use of worship songs in youth ministry. *Christian Worship Magazine,* 34, 37-38.

2.3. *Newspaper articles* need to indicate the exact date, the city of publication and the page number.

Woodbridge NB 2007 (14 November). The use of worship songs in youth ministry. Johannesburg, South Africa. *The Star,* 4.

Bibliography entries *for online resources*

3.1. The standard format for online resources includes these elements: author; date; title of article (not italicised); type of resource; place of access; date of access.

Woodbridge NB 2005. The use of worship songs in youth ministry: a postmodern paradigm. Online article. Accessed from www.theological-research.org, 2007-07-11.

Woodbridge NB 2005. The use of worship songs in youth ministry: a postmodern paradigm. Online blog. Accessed from www.noelwoodbridge.co.za, 2007-07-11.

3.2. If the website does not indicate the date of writing or publication, in square brackets place the year you accessed it; you will cite it in-text using this date. The two examples below indicate how two articles by Woodbridge would be cited if no date was included on the website.

Woodbridge NB [2007a]. The use of worship songs in youth ministry: a postmodern paradigm. Online article. Accessed from www.theological-research.org, 2007-07-11.

Woodbridge NB [2007b]. How to use music in youth evangelisation. Online sermon. Accessed from www.theological-research.org, 2007-07-11.

3.3. If the website does not name the author, place the title at the start of the bibliography entry. If an organisation is the author, list it as such.

The use of worship songs in youth ministry: a postmodern paradigm. 2005. Online article. Accessed from www.theological-research.org, 2007-07-11.

South African Theological Seminary, 2005. The use of worship songs in youth ministry: a postmodern paradigm. Online article. Accessed from www.theological-research.org, 2007-07-11.

Bibliography entries *for other sources*

4.1. *Theses and dissertations* are cited with these elements: author, date, title (not italicised); type of work; institution; place. If the thesis is available online, include a URL.

Erdey Z 2007. The significance of the 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' pericopes to the theme of judgement in the Gospel of Matthew. Master's thesis, South African Theological Seminary. Johannesburg, South Africa.

Smith KG 2000. Relevance theory and Bible translation: the translation of Titus. Doctoral dissertation, University of Stellenbosch. Stellenbosch, South Africa. Available at www.theological-research.org, 2007-07-11.

4.2. *Interview* citations need to indicate the person interviewed (under 'author'), the date of the interview, who conducted the interview, where the interview was conducted and where the record of the interview can be accessed. Note the use of 'interview by the author' when you are referencing an interview you conducted yourself.

Peppler CL 2006 (14 July). Interview by JR Mason. Rivonia, South Africa. Published in *Christian News Magazine* (2007-07-23), 7-8.

Peppler CL 2006 (14 July). Interview by JR Mason. Rivonia, South Africa. Available from www.chrisp.co.za.

Peppler CL 2006 (14 July). Interview by the author. Rivonia, South Africa. Transcripts of the audio recording available from the author: kevingarysmith@gmail.co.za.

4.3. *Book reviews* are listed under the name of the person who wrote the review. They need to contain full details for both the review and the work reviewed.

Mason JR 2006. Review of F Jabini, *The Holy Spirit in the intertestamental period* (Amsterdam: Acad Press, 2005). *Conspectus* 14:171-172.

Mason JR 2006. Review of F Jabini, *The Holy Spirit in the intertestamental period* (Online book. Accessed from www.ebooks.co.za, 2006-04-12). Available www.theological-research.org.

4.4. *Academic papers,* such as those read at conferences, need the name, place and date of the conference at which they were presented.

Mason JR 2006. Maximising the use of technology in theological education. Paper presented at the Theological Higher Education Conference, 18 September 2004. South African Theological Seminary, Rivonia, South Africa. Accessed from www.sats.edu.za, 2007-01-25.

Punctuation in a bibliography

The most important thing about punctuating a bibliography is *consistency*. If you read 10 different style guides, you will probably encounter 10 different sets of rules. As long as you stick to the same system throughout your bibliography, it does not matter too much which set of rules you use.

The most important punctuation details relate to the use of capitals, italics, commas, periods and brackets. These two

examples illustrate some of the common differences between punctuation systems:

> Smith KG and Tucker LP (eds) 2007. *The new South African dictionary of theology* (rev. ed.). Johannesburg, South Africa: Christian Academic.

> Smith, Kevin G., and Tucker, L. P., eds (2007). *The New South African Dictionary of Theology,* rev. ed. Johannesburg, South Africa: Christian Academic.

The points below contain our guidelines for punctuating a bibliography. They represent our preferred style. If you choose to use variations on the recommended style, just be consistent.

a) *Capitals*. Our preferred style uses natural, sentence-style capitalisation. Capitalise only the first word and proper nouns (for example, *The new Bible dictionary*). Many style guides capitalise all words except prepositions and conjunctions (for example, *The New Bible Dictionary*).

b) *Italics and underlining*. Italicise the titles of books, journals and magazines. Do not italicise the titles of articles, theses, dissertations or papers. Reserve underlining for electronic sources, namely, e-mail addresses or URLs.

c) *Periods*. Our style keeps the use of periods to a minimum. For example, do not use periods between initials: record author Lindy Pam Tucker as 'Tucker LP' instead of 'Tucker, L.P.' In abbreviations, use a period if the last letter of the abbreviation is *not* the

last letter of the full word; if the last letter of the abbreviation is the last letter of the full word, drop the period (for example, 'ed.' not 'ed', but 'eds' instead of 'eds.'; 'vol.' and 'vols' are correct).

d) *Commas*. Use commas to separate multiple authors or editors (for example, Smith KG, Tucker LP and Woodbridge NB) and to indicate page numbers immediately after a title (for example, *The love of God,* 33-42).[6] Do not use commas between surname and initials (that is, Tucker LP, not Tucker, LP).

e) *Brackets*. Our preferred style is to place references to editors, editions and volumes in parentheses (some styles use commas to separate this information); for example: Woods WC (ed.) instead of Woods WC, ed.; *The love of God* (2nd ed.) instead of *The love of God,* 2nd ed. Whereas some styles place the date of publication in parentheses, this is not necessary. Use square brackets for publication dates in three situations: (i) for the hard copy date after the electronic date, for example, Wood AB 2004 [1996]; (ii) for approximate dates, for example, Mordt R [ca. 1869]; and (iii) for online articles when substituting the date accessed for the date published, for example, Pollock SM [2006].

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[6] In some styles, commas are used to indicate 'editor' and 'edition' information (for example, Smith KG, ed. 2007. *How to interpret the psalms,* 2nd ed. Cape Town: Christian Academic). We recommend you use parentheses for this purpose, but if you use commas consistently, it is fine.

How to order the works in a bibliography

The rule for arranging the entries in a bibliography is simple: *alphabetise* all sources based on the surnames (family names) of the authors or editors. Arrange all the entries in a single alphabetical list; do not divide them into categories (for example, journals, books, interviews, and so on). Here are some rules for alphabetising:

- If you have multiple entries for the same author, organise them in date order. Write the author's name in the first entry; thereafter, use eight underscores. Organise multiple publications from the same year by numbering them a, b, c, and so on.

    Williams DHL 2002.
    _____ 2004a.
    _____ 2004b.
    _____ 2004c.

- When alphabetising author's names, follow the exact order of the letters, ignoring spaces and apostrophes. Alphabetise compound family names by the first part of the compound.

    Brown JP
    De La Rey LWC
    De Waard AJ
    d'Offay M
    Grudem W
    Hall-Lindsay TI
    MacMillan G
    McArthur KR, Jr
    Smith-Jones LF
    St Denis R

Van Rensburg RD

- If two authors have the same surname, alphabetise by their initials.

Wilson D 2002.
Wilson DL 1991.
Wilson SJ 2007.

- When a source has no author, alphabetise it by the first word of the title, but ignore the words 'a', 'an' or 'the'.

The new international version. 1984. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Serving the Lord with your talents. 2002. Online book. Accessed from www.freebooks.co.za, 2007-11-01.

Wilson DL 1991. *A biblical theology of the Spirit.* Cape Town: Acad Books.

The word of God. 1998. Online article. Accessed from www.tjl.co.za, 2007-10-12.

Zoltan EW 2007. *The Spirit in the word.* Johannesburg: SATS Press.

Summary

Every piece of academic writing should end with a bibliography. In an author-date system of referencing, the preferred form of bibliography is a list of *works cited*; other kinds are works consulted, selective or annotated bibliographies.

Bibliography entries are organised alphabetically by the surnames of the authors or editors. Entries need to convey at least four essential pieces of information: Who wrote it? When was it published? What is it called? Where can it be

accessed? The exact content and format of entries vary widely depending on the kind of resource it is (for example, book, thesis, journal article, interview, online resource) and the details available for it.

There are many different style- and format guides for writing bibliography entries. Rules regarding what components to include, how to order them, how to punctuate and many other details vary. This chapter offered a set of such guidelines. Whether you follow these guidelines or another set of protocols is not terribly important. There is only one non-negotiable rule—be consistent!

Chapter 5:
Plagiarism

Technology—you can love it or hate it, but you cannot ignore it! Whatever your view, it is here to stay. A well-known futurist and theologian was confronting his child about the dangers of technology (that is, computers, the Internet, chat rooms, computer games and the ever-growing popularity of SMS and photos so easily thrown about on cellphones). The child interrupted, saying, "deal with it dad or go and see a doctor". Whether we like it or not, we must face the challenges technology presents.

In the technocratic world, people no longer need to go into the office for meetings. Free online conferencing software can facilitate multi-user meetings. You can simply install any number of conference programs available with a camcorder on your computer to enjoy multiple visual interaction without leaving your office or home. Through ever-changing technology, people walk with their fingers, not their feet any more. There are vast amounts of information and modes of transporting this information available at one's fingertips. Anybody with a computer and an Internet connection can enter a cyber world that less than 25 years ago was inconceivable to the average person.

Ever-changing technology brings new challenges. The number one challenge academic institutions now face in academic writing is *plagiarism*. For scholars who worked in academic institutions before the onslaught of technology, the word plagiarism was known, but in a limited way. For example, before computers became part of people's household furniture, the only way they could plagiarise was to go to a library, photostat a couple of pages from a book and copy the information verbatim. If the person marking the paper was not familiar with the information, the students could easily get away with plagiarising. However, for the budding student, or the experienced scholar in this new age of information, technology creates a great temptation to plagiarise.

Before exploring plagiarism and its dangers, we need to define it.

Defining plagiarism

According to *The Penguin English Dictionary* (Garmonsway 1972:535), the act of plagiarism is a "wrongful attempt to pass off another's literary or musical work as one's own; act of copying without permission or acknowledgement." Joseph Gibaldi (2003) addresses the two iniquities of plagiarism. "Using another person's ideas, information, or expression without acknowledging that person's work constitutes intellectual theft," Gibaldi said, "and passing off another person's ideas, information or expression as your

own, to get a better grade or gain some other advantage constitutes fraud."

Plagiarism is a serious offence. Using the work of an author without giving due credit to that author is stealing his or her information or ideas. Besides, it is deceitful because it passes that information on as if it were one's own (Gibaldi 2003). In all fairness, though, there are times when a person copies someone else's work unintentionally or out of ignorance of the laws of plagiarism. Plagiarism without the intent to deceive may be a result of carelessness; deliberate plagiarism, however, is a flagrant offence of deception. It is a serious breach of trust.

Because a charge of plagiarism is considered a serious offence, students must avoid even the slightest temptation to use someone else's writings and then claim those writings as their own. This is even more the case if you are a theology student, since we ought to "avoid every kind of evil" (1Th 5:22).

Before getting into what constitutes plagiarism and how one can avoid it, it would be wise to discuss how plagiarism has crept into academic circles. Plagiarism has no boundaries. It can affect anyone who has to do research for a paper, whether a student is writing an essay for school or a scholar is researching a doctoral thesis. Technology tempts everyone to take a shortcut at one time or another, especially as pressure mounts and deadlines loom. Unfortunately, to cut and paste someone else's work and pass it off as your own because of

the pressure to succeed in a fast paced society has been the downfall of many budding academics (see below).

The reality of technology is that one does not need to go and sit in a library for hours poring over books and making copious notes any more. Due to technology, this is fast becoming a practice of the past. Thus, the unfortunate reality is that plagiarism is most prevalent among students who have access to the Internet. The temptation to cut down on one's workload and to free up time for other activities makes plagiarism attractive.

Consider this when it comes to information on the Internet. One of the biggest search engines, Google, has even had its name turned into a verb by its users. We do not say, 'Go to Google if you need information', but, 'Why don't you just Google it?' Google even has plans to make millions of books available online, if it can find a solution to the copyright challenges. An article in the New York Times, (Hafner 2005-11-21), stated that five major institutions were working in collaboration with Google Books to digitise approximately 15 million books and make them available free on Google's site. The institutions are Harvard University, the University of Michigan, Stanford University, the New York Public Library and Oxford University. These are major institutions when it comes to information, and they are making this information available free.

Doubtless, this is only the start. Other institutions, notably MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008), have what they call OCW (Open Course Ware). It is a site where

they "share free lecture notes, exams and other resources from more than 1,800 courses spanning MIT's entire curriculum". Unfortunately, having access to material of that quality on the Internet makes plagiarism that much more attractive.

Research conducted by Prega Govender (2007) of the *Sunday Times* newspaper revealed that almost every institution of higher learning in South Africa and, for that matter, the world, is being affected by students plagiarising work. In South Africa in 2007, the following institutions released reports on plagiarism discovered in their institutions.[7]

- UNISA asked a senior history lecturer to leave after he plagiarised a student's master's degree.
- At the same institution, a philosophy lecturer resigned in the face of a disciplinary inquiry on a charge of plagiarism.
- At Stellenbosch University, seventeen cases of plagiarism were uncovered in 2006, including three postgraduate students.
- At the University of the Free State, six undergraduate students had to repeat courses after being found guilty of plagiarism, and the university expelled two postgraduate students for the same offence.
- The University of Pretoria documented twenty cases of plagiarism in 2006 and revoked a master of commerce degree.

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[7] The following cases were confirmed in a private communication with Govender. They are used with permission.

In other cases, several professors and senior lectures have resigned in the face of plagiarism allegations.

However, the integrity of these institutions remains intact. Only a small percentage of students plagiarised, and the institutions have taken steps to stamp out plagiarism. For example, University of Pretoria registrar, Professor Nick Grove, said they deal swiftly with plagiarism among their students. "In the end, if you don't, the integrity of your degree (the degree conferred by the institution) is a piece of paper. If people don't believe it, then you have a massive problem" (quoted by Govender 2007).

Professor Isobel Konyn of the University of KwaZulu-Natal said:

> The impact of the technological highway continues to be felt throughout society. In the sphere of higher education, it has posed new challenges that universities globally are battling to regulate efficiently. Prior to the emergence of the Internet, an academic could know what was available to students in terms of library resources and scholarly writings. Today, the challenge is far greater, and this makes the detection and eradication of plagiarism more difficult.[8]

Many institutions are setting up software packages to reduce this shameful practice. Organisations like Glatt and Turnitin.com have been created specifically to deal with plagiarism. They enable students and institutions to submit academic papers. The programme checks the submitted documents for plagiarism against its database of sources.

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[8] Used by permission of Professor Konyn of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

How should we deal with this scourge that is affecting not only the integrity of students but also the integrity of the institutions where they study?

Dealing with plagiarism

The first step in dealing with plagiarism is to educate students. This should be done the moment they enter an institution of higher learning.

One way is to create a website with questions and answers about plagiarism and require every student to study it before attempting to write an assignment. One could even compel students to sign a declaration that they understand what plagiarism is, and the consequences they face if caught plagiarising. Since many students plagiarise out of ignorance, the quicker we can educate them, the less plagiarism we should find in their assignments. Obviously there will still be students who plagiarise, but at least they will do it knowingly and will have no legal recourse to challenge whatever steps the institution takes against them. Academic institutions must make it clear that they will not tolerate plagiarism and that they are willing to take stern action against students who plagiarise.

The second step is to take disciplinary action against students who plagiarise. Each institution should have its own process in this respect. Depending on the nature and seriousness of the offence, this might involve warning, failure, suspension or expulsion. In most cases, it would involve each of these steps in a progressive procedure.

Avoiding plagiarism

You avoid plagiarism by properly acknowledging, that is, referencing, all sources. Referencing usually has two elements, attribution and documentation. Attribution is the practice of marking off any ideas and phrases that are not your own, which you do with quotation marks and in-text citations. Documentation refers to providing information about the sources of ideas and phrases that are not your own, and this is done through in-text citations and the bibliography. The case studies below demonstrate why it is important to bear both elements in mind.

Recognising plagiarism

Students often plagiarise out of ignorance—they think they only need to cite when they use exact quotations, failing to realise that there are many other situations which require giving credit to sources. In this section, we shall answer some questions to help you recognise situations in which you must cite.

Am I plagiarising when I use the author's exact words without quotation marks, but I cite the original source in an in-text citation? Yes, you plagiarise any time you use the author's exact words without using quotation marks, because you are communicating to your assessor that these words are an expression of your personal understanding and thought process resulting from your study.

Am I plagiarising when I merely exchange the author's words with synonyms, as long as I cite a source at the end of

the sentence? Yes, you are plagiarising when you use the same sentence structure as the original source because once again the thought and expression of the thought is not original with you. You have not paraphrased the original thought and therefore cannot treat it as though you had done so. You are committing deception, for your marker assumes that all content in your paper without quotation marks is your mental digestion of the facts.

Am I plagiarising when I take the content of the original source and then I put it in my own words, but do not cite the original source? Yes, you have plagiarised, because the content of what you have written did not originate with you. You merely put it into your own words. You must cite the original source after the sentence or paragraph of information that you have paraphrased.

What about using Internet sources that are not copyrighted? Is it plagiarism to use them without citing the source? Yes it is, because, once again, it consists of passing on someone else's research as though it were your own.

What information in my research paper does not *need to be cited?* You need not cite personal thoughts, opinions, or your evaluation of the thoughts of others. You also do not need to cite a source for information that is considered common knowledge, such as, Table Mountain is in Cape Town or Harare is the capital of Zimbabwe. If you discover that virtually all your sources assume certain information as common knowledge, it is not essential to cite a source for that information. For instance, if you are doing a paper on the

Dead Sea Scrolls, you do not need to cite a source to support the fact that they were found in 1947 near the Dead Sea.

Undermining research

Doing research for written assignments serves a variety of functions in your personal and academic development. For one thing, thinking deeply about the topic as you wrestle with a variety of sources not only enhances your understanding of the subject, it also makes the learning permanent—you will not easily forget what you have personally struggled to grasp. Furthermore, it develops one of the most important life-skills you can ever acquire—the ability to think for yourself! You gain the ability to think through diverse opinions on difficult questions, processing and presenting personal convictions. Third, it teaches problem-solving skills. Discovery-based learning empowers you to solve real-life problems. You learn to find the best sources and use them critically. You learn to analyse, compare, summarise and so forth.

When you swap 'cutting-and-pasting' someone else's thoughts for forming your own convictions through personal discovery (research), you cheat yourself of higher education's most valuable lessons. You should be able to say honestly that you have gained understanding and formed convictions through the research you have conducted. When you plagiarise, you violate all the objectives of research and you lose the value of higher education. You are, in fact, wasting time—yours and your teacher's.

Challenging plagiarisers

If you are prone to taking shortcuts, passing off others' work as your own instead of putting in the work required to think through your sources, we have some questions for you.

1) What learning can take place when you merely 'cut and paste'? There is no evidence that you understand the material until you explain the information you are presenting in your own words.

2) How do you prepare yourself for ministry when you focus on cutting and pasting pieces of information with the intent of deceiving your assessors? Even if you succeed in misleading your assessors, are you not cheating yourself, sacrificing your integrity and betraying your Saviour?

3) What thinking and writing skills do you develop when you substitute someone else's words for your own? Do you not think you are robbing yourself of opportunities to learn critical thinking and communication skills that you will one day need in your ministry?

We understand why students would cheat in a commerce or a law degree, but cheating in a theology degree is like stealing a Bible—how can God possibly bless you for it? What good will a degree in theology do a man without integrity?

Plagiarism is a serious offence. Avoiding it is *your* responsibility. Ignorance is no excuse. You must know what it is and ensure you don't do it. The only way to safeguard yourself is to remember these words: **you quote it, you note it!**

Chapter 6:
Formatting an Academic Paper

The purpose of this chapter is to offer tips for formatting an academic paper. After describing some principles, we present sample pages to illustrate key aspects of good formatting. We suggest you study them closely and use them as models for formatting your papers.

The cover page

The cover page of a thesis or an assignment should contain the following elements:

- The title of the paper
- The name of the author
- The nature of the paper
- The qualification
- The institution
- The date of submission
- The professor or assessor

Figure 1 shows the title page of a thesis or dissertation. All the items are centred on the page. The title appears first, followed the author's name. Next comes a description of the nature of the submission; in this example, a dissertation submitted for a degree. If the submission only constituted part

of the requirements, the wording would change to 'submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for …', such as, 'A mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Theology'. The last three items are the name of the institution, the date of submission and the supervisor(s).

Figure 2 shows the title page of an assignment for a course. The name of the assignment appears at the top. After the student's name, it states the assignment number, course, programme and institution. The cover ends with the date of submission and the name of the teacher who will assess it. If the paper were not an assignment, you could substitute labels such as report, portfolio, term paper or book review for 'Assignment 1'. Once again, note that all the items on the title page are centred. Some institutions ask you to write the title of the paper in capitals or in bold or italicised script.

The declaration and dedication (only for theses)

Theses and dissertations must include a signed declaration stating that the work is the author's. The declaration appears on a separate page. The author must sign and date it. This is a typical wording:

> I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any institution for a degree.
>
> Signed: _____   Date: _____

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A thesis or dissertation may also include a dedication to family, friends or colleagues who have made the study possible. Such a dedication appears on its own page after the declaration.

Abstract

Dissertations, theses and research projects often require an *abstract*. An abstract is a brief summary of the research and its findings. Abstracts (1999:1) explains the content and purpose of an abstract like this:

> An abstract is a paragraph, often between 100 and 350 words, that expresses the main claim and argument of a paper. An abstract says everything of central importance in a way that gives the reader a clear overview of what is contained in the essay. It should include the few things you would like your reader to remember long after the details of your paper may be forgotten. Science journals, for instance, usually publish abstracts at the beginning of articles so that readers can make quick decisions about whether the article is relevant or interesting. If the reader decides to read the entire article, the abstract functions as a map of the writer's argument or discussion.

Write the abstract on a separate page before the table of contents. The heading should be 'abstract' or 'summary', written as a main heading. The body of the abstract is written in the same style as the rest of the paper, usually 1.5 line spacing (double spacing in some institutions) and either left aligned or justified. Figure 3 contains a typical example of what an abstract should look like. Depending on the

requirements of the institution, the page may or may not be numbered (see guidelines below for page numbering).

Table of contents

All academic papers, except for very short assignments, should include a contents page. The table of contents begins on a new page. As a guideline, it should contain main headings and one or two levels of subheadings. In an assignment, the main headings will be the first level of headings in the text. In a thesis, the main headings in the table of contents are usually chapter titles; the first two levels of headings within the chapter are also listed in the contents. Each entry in the table of contents contains a page number on the right hand side. If your headings are numbered in your paper, include the numbering in the table of contents.

The diagram (Figure 4) shows a fairly typical table of contents for a thesis. Word processors (for example, MS Word; OpenOffice Writer) have functions that enable you to automatically generate and update a table of contents. To do this, you need to use the built in style settings for headings (usually called Heading 1, Heading 2, and so on). The great value of using the built-in function to generate the contents page is that it will always get the page numbers correct and, if you edit the document, it can quickly correct the contents page to match the changed pages.

Normal pages

Academic institutions set standard guidelines with respect to how the main body of a paper should be formatted. At the

South African Theological Seminary, for example, the requirements are as follows:

Font name:	Arial
Font size:	12 point
Line spacing:	1.5
Justification:	justified *or* left aligned
Paper size:	A4
Margins:	2.5 to 3.0 cm on all sides
Block quotations:	indent ±1 cm from left and right margins
Headings:	legal numbering; stylised
Spelling:	English UK
Page numbers:	bottom centre *or* top right
Referencing:	author-date system

These guidelines tell students how to format their submissions to the seminary. As a student, you should programme your word processor with these default settings (called creating a template). You can set up your processor so that the paper size is A4, the default font is Arial 12, the line spacing 1.5, the spelling English UK, and so on. In particular, you should

Expert Tip
Learn to use your word processor properly. It will save you hundreds of hours in the future.

learn to use *style sheets* in your word processor. Styles typically included defined heading styles; using them properly makes editing your work *much* easier.

A nicely formatted page in an academic paper should look a little like the example in Figure 6. The text is typed in 1.5 line spacing with decent margins. There is a block quotation, indented from both margins. The page is clearly numbered

and new paragraphs are signposted by leaving a *small* space. It contains a heading that is clearly marked (numbered and bolded). The page looks neat. It does not contain large white spaces between paragraphs.

Now, by way of contrast, look at the sample page in Figure 7. The heading does not stand out because it is neither numbered nor stylised. There is no header and no page number. The page also illustrates a common error students make—leaving large, ugly gaps between paragraphs. They do this by pressing the 'Enter' key twice each time they begin a new paragraph. *Do not hit 'Enter' twice to start a new paragraph!* There are two acceptable ways to mark a new paragraph. The first is by indenting the first line of each paragraph slightly. If you use this method, you will have *no* extra space between paragraphs. The other is by adjusting your paragraph settings to leave half a line before or after each paragraph. This leaves a *small* space between paragraphs, enough to signpost where a new paragraph begins, but not enough to leave ugly white gaps. You can set your word processor to do this under its 'paragraph' settings (Hint: in MS Word, holding down Ctrl + Shift + 0 will do it). All the examples at the end of the chapter use the second method.

Headers and footers

The header is the segment of the page above the area where you type the main body of the document. The footer is the corresponding area at the bottom of the page. In the header,

write the title of the paper or, for a thesis or dissertation, the chapter title. Insert page numbers in the footer (see Figure 6). The first page of a chapter and the title page of an assignment has no header because the title is written at the top of the page (see Figure 5). Number the first content page of your thesis or assignment as page 1. You may either leave the frontmatter (for example, title page, table of contents, and so on) unnumbered or you may number it in a different format (for example, i, ii, iii … or a, b, c …). You should position your header/footer approximately midway between the text and the margin. Word processors have built-in functions for setting headers and footers. You will need to learn how your processor facilitates a different heading on the first page of a section and how it allows you to use different styles of page numbering for different sections, that is, one style for the frontmatter and another for the rest of the document.

The first page

Leave an extra space at the top of the first page of a chapter, article or assignment, as well as at the top of pages such as an abstract, table of contents or bibliography. We suggest you leave approximately 5 centimetres (2 inches) between the top margin and the title. Write the title in large, bold, centred text. The first page of the entire document should be numbered page 1. The example in Figure 5 shows what the first page of a thesis chapter looks like. There is a gap from the top margin, then the chapter number, followed

by the chapter name. Finally, note the gap between the chapter name and the text.

Numbered and bulleted lists

If you need to number items in a paragraph, you may do so by placing consecutive numbers or letters in parentheses, such as (1) … (2) … (3) …, or (a) … (b) … (c) … Do not alternate between these two styles; select one and use it consistently. Punctuate these items naturally. If each item is a complete sentence, capitalise the first letter and end the sentence with a period. If the items are parts of a sentence, separate them either with commas or with semicolons. Here is a simple example:

> The Reformers' interpretation of the psalms emphasised (a) the value of the headings, (b) the need to understand the psalms in their historical setting and (c) the prophetic-messianic nature of the psalms, regarding David as a type of the Messiah.

Numbered or bulleted lists should be indented slightly to the right of the left margin and set to use a hanging indent (see Figure 8). If each list item is a complete sentence, end it with a period. If all the items form a single sentence, separate them with commas or semicolons and place a period after the last one. If they are just listed fragments, do not use any punctuation marks at the end. A bulleted list containing full sentences looks like this:

- It originated within an eschatological milieu.
- The figures to whom the Psalms are attributed were regarded as future-predicative prophets.

- Certain psalms describe a person or event in such glowing terms that the language far exceeds the reality of any historical king or battle.
- The very inclusion of royal psalms in the Psalter suggests that the redactor understood them to refer to a future *mashiah*-king.

Tables and figures

Tables (see Figure 9). Tables are powerful tools for presenting a large amount of data in a compact, visual format that helps readers see it as a whole at a glance. Major style guides (for example, APA, MLA, Turabian, Chicago) offer extensive guidelines concerning how to present various data types in tables. If you need to use complex, technical tables to present your data, you need to consult one of them. Each time you use a table, you must label it with three parts: (a) table, (b) number and (c) descriptive caption, like this: *Table 7: Similarities in the Headings of Psalms 3 and 7*. The label may be positioned either above or below the table (be consistent with your placement). Whenever you allude to such a table in the text of your paper, refer to it by its number (for example, 'In Table 7, …').

Figures (see Figure 10). Graphs, charts, maps, diagrams, drawings and pictures are all classed as 'figures'. Each time you insert one of these in your paper, you must label it for precise identification. The label has three parts: (a) figure, (b) number and (c) descriptive caption. This is an example: *Figure 6.4: Chart Summarising the Exegetical Process*. All

graphs, charts, diagrams and so forth are labelled 'figure'. The number ensures the figure has a unique identification. The name summarises the content of the diagram. The label may appear either above or below the figure. Be consistent with its placement. Either label them all above or all below; do not chop and change. Having labelled a figure, all references in the text should refer to it by number. If the author wished to refer readers to the example figure above, he would called it 'Figure 6.4'.

Bibliography

The bibliography (see Figure 11) is usually labelled 'works cited'. It begins on a new page. Format the title 'works cited' as a level 1 heading. In the case of a paper with chapters, format it as a chapter title, leaving a gap between the top margin and the label. For smaller papers, simply style it like heading level 1. Thereafter, list entries in alphabetical order by the last name of the author(s). The paragraph style for bibliographic entries includes *hanging indent*. Position the first line of the entry against the left margin; indent subsequent lines approximately 1.25 centimetres (½ inch). To create a hanging indent, use the paragraph settings in your word processor. Do not leave a line between entries. Lastly, when there are multiple entries by the same author, do not repeat the name each time. Instead, use a short line for each subsequent entry.

The Redactional Criteria and Objectives
Underlying the Arrangement of Psalms 3-8

By
Kevin Gary Smith

A dissertation submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Theology
at the South African Theological Seminary

December 2007

Promoter: Dr WR Domeris
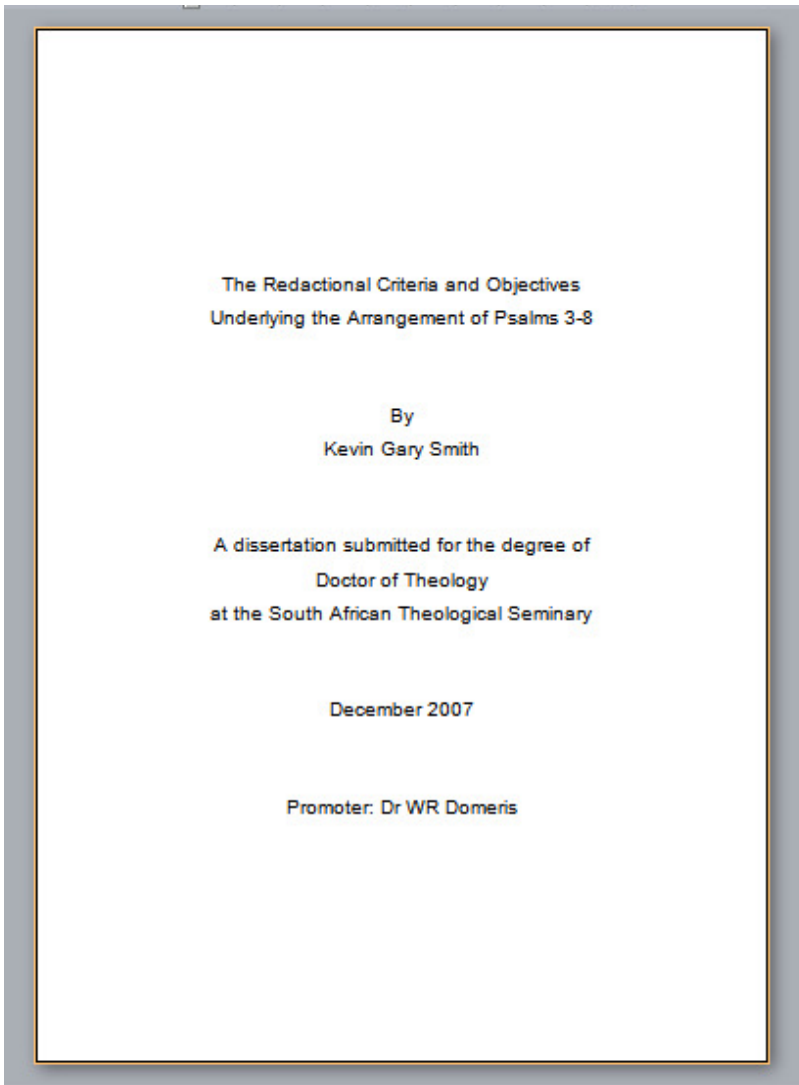
Figure 1: Cover Page of a Thesis
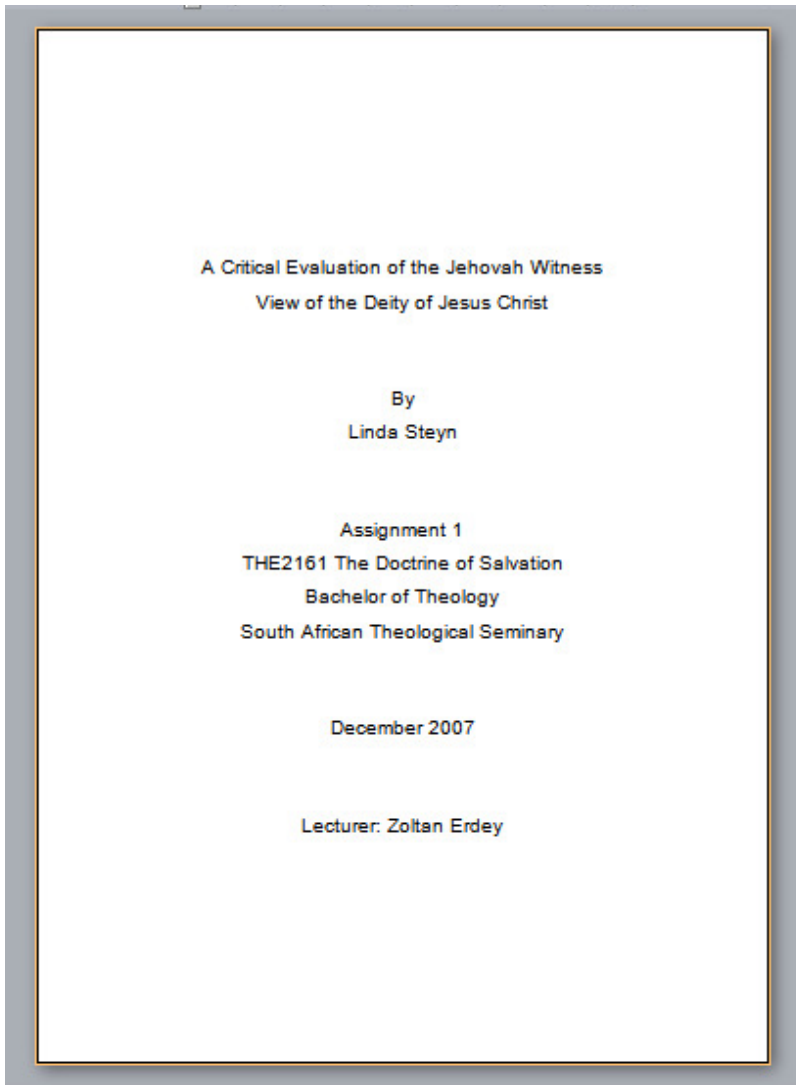
Figure 2: Cover Page of an Assignment

Abstract

At present, research into the editorial shaping of the canonical Psalter holds a central role in psalms studies. In keeping with this trend, this dissertation examines links between Psalms 3-8 in an attempt to discern the criteria and objectives the editors used when arranging them.

The study begins with a detailed exegetical synopsis of each of the six psalms in the chosen corpus. This lays a foundation for examining links between the psalms that might have influenced the editors to arrange them in the canonical order. An exhaustive analysis of links first between adjacent psalms and then across the entire corpus follows; the goal is to identify the rationale for the ordering of the psalms.

The analysis suggests that verbal and thematic links provided the main basis of arrangement. The editors' primary objective was to ensure a natural verbal and thematic connection between each pair of adjacent psalms. Although editorial linking is most evident on the level of adjacent psalms, beyond this level the editors do seem to have considered shared terms and similarities in the headings; these considerations were subordinate to shared terms and themes amongst neighbouring psalms.

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Figure 3: Abstract

Table of Contents

Figure 4: Table of Contents

Figure 5: First Page

Chapter 2: History of Psalms Studies

headings, the purposeful arrangement of the Psalter and the presence of messianic prophecy in the psalms. He heavily influenced Delitzsch (1887), whose work on the Psalms represents the high-water mark of nineteenth century studies. Mitchell (1997:46) summarises Delitzsch's contributions perfectly.

> Delitzsch . . . achieves the best balance between criticism and tradition of all nineteenth century commentators. He generally supports the validity of the headings.... He notes that the order of the lyrics cannot be explained purely on the basis of chronological evolution, and indicates evidence of editorial activity in the Psalter, noting concatenation in particular. In the light of this, he detects 'the impress of one ordering spirit'.... Delitzsch also maintains that a central theme is discernable in the collection, that is, concern with the Davidic covenant and its ultimate fulfilment in a future Messiah. He perceives the eschatological hope not only in the redactor's mind, but also in the mind of the individual psalmists.

In spite of the influence of Hengstenberg and Delitzsch, by the end of the nineteenth century the current of psalms studies was flowing away from the traditional view of the Psalter as a largely Davidic collection that was purposefully arranged to a critical view that it was a piecemeal collection of anonymous, post-exilic lyrics compiled for use as the hymnbook of the second temple. The great commentaries of the early twentieth century (e.g., Cheyne 1904; Briggs and Briggs 1906 and 1907; Kirkpatrick 1906) reflect the scepticism of the period.

2.4 Form criticism

A major change of direction occurred around 1920 under the influence of Hermann Gunkel, a towering figure in Old Testament studies during the first half of the twentieth century. Gunkel, the father of Old Testament form
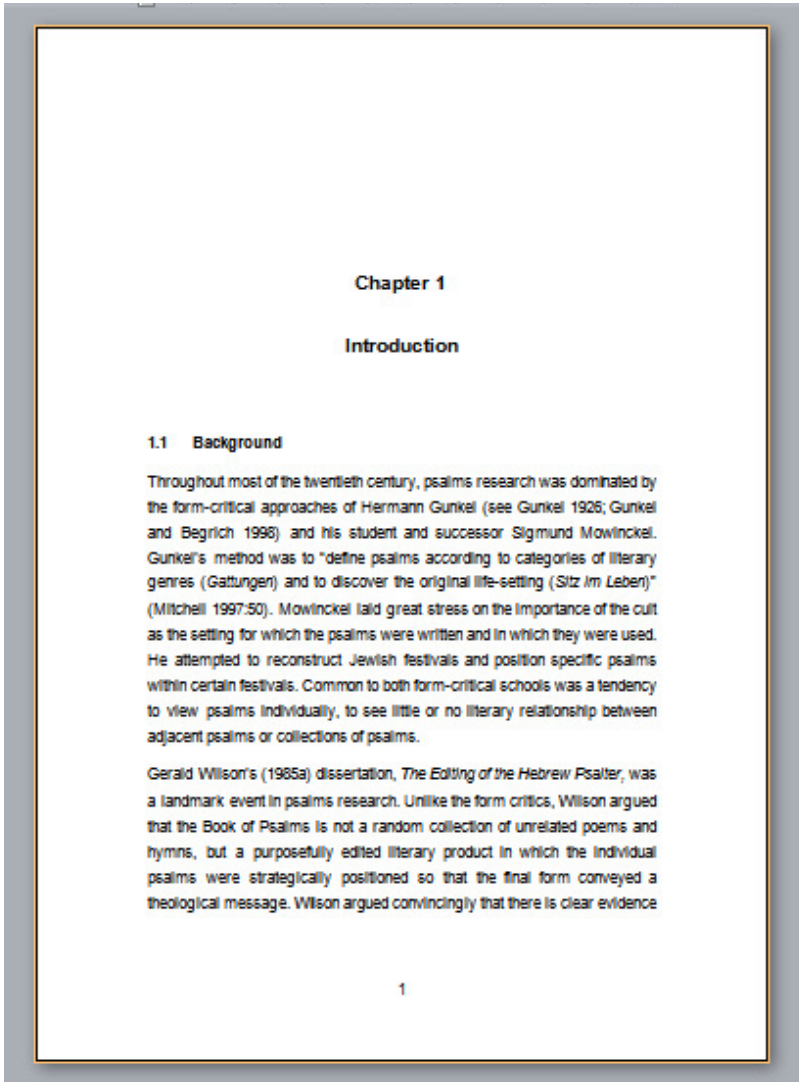
19

Figure 6: Properly Formatted Page

Figure 7: Poorly Formatted Page

1.2 Problem

A fundamental tenet of much modern research on the psalms is that the Psalter is a carefully crafted literary collection in which the individual psalms are purposefully arranged to convey a message. Whereas some scholars believe each and every psalm was carefully chosen and positioned, others believe the editorial shaping of the Psalter is primarily by the careful placement of key psalms.

The main problem of this study is to determine redactional criteria and objectives underlying the arrangement of Psalms 3-8. This main problem can be divided into three key research questions.

a) *What verbal, thematic, structural and functional links are there between Psalms 3-8?* This question needs to be explored at two distinct levels. Firstly, links between pairs of neighbouring psalms need to be examined. Secondly, broader links within the corpus as a whole need to be explored.

b) *What redactional rationale, if any, served as the basis for the arrangement of Psalms 3-8?* If there is evidence of purposeful arrangement, the study will endeavour to discover what criteria the redactors used to position psalms at the level of pairs of neighbouring psalms and across the entire corpus.

c) *What unified literary message, if any, does the arrangement of psalms in this small corpus convey?* The study will endeavour to discover whether the editors had a communicative objective behind their arrangement and, if so, what that objective was.

1.3 Objectives

The objective of the study is to identify the relationships between Psalms 3-8 so as to determine how the final redactors compiled this corpus of psalms. In
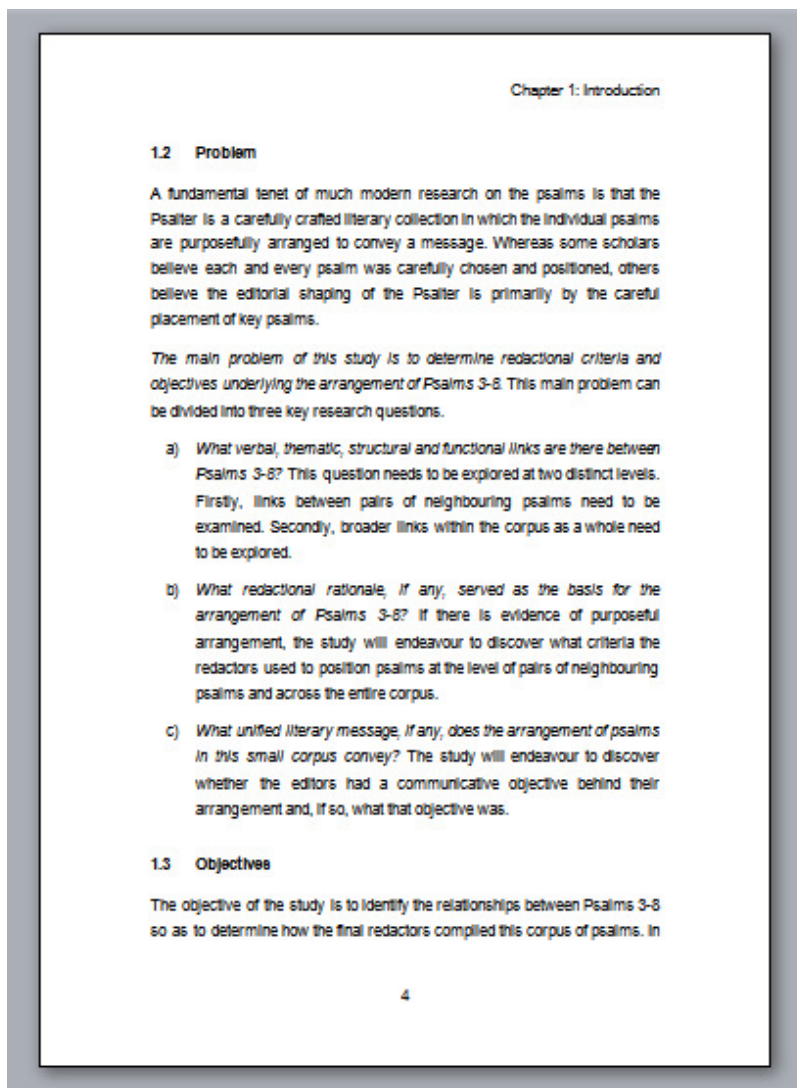
Figure 8: Numbered List

musical notations relating to tune or instruments. Both contain three elements in the same order: genre, author and occasion.

Table 6.3: Similarities between the headings of Psalms 3 and 7 (Hebrew)

	Psalm 3	Psalm 7
genre	מִזְמוֹר	שִׁגָּיוֹן
author	לְדָוִד	לְדָוִד
occasion	בְּבָרְחוֹ מִפְּנֵי אַבְשָׁלוֹם בְּנוֹ	אֲשֶׁר־שָׁר לַיהוָה עַל־דִּבְרֵי־כוּשׁ בֶּן־יְמִינִי

Table 6.4: Similarities between the headings of Psalms 3 and 7 (English))

	Psalm 3	Psalm 7
genre	a psalm	a shiggaion
author	of David	of David
occasion	when he fled from the presence of Absalom, his son	which he sang to the Lord concerning the words of Cush, a Benjaminite

Might the compilers have used Psalms 3 and 7 as some sort of literary frame around the previously existing group of Psalms 4-6? Tate (2001:347) has
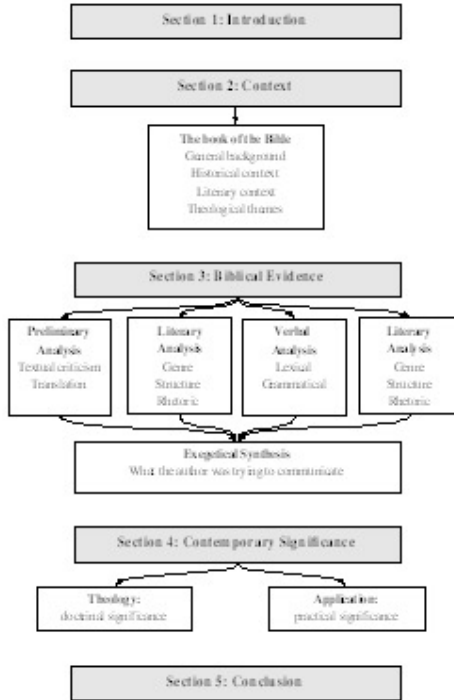
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Figure 9: Tables

Figure 10: Figures

Figure 11: Bibliography

Part B:
Theological Research

We now turn our attention to more advanced topics related to theological research. The focus here is on postgraduate research, particularly on helping MTh and DTh candidates prepare for and write theses and dissertations. This does not mean these chapters are only for postgraduate students. The models and methods of research in chapters 11-16 should be valuable to all theology students.

After a brief orientation to thesis requirements in South African higher education (chapter 7), we devote three chapters to preparing research proposals. Chapter 8 speaks about the research proposal as a whole, while chapters 9 and 10 tackle the two main sections of the proposal, the problem and the plan respectively.

The last six chapters, 11-16, deal with models and methods for theological research. First, we present models for doing biblical exegesis (ch. 11), systematic theology (ch. 12) and practical theology (ch. 13). These can work as models for papers from large assignments to full theses. Lastly, we analyse specialised methods of research that typically make up a component of a theological study. Most theses contain literature reviews; chapter 14 offers pointers for doing a

literature review. Practical theology often requires descriptive-survey research. In chapter 15, we introduce this specialised kind of research. We close, in chapter 16, with an overview of how to do a few other kinds of research, namely, book reviews, case studies and ministry issues.

Chapter 7:
Thesis Requirements in South Africa

Our focus throughout the second half of this book will be on postgraduate research, particularly on writing theses and dissertations. Our context is the higher education framework in South Africa. Although much of what we shall discuss will be generally applicable, the specific thesis requirements may differ in other countries.

In South Africa, theses are written at three levels: Bachelor's,[9] Master's and Doctor's. Table 2 illustrates the expectations at each level.

BTh Thesis	MTh Thesis	DTh Thesis
40 credits	180 credits	360 credits
10,000-12,000 words	40,000-50,000 words	80,000-100,000 words
Students must systematically analyse the selected topic in the field of study.	Students must master the selected topic in the field study.	Students must add new knowledge to the field of study.

Table 2: Thesis requirements at each level of study

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[9] We have two routes into a Master's degree in South Africa. One can either do a 3-year BTh followed by a BTh Honours (4th year), or one can do a 4-year professional BTh. In either case, the Bachelor's thesis will be the final component in the fourth year of undergraduate studies.

You can see from the table that the size and standard of the thesis increases dramatically each time you move up a level. At the MTh level, you must *master* all the literature and issues pertaining to the topic of your thesis. At the DTh level, you must do all that is required at MTh level and more—you must advance the existing state of knowledge in the field of your study. At the BTh level, the requirements are more modest. You do not have to contribute new knowledge. You do not even have to master all the existing knowledge on your topic. You only have to demonstrate the ability to research a topic systematically and critically and present your conclusions in a well-organised, well-argued thesis. Let's briefly explore these requirements in a little more detail.

Bachelor's level

At the BTh level, the thesis only counts for 40 credits[10] (in some institutions, 30 credits; this equals roughly 10 credits in the US system). It should be between 10,000 and 12,000 words (±30-40 typed pages). This *excludes* the preliminary pages (title page, table of contents, list of figures, and so on), bibliography and appendices. Depending on the nature of the research, the bibliography should contain approximately 30-50 entries. These should be academic works, not popular literature.

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[10] In South Africa, 1 credit equals 10 hours' work. One academic year is worth 120 credits. This means, for those more familiar with the American credit system, that 1 US credit equals 3.75 SA credits (roughly 1:4).

All the BTh thesis must demonstrate is the ability to carry out a protracted research project in a chosen field of study. It does not need to present original research. It must demonstrate these skills:

- Identify a research problem.
- Select appropriate research methods.
- Gather and analyse data.
- Interact critically with existing literature.
- Present a sustained, logical argument in writing.
- Cite and reference sources correctly.
- State conclusions and recommendations.

A topic such as 'What Romans teaches about justification' would be permissible as a BTh thesis, since the student does not need to contribute new knowledge or master the entire, vast body of literature on the topic.

Master's level

South African Master's degrees are worth 180 credits (48 US credits) and can be earned in two ways, namely, (a) thesis or (b) structured. In the thesis route, a single thesis of approximately 50,000 words *is* the degree. The thesis is the entire degree. Although this model of Master's degree is foreign to many, it is a demanding process since the research standards required are lofty. Structured programmes, by contrast, contain both coursework and thesis. The thesis is then a mini-thesis and counts either 60 or 90 credits (out of 180). Table 3 shows the approximate requirements for the thesis in each programme.

180 credit thesis	90 credit thesis	60 credit thesis
Counts 100 percent of the degree	Counts 50 percent of the degree	Counts 33.3 percent of the degree
ca. 50,000 words	ca. 25,000 words	ca. 17,500 words
100-150 works cited	80-120 works cited	50-75 works cited

Table 3: Thesis requirements in MTh degrees in South Africa

In writing her thesis, a Master's student must demonstrate the ability to design and conduct a research project. She must demonstrate mastery of her subject, including the research methods that relate to it and the existing literature on it. All the requirements for the BTh thesis apply to an MTh thesis, but with the added expectation of *mastery*. A Master's thesis need not contribute new knowledge, but it is desirable that it demonstrate a fresh approach to the topic; it should not be a dull rehash of familiar territory.

'What does Romans teach about justification?' would not be a suitable topic for an MTh thesis. There are two reasons for this. First, it would be difficult to demonstrate mastery of the vast body of literature on this topic. Second, so much has already been written that this thesis would likely be a dull review of the familiar. 'How to communicate the doctrine of justification by faith to the Hottentot people in the Kalahari' would give a thesis a fresh perspective *if* the Hottentots, for cultural reasons, found the doctrine confusing or offensive.

Doctor's level

Our doctoral degrees are by dissertation only. Institutions or professors may (a) require comprehensive reading (with an

exam), (b) prescribe additional coursework or (c) conduct an oral examination at the end of the dissertation, but none of these requirements contributes to the credit value of the programme. All 360 credits (96 US credits) are assigned to the dissertation.

South Africa only has *academic doctorates*. Within the broad banner of theology, we have Doctor of Philosophy (PhD or DPhil), Doctor of Theology (DTh), Doctor of Divinity (DD or DDiv), Doctor of Literature (DLitt) and Doctor of Literature and Philosophy (DLitt et Phil). There is no difference in status between these. The academic requirements and status are identical. In international jargon, each of the above would be a 'PhD', often used as a generic term for academic, research doctorates. We have no professional doctorates, such as the praxis-oriented Doctor of Ministry (DMin), which is popular abroad.

Doctoral dissertations should be between 80,000 and 100,000 words. They are judged on two main criteria:

- Does it make a substantial original contribution to existing knowledge?
- Is it publishable (either the entire dissertation or key parts of it)?

Ironically, therefore, 'What does Romans teach about justification?' might be perfectly feasible as a doctoral thesis. The onus would be on the researcher to bring a fresh perspective to the current understanding of the topic. She would need to make a substantial addition to current theory. If

her thesis did not do this, being a dull rehash of current knowledge, she would fail at examination.

Summary

This, then, is the framework for thesis writing in South Africa. The thesis is a smallish project at the Bachelor's level. At Master's level, it ranges from a moderate-sized project (mini-thesis) to a substantial research undertaking (thesis only route). Doctoral dissertations must contribute innovate, original research.

You are likely reading the chapters that follow in preparation for writing a thesis. As you work through them, you should keep this framework in mind. The chapters are general in nature. You will need to contextualise your planning to the appropriate level. If you are working at a South African institution, this should be a simple matter of knowing which of the five theses you are writing. If you are using this book in an institution outside South Africa, you will need to work out what the equivalents are.

Now, without further delay, let's move on to the most important part of writing any thesis—the research proposal.

Chapter 8:
The Research Proposal

Every theological research project should begin with a research proposal. Before you may write the thesis, a panel of experts needs to approve your proposal. A professor may require you to submit a brief proposal for a term paper. Even if a project does not require a formal proposal, you will benefit from preparing one for yourself; it will focus your thoughts and give your research direction. The ability to conceptualise and write a quality proposal is the mark of a person ready to do independent research.

In this chapter, we are going to look at the research proposal as a whole—its value, components and preparation. The two chapters that follow will each tackle one of the two main parts of the proposal, the research problem and the research plan, in greater detail.

The value of a research proposal

A research proposal "is a document that outlines how you *propose* to undertake your research studies" (Mouton 2001:44). Essentially, it outlines *what* you will research and *how* you will research it. The 'what' part is called the *problem*; the 'how' part we call the *plan*. A proposal

describes a problem and sets out a logical, systematic plan to solve it.

Whether it is a 1-page outline for your own use or a detailed doctoral proposal, writing the research proposal is the most difficult and the most important part of the entire research project! If you rush through this step, you will have a poorly conceived research problem and plan. This makes the rest of the study difficult. On the other hand, if you invest time and effort to produce a first-class proposal, the rest of the study should fall into place.

The greatest value of a proposal is that it keeps the research project on course. It gives direction and focus to the project. It prevents you taking rabbit trails—time-consuming, energy-sapping digressions. If you invest the time and energy at the start of your project to think through *what* you will research and *how* you will go about it, formulating a clear picture in your mind of your destination and the route you will take to get there, your journey should progress without delay or detour.

For example, if you carefully and precisely formulate your research problem, keeping it narrow and focused and identifying which aspects to include and exclude, you dramatically reduce the amount of reading you need to do. This saves time. If your problem is vague and fuzzy, you will read five times as much because you have no clear yardstick to distinguish what you must read from what you need not read. Similarly, if you think through the essential steps you

must take to solve the problem, you reduce the likelihood of wasting time gathering data you do not need.

In short, prepare a good proposal and your research will flow; prepare a poor one and it will flop. An old adage —'failing to prepare is preparing to fail'—certainly applies to research. Yet students often do a poor job of preparing their proposals. Why? Partly due to ignorance, that is, not understanding the nature of research well enough to plan the project. We suspect over-eagerness is an even bigger cause. In their haste to get on with 'the real work', they slap together a poorly conceived proposal. Preparing a quality proposal is hard work. It requires much reading and reflection. It is time-consuming. However, in the long run, it saves time. Therefore, we urge you—invest quality time in the proposal. Prepare it well. What you sow into the proposal, you will reap in the thesis.

If you are convinced of the value of preparing the proposal properly, you will be wondering what elements should go into a research proposal. Views differ from one researcher to another. In the next section, we shall present our preferred breakdown of the elements that belong in a proposal.

The elements of a research proposal

A research proposal consists of two main parts: the research *problem* and the research *plan*. The first part, the research problem, addresses 'the what' of the study; it describes the problem the researcher will attempt to solve. Part two, the research *plan*, focuses on 'the how' of the study;

it explains how the researcher will go about solving the research problem. Let us examine each part.

Part 1: The research problem

The first part of the proposal should state the research problem with the utmost focus and clarity. The problem the researcher will attempt to solve needs to be defined and delimited with such precision as to leave no confusion or ambiguity as to what the research is about and what it aims to accomplish. The more clearly and precisely the research problem is laid out, the more focus the research will have.

> Your problem should be so clearly stated that anyone anywhere in the world (who reads English) may read it, understand it, and react to it without help. If the problem is *not* stated with such clarity and precision, then you are merely deceiving yourself that you know what the problem is. Such self-deception will merely cause you trouble later on (Leedy 1993:63).

What components should you include in your description of the research problem? We suggest you include these elements in this order:

    1 The statement of the problem
        1.1 The main problem
        1.2 The key questions
        1.3 The hypotheses
    2 The elucidation of the problem
        2.1 Delimitations of the study
        2.2 Definitions of key terms
        2.3 Presuppositions of the researcher

     2.4 Preliminary literature review

  3 The value of the study

     3.1 Theological value

     3.2 Practical value

The notable omission from the list is a section on the background to the problem. The first time I wrote about research methodology was a course for Master of Theology candidates at the South African Theological Seminary. I followed Mouton (2001:48), who suggests that a section on the background of the problem precede the statement of the problem. Since writing that course, I have evaluated almost one hundred research proposals by students working from the model I presented. I am convinced that including a background section tends to hinder students more than it helps them. The heading 'background' lures all except the most gifted students into writing a long-winded social narrative that seldom sheds much light on the research problem. For many students, it serves as a decoy. After writing several pages about social ills in their communities, they are unable to shift focus from the practical to the academic, from real-life problems to a research problem. Under the heading 'the problem', they describe a broad, undefined social problem that is unsuitable for theological research. For this reason, I consider it best to exclude a background section from the research proposal. Essential background information can be presented in the section about the value of the study. (If you are preparing a thesis proposal,

I advise you to check with your professor whether he wants you to include a section on the background to the study.)

The statement of the problem. Begin your research proposal with a direct statement of the research problem. State the problem as a single sentence (at most a short paragraph). You may formulate it as a statement, a question or an objective. In large research projects, the main problem is usually too large to solve without dividing it into smaller units. In such cases, break the main problem down into 2-6 subproblems; we are calling these 'key questions', but many call them 'objectives'. A hypothesis is a calculated guess as to what the answer to a research question will be. A hypothesis must be directly related to a research problem or question. Thus, you may have a hypothesis for the main problem and, if you wish, one per subproblem.

The elucidation of the problem. If you begin with a direct statement of the research problem, there will be loose ends to tie up. This section clarifies the nature of the research by explaining the delimitations, definitions and presuppositions of the study and by presenting a preliminary literature review. Under delimitations, you narrow the focus of your study by indicating what you will *not* research, that is, what you will exclude. The sections on definitions and presuppositions help your readers to understand the things you treat as 'givens' (what you assume to be true) and how you use important terms. The literature review places your planned research in the context of related scholarship, helping readers to appreciate how your study relates to what others have done.

The value of the study. The first part of the proposal ends with a motivation for doing the study. You may motivate the study at a practical and/or theoretical level. This section provides an opportunity to introduce some essential background information by indicating how the proposed research will help to address social needs in a community. You may explain who should benefit from the research and how they might benefit.

We shall discuss each of these elements in more detail in the chapter on the research problem. Now let us examine the elements that constitute the second part of the proposal, the research plan.

Part 2: The research plan

Research follows a problem-solution format; so does the research proposal. The first part sets out the research problem; the second part presents a plan to solve it. The research plan contains three sections: design, methodology and bibliography.

    4 The research design
        4.1 The structure
        4.2 The timeframe
    5 The research methodology
        5.1 The data
        5.2 The tools
        5.3 The steps
    6 The annotated bibliography

In certain cases, it may be necessary to add a section indicating the qualifications of the researcher to do the research. For example, if the proposed study requires advanced analysis of the Greek text of the New Testament, the researcher needs to be competent to perform such analysis. If an empirical study depends on specialised psychometric testing, the researcher needs the skills and licence to perform the testing.

The research design. Your first decision is what kind of study is best suited to solve the research problem. For example, can you use a purely literary approach or do you need an empirical component? Later in the book, we shall present a variety of standard designs for theological research —exegetical studies, systematic theology, empirical research, case studies, and so on. The chosen design largely dictates the logic and structure of the study. In large projects, such as theses or dissertations, the proposal needs to include proposed timeframes; these serve as a progress agreement between student and supervisor.

Research methodology. To assess the validity of a research project, one must know *exactly* how the researcher will conduct the study. You should explain step by step how you intend to do the research. The best way of doing this is to work through your proposed study one section (or one subproblem) at a time, describing the research tools (methods) you will deploy and indicating what data you will collect, how you will collect it and how it will be analysed.

Annotated bibliography. End your proposal with an annotated bibliography of at least 20 good entries. The majority of the entries should be recent scholarly works. Avoid sources that are out of date (older than 25 years) and those classified as 'popular' instead of 'academic'; do not clutter your bibliography with irrelevant books (those not directly related to your topic) or with online articles. You must show that you know what the major works on the topic are. The annotations show that you are familiar with a source's content and understand its relevance to your study.

We shall discuss each of these elements in more detail in the chapter on the research plan. The final matter we need to address in this chapter is the preparation of the research proposal.

The preparation of a research proposal

Students are notorious for being careless in the way they prepare research proposals. As members of a committee that evaluates proposals for MTh theses and DTh dissertations, we are appalled by the sloppiness with which many proposals are prepared. Students write the name of the degree programme incorrectly; their work is littered with spelling errors and grammatical errors; it abounds with imprecise language, fuzzy logic, unsubstantiated claims and unjustified generalisations or assumptions.

Take care with the preparation of your research proposal. Based on the proposal, your professor(s) will make a decision as to whether you are capable of conducting serious research.

Your proposal needs to make a positive impression. Sloppiness in the presentation of your proposal sends the wrong message. No professor looks forward to working with a lazy, careless student.

What are the important errors to avoid when preparing a research proposal? Here is a checklist of questions to consider:

- *Did you carefully check the spelling and grammar?* Even if you have to write the proposal in a second or third language, there is no excuse for the kinds of spelling, typing and grammatical errors that can be corrected by using the spelling and grammar checking functions on your word processor. Proof read your proposal several times before you submit it.

- *Does your proposal conform to the requirements of the institution?* Find out if the institution has set requirements for the following: (a) line spacing, font type and size, margins, and so on; (b) the components of the proposal; and (c) referencing and bibliography. Make sure your proposal conforms to all the institution's requirements.

- *Did you write the name of the qualification correctly?* The South African Theological Seminary offers a Master of Theology (MTh) and a Doctor of Theology (DTh). We regularly evaluate proposals in which

students specify the qualification as an MA or a PhD —very careless.[11]

● *Is your language precise and modest?* Be modest in your claims. Do not promise more than you can deliver. Support all claims with evidence. Say exactly what you mean. It is your responsibility to be so precise that you leave no room for readers to misunderstand your proposal.

Pay attention to detail when you prepare a research proposal. Do not be careless or sloppy. The research proposal is the most important part of writing a thesis. It needs to convince a panel of professors that you are capable of doing independent research.

Summary

A research proposal governs and directs a research project. This is the most difficult and most important part of many research endeavours. In the long run, the time and energy invested in conceptualising the project pays dividends.

Research proposals have two main parts—the research *problem* and the research *plan*, the *what* and the *how*. First it describes a problem, then it presents a plan to solve it. See Table 4 for a list of the components included in each section of a proposal. These two parts are so crucial that we shall devote the next two chapters to exploring them in detail.

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[11] In the case of an MTh, the candidate should also specify if the proposal is for a mini-thesis as opposed to full thesis.

In the following chapter, we shall explore how to construct each element of the research problem.

The Components of a Research Proposal
Part 1: The research problem
1 The statement of the problem
1.1 The main problem
1.2 The key questions
1.3 The hypotheses
2 The elucidation of the problem
2.1 Delimitations of the study
2.2 Definitions of key terms
2.3 Presuppositions of the researcher
2.4 Preliminary literature review
3 The value of the study
3.1 Theological value
3.2 Practical value
Part 2: The research plan
4 The research design
4.1 The structure
4.2 The timeframe
5 The research methodology
5.1 The data
5.2 The tools
5.3 The steps
6 The annotated bibliography

Table 4: The components of a research proposal

Chapter 9:
The Research Problem

The goal of all research is to solve a problem. If you do not have a problem needing a solution, a question crying out for an answer, you do not have anything to research. Therefore, formulating a research problem is the most important and, for many students, the most challenging part of the entire thesis writing process. Every thesis is a systematic attempt to answer a single research question, to solve one overarching research problem. In this chapter, we are going to examine the steps involved in formulating a research problem.

The process at a glance

The quest for a research problem begins with a *provisional research idea* (see Figure 12). This might be a topic that interests you, such as divorce, judgement or prophecy. It might be a particular book of the Bible or a passage of scripture, perhaps the book of Psalms or Matthew 24-25. Often the research idea originates with a real-life problem in your community or your church, problems such as the neglect of children's ministry in your denomination, the devastating impact of poverty or HIV/AIDS in your community, or ministering in a culture that practises polygamy. The crucial

thing to realise is that the *provisional research idea* needs to be refined into a suitable *research problem.*

5.
Flesh out the
problem

1.
Provisional
research idea

4.
Identification
of the key
questions

2.
Preliminary
literature
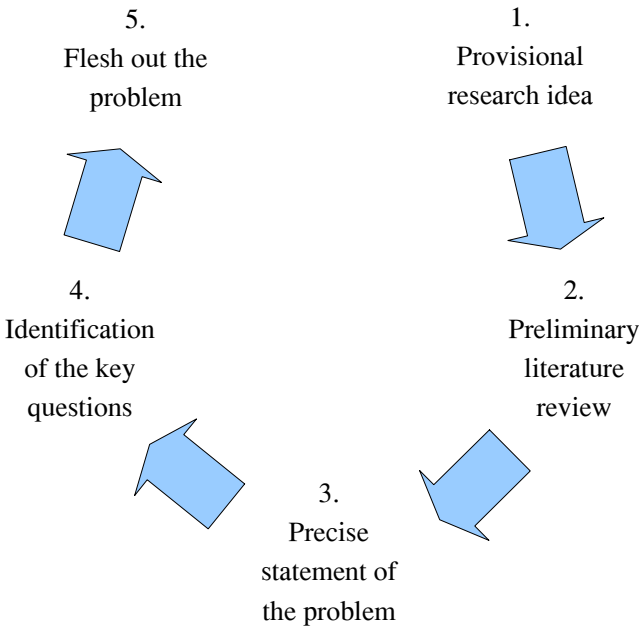review

3.
Precise
statement of
the problem

Figure 12: Formulating the research problem

When you have a provisional research idea, the next step is to conduct a preliminary study of the topic. You can do this by skimming the literature available on the topic, conducting a *preliminary literature review*. This is a vital step. By surveying literature related to your topic, you will get a good idea of what the issues and debates are, what others have done, what needs to be done, and so forth. It helps you to clarify your thinking on the issue and identify some key research questions.

When you have read broadly on the topic, you need to narrow your research idea down to *a single research problem* and formulate it precisely in one sentence, as either a statement, a question or an objective. This is a crucial moment in the research project. Whatever question or objective you commit to here will control the entire thesis. The research problem statement is not just an appealing question or a desirable objective; it is a narrow, focused, precisely formulated statement of a research problem that is informed by familiarity with existing research (literature) on the topic.

The fourth step is optional, but usually desirable. Although the research problem states the overarching question or objective of the thesis, it is helpful to break this problem statement down into a set of key questions that must be answered in order to solve the main problem. These *key questions* are logically related to the main problem. They break the main problem down into smaller, more manageable units. By answering the key questions, you should solve the main problem. We recommend that you try to identify between three and five key questions.

The final step is to *flesh out the problem* by thinking through the elements that form the elucidation of the problem (delimitations, definitions, presuppositions) and the value of the study. This process helps you to clarify and focus the research problem further.

In summary, then, the process of formulating the research problem has five steps (see Figure 12):

1) Identify a provisional research idea
2) Conduct a preliminary literature review
3) Formulate the main research problem
4) List 3-5 key research questions
5) Flesh out the research problem

Since this is such a crucial part of research, we need to examine each step in greater detail.

The research idea

Your research begins with something that interests you, such as a field of study, a practical problem or a biblical question. This is not yet a research problem, but it is the starting point. Ideas for theological research usually come from one of two worlds: the real world or the research world.

- *Real-life*. Research in the field of *practical theology* often begins with a real-life problem. Real-life problems are practical problems in the church and/or community. For example, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has caused a host of practical problems in communities and churches in South Africa. These include large numbers of orphaned children, aging grandparents raising infants, superstitions about causes and cures of HIV/AIDS, church-based prejudice towards HIV-positive people, a great need for family-based health care, and many more. Any of these could serve as the point of departure for a research project.
- *Research*. The point of departure for research in the fields of *biblical studies* and *systematic theology* (and

some topics in practical theology) lies in existing research. As you study the scriptures and read scholarly books and articles, you will begin to note which questions have been answered and which ones remain to be answered. The 'gaps' in current research provide opportunities for further research. For example, while studying the gospel of Matthew a student discovered that judgement is a major theme; he noticed that Matthew uses the phrase 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' six times (out of seven in the Bible), yet found that nobody has done an in-depth study of this phrase and its contribution to Matthew's theology. This gap in existing scholarship paved the way for his MTh thesis.

We repeat: research begins with something that *interests you*. This is vital. Research is a long, lonely, demanding task. You need to find your topic fascinating. You need to love your chosen field. Do not allow yourself to be persuaded to research a topic that does not capture your attention.

The preliminary literature review

When you have a research idea in mind, you need to begin the process of refining it into a focused research problem. The process of refining the research idea into a research problem is challenging. Mouton (2001:149) observes that students seldom have difficulty identifying potential research ideas. "The real challenge, however, is to take that idea and transform it into a research problem or research question.

In my experience, most students find this a very difficult and time-consuming process."

The first step in refining your research idea into a research question is to do a preliminary literature review. The idea is to scan academic writings related to your topic to see what has been done and what questions remain unanswered (or unasked). As you scan the literature, new questions and creative angles for examining your topic will emerge. Here are three examples of how the literature survey helps you to develop a research idea.

1. A preliminary literature review will alert you to current trends in your field of interest. Being aware of these trends helps you to channel your study into a research gap. I began my first doctoral thesis with a general interest in Bible translation. My promoters, aware of a recent development, alerted me to a few recent publications. The articles proposed a new philosophical framework for translation. I immediately recognised a gap for further research—nobody had yet examined the theoretical or practical implications of using the new framework to develop an approach to translation.

2. A preliminary literature review will help you to delimit your study to ensure that it is doable. Your initial research idea will be too broad to serve as a research problem; you need to narrow it. A new MTh candidate began with an interest in what the Old Testament teaches about the Holy Spirit. Realising that he needed to narrow his focus, his supervisor advised him to review existing literature on the subject; she gave him some tips to help him get started. As he

read widely on his research idea, he reduced the scope first to the prophetic books, then to Zechariah alone. Another candidate began with an interest in researching what heaven will be like for believers. She began with the feeling that not much research had been done on the topic, but soon discovered there was a vast body of writing on it. She settled on researching what a single text in Revelation teaches about heaven.

3. A preliminary literature review may alert you to the fact that your research idea is not doable. A colleague assisted an MTh candidate who was determined to write her thesis about justification in Romans. He cautioned her that the topic has been so thoroughly covered that there is no point in another study retracing familiar territory, but his words fell on deaf ears. They agreed that she would read broadly about justification in Romans; if she could identify a gap in the existing literature or come up with a fresh perspective, she could proceed. She could not, so she had to return to the drawing board.

These are some of the values of doing a literature survey as step two. It may lead you to abandon a poor research idea early. If the preliminary survey confirms that the idea has potential, it helps you to identify gaps in the existing research and to narrow the scope of the planned research.

The main problem

Step three is to state the main research problem in a single sentence. A well-formulated main problem, which is clear and

focused, is crucial for effective and efficient research. The research problem can be formulated as a statement, a question or an objective. It does not matter which form you use. (I usually ask my students to formulate the research problem as a question, but other formulations are equally suitable.) The following examples illustrate how the main problem can be formulated as a question, statement or objective without altering its basic meaning.

Statement	Question	Objective
The research will examine how churches in Swaziland should minister to polygamous families which join the church.	How should churches in Swaziland minister to polygamous families which join the church?	The main objective of the study is to determine how churches in Swaziland should minister to polygamous families which join the church.

Statement	Question	Objective
The research will attempt to discover the criteria and objectives the editors of the Psalter used to arrange Psalms 42-49.	What criteria and objectives did the editors of the Psalter used to arrange Psalms 42-49?	The objective of the research is to determine the criteria and objectives the editors of the Psalter used to arrange Psalms 42-49.

The Golden Rule   *The golden rule for formulating a research problem is that you must state it in a single sentence!*

Whether you choose to formulate the problem as a statement, a question or an objective, you must write it in a *single sentence*. If you cannot state it in one clear sentence, the problem is not yet clear in your mind. The more simply and precisely you state the research problem, the easier your task will be later.

> Your problem should be so clearly stated that anyone anywhere in the world (who reads English) may read it, understand it, and react to it without help. If the problem is *not* stated with such clarity and precision, then you are merely deceiving yourself that you know what the problem is. Such self-deception will merely cause you trouble later on (Leedy 1993:63).

How does one transform a research idea into a problem statement? (We shall assume the problem will be stated as a question, but the same principles apply if you prefer to formulate it as a statement or an objective.) Every question has two components:

1. Subject: what you intend to study
2. Complement: what you intend to find out about it

A few simple examples should help you to understand the two elements:

Subject	Complement	Question
leaders	why they leave churches	'Why do good leaders leave churches?'
heaven	what it will be like	'What will life in heaven be like?'
Psalms 3-8	what message they convey	'What are the main teachings of Psalms 3-8?'

By way of review, the process of formulating a question is as follows:

- Subject: decide what subject you want to study
- Complement: decide what you want to discover about it
- Question: put the two parts together as a question

Each of the examples above was a simple question. A good *research question* is usually more complex. The same principles apply to more complex questions. The difference usually lies in the subject, which tends to be more specific in a research question.

Subject	Complement	Question
leaders in Baptist churches in KwaZulu-Natal	why many are leaving	'What factors are causing pastors to leave Baptist churches in KwaZulu-Natal?'
heaven in Revelation 21:1-8	what heaven will be like	'What does Revelation 21:1-8 teach about life in heaven?'
the arrangement of Psalms 3-8	the reason the editors put them in this order	'What does the arrangement of Psalms 3-8 reveal about the editors' objectives?'

In each of these examples, the subject is much narrower (more precise) than in the simple questions in the previous example. We have narrowed the subject from 'leaders' to 'Baptist leaders in KwaZulu-Natal'. You could not research all leaders everywhere, but you could research a particular group of leaders (Baptist) in a limited area (KwaZulu-Natal). An in-depth study of all the passages of scripture that speak

about heaven would be impractical, but a study of what one key passage (Rev 21:1-8) teaches is realistic. We have narrowed the subject to make the study doable. Similarly, an exegetical study of Psalms 3-8 is not practical. By narrowing our focus to *the arrangement of* Psalms 3-8, the scope of the study becomes manageable.

What often happens is that you begin with a broad subject in mind (research idea), but, as you read widely on that topic (preliminary literature review), you begin to narrow the scope of the study by choosing to focus on one particular aspect of the broad subject—from leaders to Baptist leaders in KwaZulu-Natal, from heaven to heaven in Revelation 21:1-8, from Psalms 3-8 to the arrangement of Psalms 3-8. What you have done is *delimit* the scope of the subject.

Finally, here are two practical tips to help you avoid common traps that catch novice researchers. First, do not formulate your main problem in a way that permits a yes or no answer. A good theological research question should never permit 'yes' or 'no' as an answer. Rather ask 'what are the causes of church splits?' than 'is Satan the cause of church splits?' 'What does Matthew 19:1-12 teach about divorce and remarriage?' is a better question than, 'Does Matthew 19:1-12 permit a divorced person to remarry?' Second, do not ask a question to which you know the answer. Thesis candidates often begin with a hidden agenda. They are convinced of something and intend to use a thesis to announce their conviction to the world. They fail to realise that a thesis is research, not propaganda. Research must seek solutions to

unsolved problems, answers to unanswered questions. If you are convinced you know the answer to your question before you begin the study, your bias will prevent your doing justice to the study. Either write a book expressing your convictions or select a different topic for a thesis.

In summary, then, formulate your main problem in a single sentence. It may take the form of a statement, question or objective. It needs to indicate both what you will study (the subject) and what you wish to discover about it (the complement). In a research problem, the subject area should be narrowly delimited. Avoid questions permitting a yes or no answer; do not ask loaded questions on which your mind is made up.

The key questions

Although a research project seeks to solve a single research problem, the main problem is usually too large to treat as a whole. Therefore, it often helps to break it down into a few key questions. Answering the key questions leads naturally to solving the main problem. In a thesis, there is often one key question for each chapter (except the introduction and conclusion).

You need to be aware that various authors (and supervisors) use different terms for the same things. For example, the main research problem may be referred to as the problem, question, aim, objective or purpose of the study. What we are calling the key questions are often referred to as either subordinate problems or research objectives.

Regardless of the preferred terminology, there is always a main problem (or question or objective) that is broken down into a series of smaller problems (or questions or objectives).

To identify the key questions, ask yourself what specific questions you need to answer in order to answer the main question. If you ask the right questions in the right order, your study will fall into place naturally. Here is an example:

Main problem	How should churches in Swaziland minister to polygamous families which join the church?
Key questions	1. What cultural practices related to polygamy pose pastoral challenges to the churches? 2. How do the churches currently handle these pastoral challenges? 3. What biblical principles should pastors bear in mind as they minister to polygamous families? 4. What practical steps do churches need to take to enhance their ministry to polygamous families?

We could now easily convert this list of questions into a thesis title and outline:

Title	How churches should minister to polygamous families in Swaziland
Chapter	1. Polygamy in Swaziland: a problem practice 2. How churches currently handle the problem 3. Biblical principles for handling polygamy 4. Towards an effective ministry approach

Here is another example:

Main problem	How does the Old Testament practice of tithing taught in Malachi 3:8-12 relate to New Testament believers?
Key questions	1. What did the Old Testament teach with regard to tithing? 2. What did Malachi 3:8-12 mean to its original readers? 3. What does the New Testament teach with respect to tithing? 4. How does the message of Malachi 3:8-12 relate to New Testament believers?

Note that if the researcher successfully answers all the key questions, she will have answered the main question. Can you see how each key question could easily represent one chapter of a thesis (or section of an article)? A thesis outline for this study might look like this:

Title	How tithing in Malachi 3:8-12 relates to Christians
Chapter	1. Tithing in the Old Testament 2. Exegesis of Malachi 3:8-12 3. Tithing in the New Testament 4. Tithing and the Christian

Once you have identified the main problem and the key questions, your research project starts to take shape. You have, in embryo form, the title of your study, the main problem you need to solve, the logical sequence of steps to solve it and the key to a working outline. The final step in formulating the research problem is to flesh out the details.

Fleshing out the problem

The final step is to flesh out the research problem. This involves completing these parts:

- The hypotheses
- The delimitations
- The definitions
- The presuppositions
- The value

We shall discuss each of these components.

The hypotheses

What is a hypothesis? According to Leedy (1993:75), "Hypotheses are tentative, intelligent guesses posited for the purpose of directing one's thinking toward the solution of the problem." When you have formulated a research problem, you make an educated guess as to what its solution will be. This educated guess guides your thinking. You set out to determine whether the data supports your hypothesis (initial theory). This helps you to focus your analysis of the data.

Theologians do not agree about whether a hypothesis is an essential element of a *theological* research proposal. In many other disciplines, testing a hypothesis is by far the best approach. Medical research is a good example; the researcher suspects particular treatment may help those suffering with a disease, so he designs a series of experiments to test his hypothesis. In theological research, hypotheses are not always essential. This is another matter on which to consult your supervisor for his preferences.

If you do decide to base your study around a hypothesis, then your entire analysis should be designed to determine whether the evidence supports it as the solution to the research problem. At the end of the study, you must accept, reject or modify your hypothesis. We use 'accept' or 'reject' instead of 'prove' or 'disprove' because research findings do not constitute absolute proof. Furthermore, *proving* your hypothesis is *not* the goal of research; *testing* it is. Whether you accept, reject or modify it has no bearing on the success of your study. If the evidence points towards a different conclusion to what you envisaged when you began, so be it. If you feel pressure to prove your hypothesis, you may distort the data so as to succeed. Settle in your heart early that there is no pressure to accept it; this will help you remain objective. In fact, it reflects well on your rigour and objectivity if your findings do not support your hypothesis.

Hypotheses are directly related to research questions. Therefore, you may have one and only one hypothesis per research question. This means you may have one main hypothesis related to the main problem and one subordinate hypothesis per key question. We say 'may' because many researchers prefer to work with only a main hypothesis. Once again, if you are preparing for a thesis, check what your supervisor expects.

The delimitations

Delimitations are self-imposed limitations, that is, the ways you choose to limit the scope of your research. They state

what you will *exclude* from the research, what you will *not* study. They refine the problem by demarcating its boundaries. They help to make the study doable by reducing its scope. They help you to focus on what is relevant to your problem and avoid following rabbit trails. Leedy's (1993:74) remark is true:

> Only a researcher who thinks carefully about the problem and its focal center will distinguish between what is relevant and what is not relevant *to the problem*. All irrelevancies to the problem must be firmly ruled out in the statement of delimitation.

The delimitations directly affect the scope of the findings. If you delimit your study to 'the Zulu speaking believers in the Assembles of God in the Gauteng province', you cannot draw conclusions that apply to the Assemblies of God throughout South Africa.

What kinds of delimitations tend to form part of theological research? These are some common types of delimitations (do not treat it as an exhaustive list):

- *Canonical: limiting your study to a selected corpus of scriptures.* A term paper may not be able to address 'what the Old Testament teaches about life after death', but it may be able to do justice to 'afterlife in the book of Psalms'.

- *Geographical: limiting your study to a particular region (or regions).* To research the training needs of pastors' wives in South Africa, you would need to interview wives from all across the country; this may

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not be possible. By limiting the research to Cape Town, it becomes doable.

- *Cultural: limiting your study by cultural or language divisions.* Could you research the question, 'How does traditional African culture view the spirit world?' We doubt it. Although they share much common ground, African cultures are not uniform in their worldview. It would be more feasible to ask, 'How does traditional Zulu culture view the spirit world?'

- *Historical: limiting your study to a specific period.* If it aims to be comprehensive in depth, historical research usually needs to limit the period it covers. The shorter the period, the greater the depth in which you can examine it.

- *Ecclesiastical: limiting your study to certain churches or denominations.* You could not do an empirical study of the causes of church splits in South Africa; there have been thousands. You could probably manage causes of church splits in the Baptist Union of South Africa (perhaps with added historical and geographic delimitations).

- *Conceptual: limiting the conceptual elements to be covered.* A thesis evaluating 'the translation of texts relating to the deity of Christ in the New World Translation' need not engage christological literature as a whole. Under delimitations, the researcher can motivate not delving deeply into doctrinal debates.

The title may include some of the major delimitations. For example, a title such as 'identifying causes of church splits in the Baptist Union of South Africa between 1980 and 2005' contains three delimitations—ecclesiastical (Baptist Union), geographic (South Africa) and historical (1980-2005). Under delimitations, you might motivate your choice of these delimitations and, if necessary, add other delimitations that do not appear in the title.

The definitions

The purpose of the definition of terms section in a research proposal is to help your readers follow your argument. It should define terms as *you* will use them in your research. It does not matter whether or not your readers agree with your definition. By alerting readers to what *you* mean when you use a particular term, you help them to follow your argument and reduce the likelihood of misinterpretations.

Which terms should be defined? First, you should only define terms that are pivotal to understanding your research proposal. In other words, stick to terms crucial to the study. Less pivotal terms can be defined when they first occur in the study. Second, you should define any term an informed reader may either not understand or may misunderstand. Three categories occur regularly:

- *Uncommon technical terms.* You can assume your readers will be fairly well informed with respect to theological jargon. Define key terms they may not know. If your topic is Bible translation, you do not

need to define *dynamic equivalence*, but you should define *indirect translation* (a new approach based on a communication model called relevance theory). A doctoral dissertation on the ethics of genetic engineering need not define *utilitarianism*, but ethicists may not know exactly what *somatic engineering* is.

- *Terms with more than one attested meaning*. If a key term in your proposal has more than one attested meaning in scholarly literature, you need to state what you mean by it. Some use the term *missio Dei* to refer to God's mission to reconcile all human beings to himself, while others use it with more socio-humanitarian overtones. Attested uses of *biblical theology* include a twentieth century movement, an approach to OT and NT theology, and simply theology that is biblical in approach. The meaning ascribed to *baptism in the Holy Spirit* varies from one church movement to another. When using these kinds of terms, you must state what you mean by them.

- *Terms you are using with particular nuances*. If you intend to use a term with slightly different connotations to its standard use in scholarly literature, explain the difference. In Ethiopia, *evangelist* has a special meaning. Many churches have two full-time workers, a pastor and an evangelist. When Ethiopians speak of *the evangelist*, they mean something slightly different to what most Christians would.

You should *not* define terms informed readers will understand. One of our MTh students wrote two paragraphs in his thesis defining *the Old Testament*; this insults informed readers. Even terms such as justification, situation ethics, deism, or source criticism do not require definitions unless you are using them in with different nuances to their standard usage.

How many terms should be defined? There is no standard answer. As a rule, define as many as necessary, but as few as possible. Some studies need no definitions; others are rich in technical jargon and require many definitions. Readers of theological research tend to be well informed regarding theology. Therefore, an exegetical study using standard terminology might not require any definitions. However, if a theology student writes a doctoral dissertation on the ethics of genetic engineering in which he delves into medical procedures, he many need to define many terms since his readers may not be as familiar with medical terms.

This discussion of definitions of terms relates to the process of formulating a research problem in a research proposal. In a research report, such as a thesis, you may elect to include a more comprehensive glossary. Alternatively, many terms can be defined when they first occur in the body of the report.

The presuppositions

Presuppositions (also called assumptions) are 'the givens' that undergird your thinking and approach. They are the

things you take for granted, what you consider self-evident, the foundational truths on which you build your study.

Your presuppositions may or may not be true. You might, for example, base your study on the philosophical foundation laid by an earlier piece of research. If that research is later disproved, yours may be too. In the 1960s, Eugene Nida was the leading Bible translation theorist in the world. He developed his ideas based on the best linguistic theories available at the time. Today, linguistic models have changed, calling some of Nida's views into question.

Your readers may or may not share your presuppositions. By stating your presuppositions, you alert your readers to your personal bias and help them to follow your argument. If your exegesis of a gospel text assumes Matthean priority, a reader who believes in Markan priority may have trouble following your train of thought. Although she may disagree with your view, by alerting her to the fact that your study presupposes Matthean priority, you empower her to understand your analysis.

Which presuppositions do you need to state? Any that materially influence your study. "An important task in research thinking is to ask the question: 'Which of my presuppositions affect the way I think and write?'" (Vyhmeister 2001:44). How might your personal bias (for example, church affiliation, theological persuasion) prejudice your interpretation of the data? Which beliefs or theories are foundational to the research? Asking these kinds of questions will help you to pinpoint presuppositions you need to state.

Since scholarly literature does not agree regarding whether Isaiah 40-66 was written by Isaiah in the eighth century B.C., if you take this for granted *and* doing so materially affects your argument or conclusions, you need to state it as a presupposition. If you set out to analyse whether 1 Corinthians 13:10 supports the cessation of spiritual gifts, your church and theological background (for example, Pentecostal or Reformed) will significantly affect your objectivity; therefore, mention your background. Perhaps your convictions regarding the inspiration of scripture or your preferred hermeneutic methods are so crucial to your study that you should declare them up front.

The value

The final section of the problem should motivate the study by explaining its value. Depending on the nature of the study, the value may be theoretical and/or practical. You should describe how the study promises to contribute to current knowledge (theoretical value) and/or to present realities (practical value).

When you discuss the practical value of the study, you should address *who* should benefit, *why* they should benefit and *how* they should benefit. Since the model we are recommending does not begin with an introduction section, this is the place to provide a little background information. Briefly describe the present realities and how the proposed research may help to address them. But please keep this section short and sharp, a few paragraphs at most. Do not

wander off on a five-page lament about the social ills of society.

This is an example of a well-written 'value' section for a thesis entitled: 'Practical proposals for raising the profile of children's ministry in Assemblies of God churches in Zimbabwe':

> Speaking as a leader in the Assemblies of God in Zimbabwe, casual observation suggests that children's ministry is widely neglected in the denomination's churches. Few churches appear to devote a significant percentage of their budget to children's ministry. The children's ministries that exist seem to focus on entertaining the children so they do not disturb the adults' worship service rather than on evangelising, discipling and equipping children for ministry.
>
> This study will help to raise the profile of children's ministry in the Assemblies of God in three ways. First, by means of a descriptive survey it will provide accurate data regarding the present state of children's ministry. Second, its analysis of the biblical and scholarly materials will underline the importance and value of prioritising children's ministry. Last, and most important, it will develop a feasible strategy for raising the profile of children's ministry amongst churches and church leaders in the denomination.

In just 150 words, this proposal indicates who will benefit (the Assemblies of God in Zimbabwe), why they will benefit (children's ministry is undervalued) and how they will benefit (raising the profile of children's ministry). It provides enough background information to understand the context of the study and enough motivation to persuade readers of the study's value.

Summary

A research proposal consists of two sections: the research problem and the research plan. The process of developing a research idea into a full research problem involves five steps:

1) Identify a provisional research idea
2) Conduct a preliminary literature review
3) Formulate the main research problem
4) List 3-5 key research questions
5) Flesh out the research problem

The initial research idea is just something that interests you; it may or may not prove to be a feasible research area. To help decide if it is a good research idea, you need to preview the literature in the field. Your reading will help you to isolate and formulate a specific research problem. Since this main problem is often too large to tackle as a whole, divide it into a few key questions that represent the logical steps from problem to solution. Lastly, flesh out the problem section of your proposal by addressing the hypotheses, delimitations, definitions, presuppositions and value of the study.

Chapter 10:
The Research Plan

The research plan constitutes the second half of the research proposal. The first half presents the research problem. The second half sets out a plan to solve it. The plan needs to be thorough, describing every step the researcher intends to take in solving the problem. Many research proposals fail dismally here. They set out the plan in such vague, general terms that one really has no idea *exactly* how the candidate intends to solve the problem. The research plan should be presented in such detail and with such clarity a different researcher, simply by studying the proposal, could duplicate the study.

We suggest the research proposal should include three sections under the research plan:

- The research design
- The research methodology
- The annotated bibliography

We shall devote one section of this chapter to each of these three parts.

The design

The research design is the general approach you will use to solve your research problem. The most important part of the design is *the structure* of the study. The other standard element is the timeframe.

The structure. By structure, we mean identifying logical, sequential divisions of the study. What major steps will be needed? How should these steps be ordered? These steps will form the major parts, chapters or sections of the research report (paper, thesis or dissertation). When you know the steps and their sequence, it is usually easy to work through them one by one determining the exact methodology needed for each.

In the simplest terms, theological research tends to be one of two types: literary or empirical. Since all theological research involves some literary research, we tend to define a study as *literary research* if it has no empirical component, but as *empirical research* if it contains fieldwork. Research under the banner of biblical studies and systematic theology is usually literary, while many studies under practical theology are empirical.

As a broad, general rule, research in practical theology often begins by examining a present situation, then formulates a biblical model of what should be, and culminates with developing a practical response. Analysing the present situation often requires empirical research. In systematic theology, one typically begins with a thorough analysis of current views, then analyses the biblical evidence (the bulk of

the study), and concludes with a short section on the significance of the findings. The biblical analysis needs four steps: identify all the scriptures, analyse each one in context, deduce timeless principles and construct a theory to explain all the data. Exegetical studies often move from a discussion of the context of a passage to a detailed examination of the text itself and conclude with a look at its significance. We shall discuss each of these models in detail in chapters 11-13.

You should *not* simply adopt one of these designs uncritically. Your research problem must control the design of your study; it dictates what steps are needed and the best order in which to follow them. Therefore, it controls which model is most appropriate and how, if at all, you should customise or modify it to suit your objectives.

As you study these research designs, you will notice that every model has substantial biblical *and* practical components. This reflects our convictions that theology should be both biblical and practical. This might seem obvious to you, but not all scholars share these values. Many institutions make little room for the Bible in their approach to either systematic or practical theology. When an institution does not view the Bible as God's inerrant and authoritative word, it tends to approach systematic theology as an exercise in analysing theological views and theories rather than a disciplined study of the Bible's teachings. Similarly, it tends to approach practical theology as a pragmatic exercise, permitting theses that closely resemble the social sciences in that they are exclusively empirical in design.

We favour a Bible-based approach to all theology. While we value both the writings of scholars and the findings of empirical research, we consider these subordinate to the revealed truth of the word of God. For us, therefore, systematic theology is first and foremost a study of what God has revealed about a particular topic. Similarly, practical theology is first and foremost an investigation of how the truth of God's word applies to the real-life circumstances and problems we encounter in the world.

We also embrace an approach to theology that emphasises its practical application for the church and the believer. Therefore, all three models move from theory to practice, from doctrine to application, from belief to behaviour, from ideas to implications. This is not the norm for postgraduate theological research. Rarely do theses in the domains of systematic theology and biblical studies make a serious attempt to apply their exegetical or doctrinal findings to churches or believers. Because we believe that God, his kingdom and his word are applicable to every area of life and that his teachings are given to meet human needs, we strongly encourage every thesis to deal with 'significance and suggestions'.

The timeframe. If you are writing a thesis or conducting funded research, your proposal must include a proposed timeframe for completing each phase of the study. This serves as a kind of contract between student and supervisor or between researcher and funder.

In the vast majority of cases, MTh and DTh students grossly underestimate the time it will take to complete their research. When you draft a research proposal, allow more time than you think you will need for each step. Full-time students should be able to complete an MTh thesis in 1-2 years, a DTh dissertation in 2-3 years. The averages for part-time students are 3-4 years for the MTh and 4-6 years for the DTh. We suggest you assume it will take you towards the upper end of these averages and spread out your proposed dates accordingly. If you finish faster than proposed, nobody will complain.

The presentation. In your research proposal, the research design section should begin with a brief description of the type of study, followed by a chapter outline with dates and notes attached. These elements should be included:

- The type of research being undertaken
- The steps and their sequence
- The nature of the data involved (literary or empirical)
- The chapter outline with brief notes
- The proposed dates of completion

Here is a possible design section for a thesis addressing the question, 'How should churches in Swaziland minister to polygamous families which join the church?'

Research Design

The proposed study falls within the field of practical theology. Solving the main problem will require four major steps. First, the study will describe the challenges that cultural practices related to polygamy pose to churches in Swaziland. Then, it will examine how churches currently handle these

challenges. Next, it will present biblical principles Swazi pastors should bear in mind when ministering to polygamous families. Finally, it will conclude with some practical guidelines for pastors to implement.

The study will contain both literary and empirical components. There is little written material available on steps 1 and 2, so the researcher will gather these data through empirical means. Step 3 requires a literary approach, analysing selected texts that have relevance to ministry in polygamous settings.

The thesis will require six chapters. Here is a proposed outline with intended dates of completion:

1) *Introduction* (Mar. 2009). The introduction will present the research problem and the research plan.
2) *The challenges of ministering in polygamous settings* (Dec. 2009). The study must begin with an understanding of the challenges of ministering in the Swazi culture.
3) *The current approaches of Swazi pastors* (Feb. 2010). The next logical step is to document and evaluate current approaches to the challenges.
4) *Biblical principles for ministering in polygamous settings* (Aug. 2010). Thereafter, a detailed analysis of the biblical principles relating to polygamy and ministry to those who practise it is needed.
5) *Biblical, ministerial model for Swazi pastors* (Nov. 2010). In the light of the data presented in chapters 2-4, the researcher will attempt to develop a model for ministering to polygamous families in Swaziland.
6) *Conclusion* (Dec. 2010). The final chapter will summarise the research and make suggestions for pastors in Swaziland.

The design section, as this example illustrates, gives a comprehensive outline of the process the researcher will

follow, without going into detail about *exactly how* he will do each step. The methodology section answers the question, how exactly will you do each step?

The methodology

In the design section, you presented a broad overview of the steps necessary to solve the research problem. Now, in the methodology section, you take each step in turn and describe *exactly how* you plan to do it. You need to describe each step in sufficient detail that, by the end of the study, others can confirm that you did what you promised to do and did it properly.

The results of your research will be judged on one criterion above all others—how well you choose and implement your methodology. Did you choose appropriate methods to solve your research problem? Did you implement your chosen methods consistently and competently? If you commit yourself to a diachronic approach, examiners will ask whether you really did a diachronic study. If you promise to exegete key texts, they will check that you did proper exegesis. If you undertake a descriptive survey, did you use proper data collection and analysis techniques?

The best way to do the methodology section of a research proposal is to take each step in the research design and explain exactly how you plan to do it. For each step, you should discuss *the data* you need and *the tools* you will use.

The tools

What we are calling tools, others called methodologies (plural). It is important to distinguish between research methodologies (tools) and your methodology.

Research methodologies are proven ways of solving certain problems. They are like tools in a toolbox. If you are building a cabinet, at different stages you will use different tools (saw, screwdriver, hammer, pliers). Each tool was designed for a particular task. In the same way, a researcher has a toolbox with a variety of methodologies—tried and tested methods of solving particular problems. An expert researcher has mastered the art of knowing when and how to employ each tool to solve problems.

Your methodology is a description of the steps you will take to solve your particular problem. Drawing from your toolkit of methodologies, you will select and use appropriate tools for each step. In your methodology, you must describe which tools you will use, as well as when, how and why you will use them. You may use many different methodologies in your methodology or you may use only one or two. You must select and use the appropriate tools for each task.

You can only use tools you own. Similarly, you can only employ methodologies if you are aware of them. Therefore, we shall quickly present a whirlwind survey of some of the methodologies (tools) commonly used in theological research. This survey is not intended to be complete. We just want to give you an idea of the kinds of hammers, chisels, spanners, saws and screwdrivers in a research toolbox.

Methodologies used primarily in conceptual argumentation. The methodologies here are different ways of engaging conceptual literature in a philosophical debate. Regardless of the field of study, your research could draw on a variety of these at different stages. These include:

- *Dialogical:* simply engaging in dialogue with different authors' viewpoints.
- *Comparative:* comparing different views, analysing their similarities and differences.
- *Complementary:* harmonising different theories or views by moulding them into a single, logically coherent whole.
- *Epistemological:* critiquing the philosophical foundation on which a theory or an argument is based.
- *Polemical:* arguing for or against a particular viewpoint.
- *Analytical:* breaking down a theory or a concept into its logical components or constituents.
- *Synthetic:* putting together previously unrelated concepts or components to form a new entity (theory, model).

Methodologies used primarily in biblical exegesis. The methodologies here are examples of interpretive tools used in the exegesis of Bible passages. You may need to use several of these tools when engaging the biblical text.

- *Textual criticism:* reconstructing the original text by weighting variant readings.

- *Historical criticism:* reconstructing the history of the text or the history in the text.
- *Lexical analysis:* conducting word studies on key words.
- *Syntax analysis:* analysing the grammar of the text.
- *Discourse analysis:* analysing the discourse features showing the flow and coherence of a pericope.
- *Structural analysis:* examining the literary and semantic structure of a text.
- *Source criticism:* analysing and/or reconstructing the sources an author used.
- *Form criticism:* examining the literary forms and the life-settings in which they were used.
- *Redaction criticism:* exploring the theological message of a text.
- *Rhetorical criticism:* studying the literary artistry or rational argument of a text.

Many of these tools are defined and deployed differently by varying schools of theology. The presuppositions of the user can dramatically affect how the tool is used. Therefore, it may be necessary to indicate how you define and apply some of these tools.

Methodologies used primarily in field research. The methodologies listed here are ways of gathering primary data. Each method is susceptible to misuse, so you should be sure you understand how to use a method correctly when you elect to employ it in your study.

- *Questionnaire:* a series of written questions a researcher supplies to subjects, requesting their response. Different kinds of questions solicit different types of data (for example, open or closed questions, quantitative or qualitative questions).
- *Interview:* a series of questions a researcher addresses personally to respondents. The interview can be structured or unstructured. As with questionnaires, different questions solicit different kinds of data.
- *Survey:* a statistical tool designed to provide a broad overview of a representative sample of a large population.
- *Case study:* the collection and presentation of detailed information about a particular participant, looking intensely at an individual or small participant pool, drawing conclusions only about that participant or group and only in that specific context.
- *Observation:* in fieldwork, observation occurs when the researcher observes the subjects; in *participant observation,* a researcher systematically observes people while joining in their activities; in *action research,* a researcher observes without participating.
- *Focus group:* a group discussion to solicit views about a focus area.

We shall discuss some of these empirical methods in more detail in later chapters. However, using them properly in complex studies may require more specialised training than

we can provide here. If necessary, we urge you to read works offering specialised guidance on these methods.

We must emphasise that all these methodologies are simply *the tools of the trade*. Just as a handyman uses a variety of tools to complete a job, so too the researcher uses various methodologies at different stages of a study.

The data

You must address all critical questions relating to the data you will use. Here are some examples:

- What data do you need?
- If they already exist, how will you access them?
- If they do not exist, how will you collect them?
- How do you intend to analyse and interpret them?

For the literary components of your study, you should list the primary and major secondary sources you plan to use and how you intend to use them. For empirical components, you should address matters such as the nature and scope of the population, the selection of sampling techniques, data collection instruments and techniques, data analysis and interpretation and any other aspects of significance (see ch. 15 for a detailed description of survey research).

We turn now to how you should present your methodology in the research proposal.

The presentation

When you write up the methodology section of your proposal, describe your methodology for each stage of the study. In an orderly, step-by-step fashion, explain what you

will do to solve the problem. Discuss the data and the tools. Defend your choice of methods for each step by explaining your rationale. The crucial thing is to use the right tool for each job, to employ appropriate methodologies for each aspect of the research project.

By way of example, let's consider the example study on how to minister to polygamous families in Swaziland. How exactly would we do the first phase of the study, describing the challenges Swazi pastors face ministering in a polygamous culture? Unless someone has previously conducted a similar study, the data probably do not exist, so the researcher will need to collect them herself. How will she do it? Should she use questionnaires, interviews or focus groups? Whichever tool (or tools) she chooses, whose views should she survey (for example, pastors, elders, missionaries, members, polygamists)? How many (per group) will comprise the sample? Will the sample be representative of the population? What data will be solicited? How will the integrity of the data be insured? How will the data be analysed? These are the kinds of questions the methodology section should address.

Turning to the chapter on the biblical principles, what sources will be used? Will she conduct a diachronic (across time) survey of biblical passages that touch on the study topic? Will she do detailed exegesis of selected texts? If so, which texts and what exegetical steps will be used? Are there existing studies that can serve as the point of departure for

this section? If so, what are they and how will the researcher engage them (for example, dialogue, synthesis, comparison)?

What we are trying to illustrate is that for each major division of the study, the researcher should describe the steps she intends to follow in as much detail as possible. The last section of the research plan is an annotated bibliography. Let's discuss it briefly.

The bibliography

Research requires mastering existing literature on your chosen topic. Your research proposal needs to show that you have done a significant amount of preliminary reading—you have scanned the field and read some key works. You can show your preliminary reading by including an annotated bibliography with at least 20 entries.

What is an annotated bibliography? Whereas a simple bibliography lists the works cited or consulted, an annotated bibliography adds a one- or two-sentence explanation of why the work is relevant to the research topic. From the annotation, it should be clear why the work cited will be a valuable resource for the study. Here is a sample annotated bibliography for an exegetical thesis on Psalm 3:

> Kselman JS 1987. Psalm 3: a structural and literary study. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49:572-580. This article analyses the structural markers in the Hebrew text of Psalm 3, critiques various views of the psalm's structure and proposes a new structural interpretation.
>
> Sarna NM 1992. Legal terminology in Psalm 3:8. In M Fishbane & E Tov (eds), *Shaarei Talmon,* 171-181. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns. Sarna examines the terminology in

Psalm 3:8, noting its legal connotations. His article is helpful for evaluating the main theme(s) of the psalm.

Terrien SL 2003. *The psalms: strophic structure and theological commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. This is a major commentary on the Book of Psalms. Terrien's greatest contribution lies in his analysis of each psalm's structure and flow of thought.

What common mistakes do students make when compiling the bibliography in a thesis proposal? In dealing with our students, we often encounter these mistakes regularly:

- *Outdated works*. The majority of entries should be from the last 10-15 years. The dates are among the first things we look at when we skim the bibliography in a research proposal. We do not want to see the majority of entries from the 1960s. Entries older than 25 years should be seminal works in the field.

- *Popular works*. A thesis is a piece of theological *research*. It needs to engage with academic literature, which is the product of research. Popular and devotional books (as opposed to academic sources) express the opinions and experiences of the author, but those views may not be well researched. The majority of works should be academic resources.

- *Irrelevant works*. Students often fill up their bibliography by listing resources unrelated to the proposed research topic. If your thesis topic is 'the work of the Holy Spirit in Luke's gospel', do not list Steven Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* in the bibliography. When we see this, we immediately suspect you have been too lazy to do a

proper job and are listing works for the sake of reaching 20 entries.

- *General works*. Try to include as many specialised books and articles as possible. Although one-volume commentaries, Bible dictionaries or systematic theology textbooks may prove helpful during the study, specialised works are more valuable. For a thesis proposal on Psalm 3, Kselman's article on the structure of Psalm 3 is more helpful than *The New Bible Commentary*.

If your topic touches on several major areas, your bibliography should include entries relevant to each major part. If you are researching leadership in the Salvation Army in South Africa, your bibliography should not be limited to titles on leadership. There should be some dealing with the Salvation Army, especially the Army in South Africa.

Our seminary requires that all research proposals include an annotated bibliography with at least 20 entries. This is a minimum. For certain topics, the supervisor may require additional preliminary reading, especially at the doctoral level. For the works included, he wants to see recent, relevant, specialised, academic works. Resist the temptation to pad your bibliography with outdated, irrelevant, general, popular titles.

A word of advice—*start compiling your thesis bibliography from day one!* Each time you consult a book or an article, add it to your bibliography. Writing the bibliography is frustrating at the best of times, but if you

leave it to the end of the process, it can be almost impossible. We recommend that you open a file on your computer called 'Bibliography' and update it every time you find a new source.

Chapter 11:
Biblical Exegesis

Biblical exegesis is an in-depth, inductive examination of scripture in which the exegete systematically applies established hermeneutic tools (exegetical methods) to discover the meaning and implications of a text of a biblical text (or group of texts).

Good biblical exegesis meets all the criteria of research. The object of enquiry is the biblical text. Exegetical methods are research methods. The objective is to resolve an interpretive problem in the text to determine its meaning and significance.

Although this chapter offers some guidelines for an exegetical procedure, its goal is to provide a framework for doing exegesis as theological research. For detailed treatment of exegetical procedures, students should consult some of the many excellent exegetical guides.

Presuppositions of evangelical exegesis

As interpreters, we all approach the biblical text with a set of presuppositions that govern our exegesis. Since these presuppositions influence our exegesis, we should state them openly. My hermeneutic presuppositions influence the

method presented in this chapter. If your views differ significantly from mine, you should still find the chapter helpful, but you may need to adapt it. These are my convictions:

1. The scriptures are the inspired word of God and are inerrant in the autographs.

2. The primary goal of biblical interpretation is to discover the author-intended meaning, that is, the message the Holy Spirit led the human author to convey to the original readers. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit guided the writing process to ensure the intended message is faithfully communicated in writing.[12]

3. Each text has one primary author-intended meaning; therefore, each passage can have only one correct interpretation. I reject all forms of *sensus plenior* (multiple meanings), especially the idea that the text can mean something to us that it could never have meant to its original readers.

4. The Bible should be interpreted literally, that is, at face value according to the normal rules of communication (that is, grammatical-historical exegesis).

5. Although a text has only one meaning, it may have many valid applications. The applications derive from the one meaning; they are concrete applications of the same timeless truth.

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[12] In ordinary communication, this is often not true. What we say may not accurately represent what we intend to communicate. Because the Holy Spirit superintended the writing of the scriptures, he ensured that the human authors wrote exactly what he intended.

6. Exegesis must be relevant and valuable to today's believers. To complete his work, an exegete must move from interpretation to application, from the past to the present, from the there-and-then to the here-and-now.

These convictions underlie my approach to exegetical studies. If your presuppositions differ significantly, you may need to adjust the model I am about to present.

Design for an exegetical study

Whether it is a 10-page term paper, a 100-page thesis or a 300-page dissertation, an exegetical study has five main parts: (1) introduction, (2) context, (3) meaning, (4) significance and (5) conclusion. In a term paper, these would be sections of the paper. In a thesis, each might be one chapter. In a dissertation, each part could require several chapters.

Section 1: The introduction

The opening section provides framework for the study. It covers such elements as the boundaries of the passage, the reason for selecting it, problems in the text, scholarly views (short literature review) on the passage and its problems, a brief description of the research approach and an overview of the remainder of the study.

- *The passage*. Explain your reasons for choosing the text and how you delimited its boundaries.
- *The objectives*. The general objective of exegesis is to expose the meaning and significance of the biblical text. If your exegesis will focus on particular

exegetical problems in the text, describe them; your objective will be to solve these problems.

- *The perspectives.* Summarise the major scholarly perspectives on the text, especially different approaches and alternate solutions to exegetical problems.
- *The plan.* Preview the remainder of the study, describing the approach, methodology and structure.

Section 2: The context

This part deals with all aspects relevant to the historical and the literary contexts of the book in which the selected passage is located. Most exegetical studies require a section devoted to the book in which the passage is located. This section should cover whichever of these elements are relevant to the research:

- *The general background of the book.* The general background encompasses issues related to the *authorship, date* and *audience* (recipients) of the book. Unless these matters are crucial to the argument, they can be addressed briefly in the thesis.
- *The historical context of the book.* The historical context relates primarily to the quest for the *occasion* and *purpose* of the book. A secondary aspect of this section is to explain any aspects of the historical setting (milieu) of the book that are crucial to understanding its message.
- *The literary context of the book.* At this level, the literary context has to do with the book's *structure*

and *argument* (that is, flow of thought). How an interpreter understands the overall structure and argument of the book has an influence on how he understands the meaning of the passage.

- *The theological themes of the book.* For some studies, a survey of the major *themes* and *motifs* of the book is necessary. In particular, this section should analyse what the whole book teaches about themes relevant to the focal point of the selected passage.

Section 3: The meaning

This section is the heart of the exegetical study, consisting of an in-depth analysis of the text.

1. *Preliminary analysis.* The preliminary exegetical work entails two main tasks: analyse textual variants and translate the passage.

- *Textual criticism.* Examine textual variants and discuss any meaningful ones.
- *Translation.* If you are familiar with the original language, it is valuable to produce your own translation of the passage. Where difficult translation decisions have to be made, the translation should include notes explaining the problem, listing translation options and motivating the choice. If you are unable to produce your own translation, you may substitute by comparing various good translations. Write out the text of the translation you will be using

as your main text together with notes discussing significant alternate renderings.[13]

2. *Contextual analysis*. Study the immediate historical and literary context of your pericope. You should give due attention to whichever of these aspects of the pericope context are relevant:

- *Historical setting*. Determine the underlying historical occasion the author was addressing and analyse any historical or cultural allusions in the text.
- *Literary context*. Examine attention to the literary context of the passage, which includes the immediate context, the book context and the canonical context.

3. *Verbal analysis*. Investigate the actual words in the passage, their meaning (lexical analysis) and relationships (grammatical analysis).

- *Lexical*. Analyse the meaning of key words and phrases to discover their significance in the text.
- *Grammatical*. Examine any significant grammatical features in the passage (for example, verb tenses, genitive phrases, conditional clauses, and so on).

4. *Literary analysis*. Examine the literary features of the passage to determine their influence on the meaning of the passage. Under the banner of literary features, we include:

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[13] The translation is usually done in two phases. At the start of your study, produce a provisional translation. Then, after you have conducted an in-depth study, go back and refine the translation in the light of your observations.

- *Genre*. Identify the general and specific genre of the passage and how it influences the interpretation of the text; for example, if the text is Matthew 8:18-22, the general genre is 'gospel', while the specific genre is 'pronouncement story'.
- *Structure*. Analyse the relationship between parts of the passage; techniques such as sentence diagrams or semantic structure analyses are helpful.
- *Composition*. For some texts and some studies, matters relating to traditions, sources, redaction and life-settings require investigation.
- *Rhetoric*. Examine the stylistic features of the text that may influence its meaning; these include compositional techniques such as figures of speech, repeated words, catch phrases and markers of emphasis.

5. *Exegetical synthesis*. In this section, you should begin to pull together your exegetical findings. The primary question you want to answer here is this: What was the author trying to communicate to his readers through the text? To answer this question, you might need to answer such questions as these:

- What are the major concerns or issues the passage addresses?
- What is the impact of the combination of genre, literary devices and structure on the meaning of the passage?
- What is the relationship between the motifs and the concerns of the passage?

- What is the relation of these motifs and concerns to the historical setting of the book?

Section 4: The significance

No exegetical thesis is complete until it addresses the contemporary significance of the passage, answering the question: What difference does it make? This section may explore two kinds of significance: (a) theology and/or (b) application.

1. *Theology: the doctrinal significance of the passage*. Here the thesis should expound what the passage teaches us (a) about God, (b) about creation (especially ourselves) and (c) the relationship between God and creation.

- What universal truths (principles) does the passage teach?
- How does it harmonise with the whole teaching of scripture?
- What contribution does it make to Christian doctrines?

2. *Application: the practical significance of the passage*. The study should make *at least one application* of the passage to contemporary Christianity. The application should focus on the central idea in the exposition of the passage.

- Identify the target group at which you will aim your application. Then give attention to how you can (a) explain the original meaning of the text to them and (b) help them connect with the truths in the text.
- Identify how the text applies to today's situation. The focus may be upon (a) the life of the individual

> Christian and/or (b) the life and ministry of the church.

In many institutions, exegetical studies do not include a major section on the significance of the text. Students may leave the research in the there-and-then without building bridges to the here-and-now. In our opinion, exegesis is not complete until it links the biblical text with the real work, the past with the present, allowing the ancient message to speak to our modern context. Since not all professors require (or even desire) this component, we recommend you ask your professor what he expects.

Section 5: The conclusion

The conclusion may or may not be a separate section of the study. In some exegetical studies, the section about 'significance' *is* the conclusion. It briefly summarises the exegetical findings, then closes with a discussion of the significance (doctrinal and/or practical) of those findings. In other studies, the conclusion is a separate, short section summarising the problem, process and findings of the study and possibly proposing further research.

Writing up an exegetical study

How should you write up an exegetical study? The answer depends somewhat on the length of the study. The exegetical design presented above outlines the logic of the study and the elements that typically fall under each main section, but it does not dictate the outline of the study. The most common

way to organise the report on an exegetical study is what we call the commentary structure.

The commentary structure

This approach moves through the passage verse by verse, presenting relevant exegetical insights as they occur in the pericope. It needs an introduction section and a section discussing the overarching background issues, but it presents most of the exegetical details in the verse-by-verse discussion. The commentary integrates the historical, cultural, redactional, grammatical, lexical and other types of observations. It may discuss the significance (doctrinal and practical) within the commentary or in a separate section.

An exegetical study can be organised under the following categories:

1. Introduction
    1.1. The passage
    1.2. The problems
    1.3. The perspectives
2. Context of the book
    2.1. General background: author, date and audience
    2.2. Historical context: occasion, purpose and milieu
    2.3. Literary structure: structure and argument
    2.4. Theological: themes and motifs
3. Exegesis of the passage
    3.1. Text and translation
        - Present the working translation of the text (your own or an existing one) followed by

notes discussing relevant textual variants and translation alternatives.

    3.2. Meaning for the original readers

- Move through the text verse by verse discussing all the points relevant to its meaning, such as key words, grammar, customs, geography, rhetoric, redaction, and so on.

    3.3. Significance for today's readers

4. Conclusion
5. Bibliography

An alternative to a commentary arrangement is a topical arrangement. This is less popular, but well suited to certain studies.

The topical structure

An alternative structure, a topical outline, uses each step in the exegetical process as a heading (or, in longer studies, a chapter). So, for example, under *grammatical analysis* you discuss all important grammatical features; composition might be discussed under a heading such as *redaction criticism*. The name 'topical outline' derives from the fact that the analysis of the text is discussed under topics or in categories.

These could serve as the headings for a topical study:

1. Introduction
2. Text and translation
3. Exegetical analysis

4. Contemporary significance
5. Conclusion
6. Bibliography

The body of the study falls under the heading 'exegetical analysis' on the outline. This section presents exegetical data arranged under headings that represent steps in the exegetical process. The nature of the study dictates which headings are included. Any exegetical process might be used as a heading (for example, lexical analysis, grammatical analysis, form criticism, literary context, discourse features, historical context, and so on).

Summary

Exegesis is a form of research. Its general objective is to uncover the text's author-intended meaning for the original readers and its significance for today's church. On occasion, its specific objective is to solve a particular interpretive problem in the passage. To achieve these objectives, it deploys a variety of exegetical methods as its research methods.

A detailed exegetical analysis of the chosen pericope lies at the heart of exegetical research. Preliminary study of the book in which the passage is located lays a foundation for the exegesis, while exploring its doctrinal and/or practical significance links the exegesis to the present.

There are two acceptable ways of writing up an exegetical study, namely, the commentary style and the topic approach. The commentary method proceeds verse by verse, presenting

exegetical observations as they relate to the text. The topical approach arranges the main body of the study under topical headings.
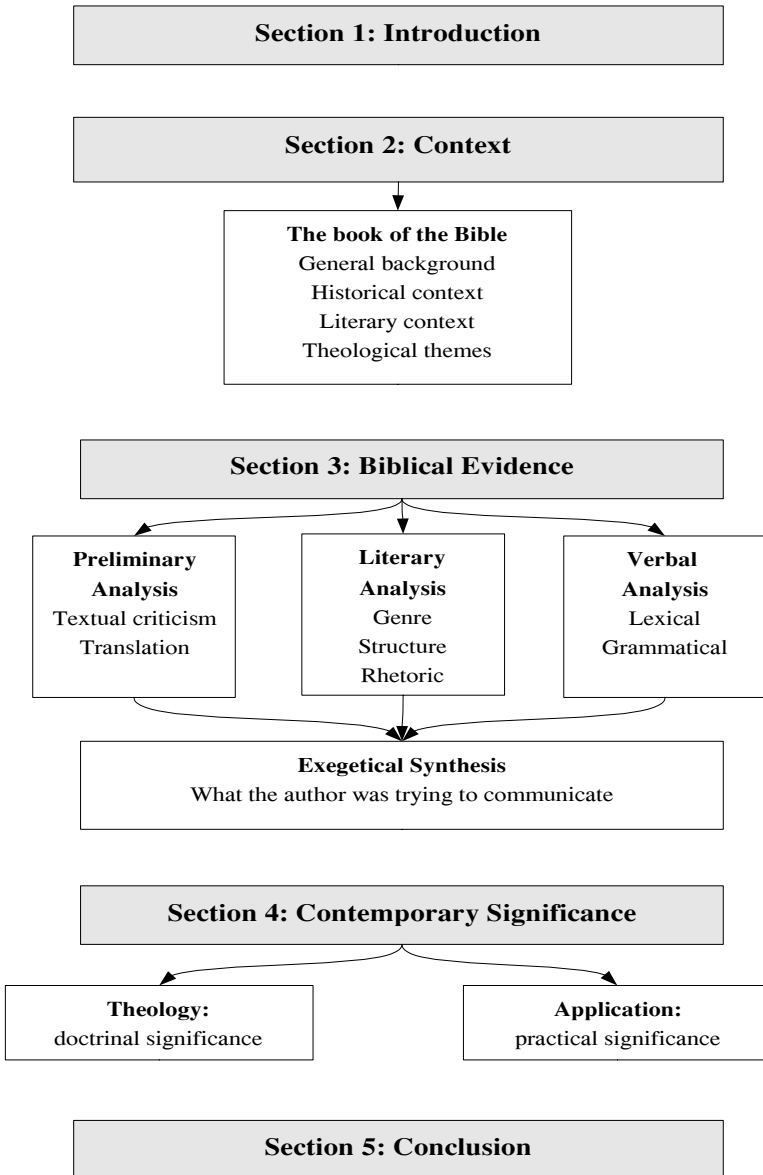
Section 1: Introduction

Section 2: Context

The book of the Bible
General background
Historical context
Literary context
Theological themes

Section 3: Biblical Evidence

**Preliminary
Analysis**
Textual criticism
Translation

**Literary
Analysis**
Genre
Structure
Rhetoric

**Verbal
Analysis**
Lexical
Grammatical

Exegetical Synthesis
What the author was trying to communicate

Section 4: Contemporary Significance

Theology:
doctrinal significance

Application:
practical significance

Section 5: Conclusion

Figure 13: Design for an Exegetical Study

Chapter 12:
Systematic Theology

For evangelicals,[14] systematic theology is *a systematic study of what the Bible teaches about a topic*. Can we justly call doing systematic theology *research*? The answer depends on *how* we do it, the method we use. If we begin with the presupposition that the task of theology is to systematise the teachings of scripture, the manner in which we proceed should meet all the criteria of research. In this chapter, we shall discuss the presuppositions and steps of evangelical systematic theology. Based on these presuppositions and steps, we shall present two models for doing evangelical theology.

Presuppositions of evangelical theology

The point of departure for evangelical theology is the conviction that the Bible is God's full and final revelation. Three vital presuppositions of evangelical theology derive from this conviction. First, God has spoken in his word. Since

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[14] Evangelical (conservative) scholars approach systematic theology differently to their liberal counterparts. Our approach reflects conservative presuppositions. We use the term 'evangelical theology' with the meaning 'systematic theology practised in a conservative, evangelical manner'.

we have an inspired, inerrant, authoritative, sufficient word from God, our task is to identify and summarise what it teaches. Second, as a corollary to this, because the word of God comes from the mind of God, it forms a harmonious whole, without inner contradictions (provided we interpret it correctly). Third, although the Bible's teaching is a coherent whole, it does evidence progressive development over time. Progressive revelation implies that each new revelation builds on the foundation of earlier revelation on the same topic.

The evangelical approach to systematic theology differs vastly from the liberal approach. Because liberal theologians do not begin with the assumption that God has spoken, they have to resort to speculation (Ware 2001). Lacking a solid, objective point of departure, their theological method amounts to little more than creative speculation as to what God might be like. Theology thus degenerates into a subjective, conceptual comparison of what others, whether ancient writers or other theologians, have written.

By taking as its starting assumption the fact that God has spoken in his word, evangelical systematic theology can proceed in a truly scientific manner (Ware 2001). Ware explains that a two-fold process lies at the heart of the scientific method, namely, (a) data collection by observation and (b) theory construction. As a physicist gathers data by observing experiments and proceeds to formulate a theory to explain all the data in a harmonious way, so a systematic theologian gathers data by careful exegesis of the biblical text (observation) and develops a theory to account for all the

data. Like every other science, systematic theology "moves beyond inductive itemisation to the synthesis of theory construction".

Steps in evangelical theology

The task of the systematic theologian is to construct a model that accounts for what all the relevant scriptures teach about a topic. This task requires four steps.

Step 1: Identify all the scriptures that address to the topic

This is a crucial preliminary step. If your research is to be credible, it needs to account for *all* the relevant data. If you omit certain texts, their implications may alter or discredit your theory. A pitfall to avoid is selecting scriptures that support your preferred outcome and overlooking those that challenge it.

The scope of many research projects does not permit an exhaustive inductive study of all the scriptures addressing a topic. If there is a large body of biblical materials to cover or if you are writing a short paper, you should delimit your study. There are several ways to do this. For example, instead of covering all scriptures on the deity of Christ, you could limit your study to those that call him 'God' (Greek, *theos*) or you could limit your study to cover only the pastoral epistles.

Step 2: Analyse each scripture to determine its meaning

The objective of this stage is to permit each scripture to speak for itself, that is, to mean whatever the original author intended. To achieve this goal, you need to conduct an inductive, exegetical study of each selected text. This corresponds to the observation stage of the scientific method, gathering the raw data from which you will construct your theory.

Exegesis is the bedrock of theology. Your theology will never be better than your exegesis. If your analysis of the individual texts is flawed, your interpretation of all the data, your final theological model, will also be flawed. For this reason, if you want to do theology, you must develop your exegetical skills. In particular, learn Hebrew and Greek. We marvel at the number of aspiring systematic theologians who consider learning the biblical languages unimportant. If theology must be built on exegesis—as it surely must— learning the languages is not optional.

When you have completed your exegetical study of a text, state its teaching about the topic in propositional form, either as a single proposition or a series of them. Reducing each text's contribution to propositions lays a good platform for the next step.

Step 3: Deduce timeless principles taught by groups of scriptures

After you have completed your exegetical study of each text and stated its contribution to the topic in propositional form, the next step is to reduce the mass of data to a limited number of timeless truths (propositions). The objective of this step is to deduce the major truths; that is, to group the many data into categories and summarise them as generalisations. Based on the individual observations (inductively observed facts), we deduce necessary generalisations (Ware 2001). This process is called deduction.

Ware (2001) illustrates the process with the doctrine of the trinity. When all the exegesis is complete, four main truths emerge from the data:

- There is one God.
- The Father is God.
- The Son is God.
- The Spirit is God.

These four truths are deduced from the mass of biblical evidence. However, they do not yet represent a full-fledged doctrine, because they do not indicate how the four truths relate to each other. Therefore, the theologian's task cannot end here. He must develop a model that explains how they relate.

Step 4: Construct a theory to account for all the relevant data

Step 3 leaves you with a minimum number of major truths derived from exegesis of the key texts. The last step is to construct a theory or a model that accounts for all the data in a unified way. Ware (2001) calls this process *retroduction*,[15] which he describes as looking at the data and asking how we can best make sense of it. He quotes John Warwick Montgomery's definition of retroduction:

> Retroduction is the creative ordering of relevant data into a conceptual fabric that exposes the relationships among those data in a way that enhances their native meanings.

The goal is to formulate a conceptual model that accounts for all the data and clarifies the relationships between them. Such a model enhances the native meanings of the data making the links between them clear. The Christian doctrine of the trinity is a theological construct that goes far beyond the four main propositions (see above). Understanding how the statements are simultaneously true and appreciating the relationships between the Persons of the trinity greatly enhances our grasp of the data.

Constructing a viable theological model is an iterative process. First examine the data and formulate a tentative theory to account for it all. Then return to the data and ask if the proposed understanding does justice to it. Does it account for all the data? Does it elucidate the relationships between the data? Is it logically consistent? If the answer to any of

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[15] Retroduction is also called abduction.

these questions is 'no', you must re-examine the data. As you re-examine it, you either modify your original theory or construct a different model.

Data do not dictate their own interpretation. Different theological systems emerge because alternate models are proposed to account for the data. The Calvinist and Arminian views on election represent two completely different models for explaining the same data. Postmillennialism, amillennialism and premillennialism present three synoposes of the biblical data regarding the millennium. The task of a systematic theologian is to analyse the data as objectively as possible and develop a model that best accounts for all the data, elucidating how they fit together.

How do we put all these pieces together into a working design for a research project in systematic theology? We are going to offer two models. In the next section, we shall propose a basic model for systematic theology. The basic model attempts to cover all the texts in the selected corpus, whether is be the entire canon or a part of it. In the following section, we shall offer an alternate model that anchors the study in a single, major text of scripture.

Basic design for evangelical theology

In essence, the basic model has five logical divisions, each of which form a main section of the study (see Figure 14).

Section 1: Introduction

The introduction states the 'what', the 'why' and the 'how' of the study. Under the banner of the what, it states the

problem, key questions, delimitations and hypothesis. The why section indicates the value of the study. The how part describes the methodology and concludes with a preview of the flow of the study.

Section 2: Current views

The study needs to be conducted with a thorough understanding of existing research on the topic. This section offers a clear, objective description of each of the major current views on the issue under investigation.

Typically, the treatment of each view should cover such elements as:

- *Key scholars and their works.* Base the presentation of each view on the writings of its most significant contributors. Wherever possible, demonstrate first-hand familiarity with the writings of the most important advocates of the view. Your description should not be based on second-hand reports of their beliefs (translations of foreign-language works are acceptable). Furthermore, while it is appropriate to include seminal works by older theologians, the focus should be on *current views* as expressed in recently published books and articles.

- *Definitions, descriptions and debates.* You should clearly define and describe each major view. You should also expose the main points of debate surrounding it, including the presuppositions on which it is based.

- *Arguments and counter-arguments.* You should state the main arguments used in support of each view and how the view counters objections. As used here, 'counter-arguments' refers to arguing in favour of the view by answering objections and criticisms to it. (The arguments *against* each view are usually presented as part of the argument for the alternate views.)

- *Scriptural interpretation.* Where relevant, the description of each view should indicate how its advocates interpret the scriptures, both their general approach to the scriptures and their specific handling of important passages.

- *Strengths and weaknesses.* A critique of the obvious strengths and weaknesses of each view needs to be built into this section in an appropriate manner. We say *obvious* strengths and weaknesses because you have not yet done the study, so you are not yet qualified to comment beyond the level of what is self-evident.

We do not intend these bullets as headings. They indicate the ingredients that form part of the recipe for a good description of a current view. You must mix the ingredients properly.

Naturally, you are free to delimit the perspectives you cover in this section. For example, if covering an ethical issue such as abortion, you may need to include all views (both Christian and non-Christian perspectives). Alternatively, when analysing certain issues, you may wish to delimit the

study to focus on the perspectives within a particular faith community (for example, Pentecostal or Reformed).

In the field of systematic theology, the description of current views will *usually* be based on literary sources. However, this is not necessarily the case. There is no reason why this section cannot incorporate empirical research (fieldwork) to discover the current views of a particular community. For example, if you were researching the beliefs of Baptist pastors in South Africa regarding the inspiration of the scriptures, you might draw your data from published works, denominational archives and surveys or interviews with Baptist pastors.

The summary of existing views on the topic sets the stage for your own in-depth analysis of the issues, which necessarily begins with an exegetical study of the biblical texts addressing the topic.

Section 3: Biblical evidence

The next major section of the research consists of a thorough inductive analysis of the relevant biblical texts. This phase of the study constitutes the bulk of the study. In a thesis or dissertation, it may require several chapters. The process itself divides logically into two distinct phases: induction and deduction. The *induction* phase consists of an exegetical study of each text touching on the topic. When it is complete, you will have a mass of isolated data. The *deduction* phase reduces this mass of isolated data into a few generalisations, that is, into the smallest possible number of propositions.

Induction: exegesis of passages

As a Christian committed to developing a biblical worldview, you must strive to build your theology exegetically. This step calls for you to identify and analyse all the relevant biblical texts. The number of texts and the level of the study will determine how deep the exegesis needs to be. However, unlike when doing an exegetical study, it is not necessary to document every stage of your exegesis. You may report only the results of your exegetical study, commenting on the relevant aspects of the text as they relate to the topic of the research.

Deduction: extraction of propositions

The exegesis will leave you with a host of data, all tied to the truth implications of specific texts. To work with this data in a way that enables you to construct a theory to explain it, you need to reduce it to a manageable number of propositions. Divide the ideas that emerge from the exegetical phase into categories, leaving nothing out. Then formulate propositional statements that encompass all the data in each category. When this process is complete, you will have the key ideas for which you will need to account in your theory construction section.

Section 4: Theory construction

Once you have analysed the relevant texts (induction) and isolated the key ideas they teach (deduction), you need to put all the data together to form a holistic picture of what the Bible teaches about the issue (retroduction). This is theory

construction. Your goal is to construct a model that accounts for all the biblical evidence in a unified manner, making the relationships between the individual data clear. When you have devised a tentative model, go back to all the exegetical data and check that your model adequately accounts for each datum without distorting it. Keep revising your model until it does so.

Every major evangelical systematic theology contains numerous examples of how expert theologians go about this process. What are dichotomy and trichotomy? They are models designed to explain all the biblical evidence regarding the constitution of man. What is the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement? It is a theory attempting to explain all the biblical data on the reason for and significance of Jesus' death. The scholars who write these textbooks have followed the above processes; when you read their books, you are seeing the result of their analysis, their proposed model with a sample of the evidence added as proof texts.

Section 5: Contemporary significance

The task of theology is not complete, in our opinion, until its significance for today's church and its believers is considered. The final section of the study should explore the contemporary significance of the study. You can do this at two levels, namely, doctrinal and practical.

The entire discussion in this concluding section needs to be overtly and intentionally tied to the main issue driving the research agenda. Do not allow your discussion of the

significance of your study to focus on peripheral details. Major on the majors.

For many studies, the volume of biblical data available on the topic combined with the length of the study make the basic model unsuitable. In such cases, the researcher has three options: (a) narrow the topic; (b) reduce the corpus; or (c) use a different design. The alternative design presents a way of handling a large number of texts in a more focused manner than the basic design.
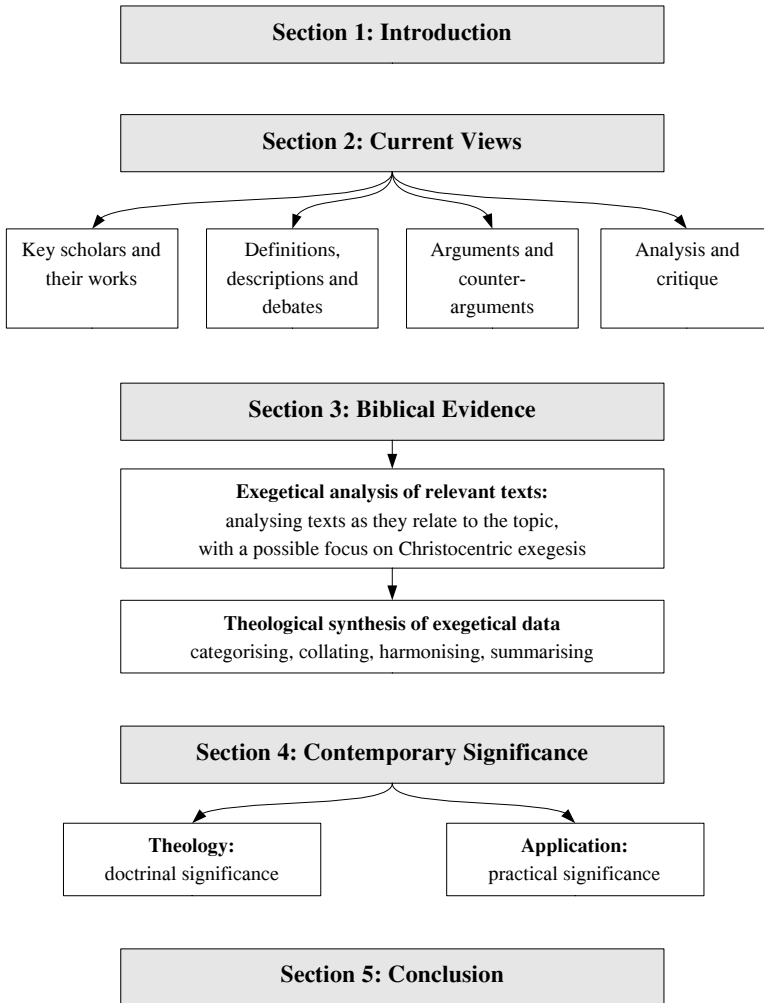
Section 1: Introduction

Section 2: Current Views

Key scholars and their works	Definitions, descriptions and debates	Arguments and counter-arguments	Analysis and critique

Section 3: Biblical Evidence

Exegetical analysis of relevant texts: analysing texts as they relate to the topic, with a possible focus on Christocentric exegesis

Theological synthesis of exegetical data categorising, collating, harmonising, summarising

Section 4: Contemporary Significance

Theology: doctrinal significance	**Application:** practical significance

Section 5: Conclusion

Figure 14: Design for a Systematic Study

Alternate design for evangelical theology

You cannot always conduct a full exegetical study of what the entire Bible teaches about a chosen topic in a single research project because this often requires in-depth exegesis

of a large number of texts, a task that is not doable in one study. However, it is possible to conduct an in-depth exegetical study of one or two key texts *and* allow your exegesis to be informed by a thorough survey of other relevant texts. In such cases, the study is anchored in a key passage. Earlier biblical passages are analysed in relation to the *anchor text*; these provide the *informing theology*. Subsequent texts may be analysed for how they elucidate or develop the theme of the anchor text.

Figure 15 shows the basic approach. The main biblical text on the topic serves the anchor text. A detailed exegetical analysis of this text lies at the heart of the study. To place the anchor text in its theological context, the study begins with a synopsis of the informing theology, that is, what earlier passages of scripture have taught to lay a conceptual foundation for the key text. The teaching of the key text is further elucidated by how later texts of scripture have added to its teaching or applied it. The study closes with a discussion of the contemporary significance of the teaching. Aside from an introduction, these four parts typically constitute the structure of the study. In some cases, you may need to include a chapter on 'current views', identical to the one in the basic design.

Section 1: Introduction

See the corresponding section under 'basic design for evangelical theology'.

Section 2: The informing theology[16]

Conduct an exegetical survey of the antecedent biblical texts that form part of the informing theology of the anchor text, leading to a synthesis which systematically summarises the combined teaching of the relevant texts on the issue. Two steps are involved:

Step 1: identify and analyse relevant texts. This step calls for you to identify and analyse all the relevant biblical texts. The number of texts and the level of the study will determine how deep the exegesis needs to be. It is not necessary to document every stage of your exegesis. You may report only the results of your exegetical study, commenting on the relevant aspects of the texts as they relate to the topic of the thesis.

Step 2: synthesise and summarise the overall teaching. Once you have analysed the relevant texts, you need to put all the data together to form a holistic picture. This involves categorising, collating, harmonising and summarising the exegetical data. In short, it is systematising the teachings of texts you analysed. Do all this with an eye on how they impact upon the main research question and the anchor text.

Section 3: The anchor text

The heart of the study is a detailed exegetical study of the anchor text, which ought to be a major biblical passage

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[16] If a literature review addressing contemporary views is deemed necessary, it will be section 2 and the informing theology will become section 3.

dealing with the topic under investigation. For a detailed description of how to conduct an exegetical study, see the chapter on 'how to do an exegetical study'.

Section 4: The developing theology

This section is similar to the one on the informing theology, except that it examines how the key theme is further developed and applied in subsequent biblical passages.
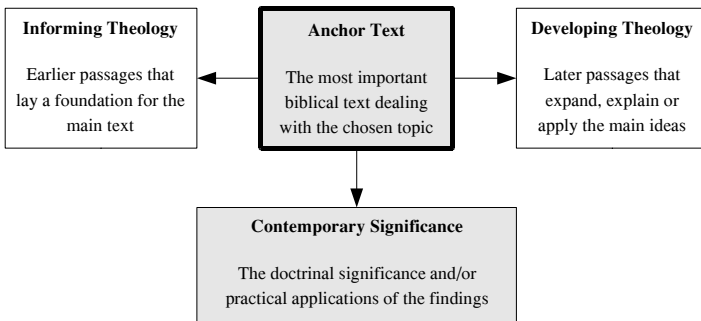
Informing Theology	Anchor Text	Developing Theology
Earlier passages that lay a foundation for the main text	The most important biblical text dealing with the chosen topic	Later passages that expand, explain or apply the main ideas

Contemporary Significance

The doctrinal significance and/or practical applications of the findings

Figure 15: An alternate design for a theological study

Section 5: The contemporary significance

See the corresponding section under the 'basic design for evangelical theology'.

Christopher Peppler uses a variation of this model for what he calls 'christocentric exegesis'. The words and works of Jesus (namely, the gospels) lie at the centre of this model. They are informed by the Old Testament and explained and applied in the remainder of the New Testament (see Figure 16).
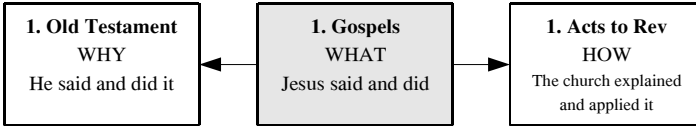
1. Old Testament	1. Gospels	1. Acts to Rev
WHY	WHAT	HOW
He said and did it	Jesus said and did	The church explained and applied it

Figure 16: Christocentric exegesis

This model of christocentric exegesis is a favoured approach at the South African Theological Seminary. Wherever possible, we strive to ground our exegesis in the words and works of Jesus. We recognise that sometimes this exegetical model may not be applicable because all the key biblical texts lie outside of the gospels, but wherever possible we encourage you to give 'what Jesus said and did' a prominent place in your exegesis and theology.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an orientation to doing research in the field of systematic theology. An evangelical approach to systematic theology begins with an essential presupposition—God has spoken in his word. The task of evangelical theology, therefore, is to identify all that he has said in the scriptures, analyse each relevant text, extract the key principles as propositions and construct a theological model to account for all the data.

We offered two designs for research projects. The first is the basic design for evangelical theology. It begins with a survey of current views on the topic, then proceeds to analyse the scriptural evidence by following three main steps—induction, deduction and retroduction—and concludes by exploring the significance of the research findings. The

alternative design anchors the study around a key text, analysing how earlier texts serve as its informing theology and later texts develop and apply its ideas.

Chapter 13:
Practical Theology

At the South African Theological Seminary, we use a simple threefold division for the main theological disciplines —systematic theology, biblical studies and practical theology. This classification is not perfect, but it is simple and helpful. In the previous two chapters, we have offered models for theological research in the disciplines of biblical studies and systematic theology. In this chapter, we shall offer a working model for practical theology.

At this point, we need to acknowledge our indebtedness for the ideas presented in this chapter. The model we offer comes directly from Michael Cowan (2000) of the Institute for Ministry at Loyola University; we shall call it *the LIM model*. Except for slight modifications, we are entirely indebted to Cowan for the ideas that follow.

The nature of practical theology

What is practical theology? Using the threefold classification mentioned above, practical theology stands in contrast to biblical studies and systematic theology. In this sense, it refers to the application of theology to life and ministry. Alternative labels might include ministerial studies

or pastoral theology. Preaching, teaching, children's ministry, youth ministry, missions, counselling, pastoring and leadership are subdivisions of practical theology; they all deal with putting theology into practice as ministry.

The key characteristic of practical theology is that it seeks to apply theological reflection to solve real-life problems. Its point of departure is a problem in the real world, that is, a real-life situation that is not as it should be. By means of a rigorous analysis of the problem, its causes and possible solutions, the researcher seeks to transform the situation. Cowan (2000) explains:

> [T]he hallmark of "practical theology" is the insistence that the point of theological interpretation is not simply to contemplate or comprehend the world as it is, but to contribute to the world's becoming what God intends that it should be, as those intentions have been interpreted by the great theistic traditions.

Cowan (2000) distinguishes between *contemplative* and *transformative* approaches to theology. Contemplative theologies are content to reflect on the world as it really is, but transformative theologies are determined to change the world into what it should be. Although biblical studies and systematic theology can be practised in a transformative way, practical theology is the most directly transformative branch of theology. Research in the field of practical theology begins with a real-life problem and hopes to end with a workable solution that will change the situation.

Cowan (2000) stresses that practical theology research has four crucial characteristics: (a) correlational, (b) hermeneutical, (c) critical and (d) transformative.

a) *Correlational*. It evaluates the relationship between 'the world as it is' and 'the world as it should be'. It seeks an accurate understanding of the present situation and the preferred scenario.

b) *Hermeneutical*. It requires the ability to interpret accurately both "our world and our traditions". Practical theologians use two tool sets, one to interpret the present situation and another to exegete the scriptures.

c) *Critical*. It "requires that we explicitly evaluate the inherited understandings that guide our interpretations and actions".

d) *Transformative*. Its underlying drive is to bring the world into greater harmony with the word.

Thus the goals of practical theology research are to examine the world to understand the real-life problem, examine the word to see what God's ideal is, and then develop an action plan to transform what is into what should be. These three goals provide the backbone of a working model for doing practical theology.

The steps in practical theology

The LIM model of practical theology requires four sequential steps:

1. *Identify a real-life problem.* The point of departure is a problem in the real world, one that we have noticed and which concerns us. This is usually something of concern in the church or community. Based on our initial, unscientific observations and reflections, we state a problem and the underlying forces at work that are causing it.

2. *Interpret the world as it is.* The research itself begins with a systematic investigation of the situation. By doing descriptive research, using both empirical and literary methods, you set about interpreting the what, the how and the why of the problem. *What* is the real situation (your first impressions might be mistaken). *How* did the present situation develop? *Why* is the situation the way it is?

3. *Interpret the world as it should be.* Cowan (2000) describes this step as follows: "We carefully select some aspect of our faith tradition … We undertake a historically and critically informed exegesis of the material chosen from our traditions" Under the rubric of 'our faith tradition', Cowan includes a "scriptural text, theological classic, church teaching, etc." For evangelical theologians, the scriptures hold centre stage; the other traditional resources simply inform them.

4. *Interpret our contemporary obligations.* The final step is to develop a feasible action plan that faithfully represents the will of God as interpreted in our faith

tradition and provides a doable remedy to the problem. Cowan (2000) describes the ideal: "We plan an adequately detailed intervention based on the possibility that we have chosen, implement it carefully, and rigorously evaluate both what practical difference it made …" Not every study can end with implementation; often the researcher must be content with offering recommendations.

These four steps contain the seeds of a simple, logical model for research projects in the field of practical theology.

The design for practical theology

Using the LIM model, Dr Noel Woodbridge and Prof. Arthur Song developed the following structure for Master of Theology theses in practical theology. We present it here with their permission.

1. Introduction

Articulate concerns directly related to the selected topic, state a particular problem, present the aims of the study, formulate a feasible hypothesis and indicate your research methodology.

2. Present situation

In this stage,[17] you interpret the world as it is. This involves describing the situation as follows:

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[17] The logical flow of some studies dictates that the present situation be presented after the preferred scenario.

a) Present a *historical survey* to develop a picture of the history of the situation. Depending on the nature of the situation, you can do this by using published works, relevant archives and records, or interviews with witnesses and participants.

b) Describe the present situation, both in terms of *what* is happening (the facts and realities) and *why* it is happening (the forces at work shaping the realities). Do this by conducting *empirical research* (fieldwork, questionnaires and interviews) and/or by doing a *situation analysis* (a literature survey in the social sciences).

This portrayal of the present situation describes in detail a real-life situation in need of improvement. The accuracy and objectiveness of the analysis are crucial for the remainder of the study. If the situation is well analysed, it lays a solid foundation for planning a biblical and practical response. This part of a practical theology study is so crucial and complex that we have devoted an entire chapter to descriptive research. You should study it in conjunction with this chapter on practical theology.

3. Preferred scenario

The goal of this stage is to formulate a theological model for the preferred scenario, interpreting the world as it should be. You need to develop this model by using scholarly sources to interpret your faith tradition.

What is a 'faith tradition'? Cowan (2000) includes scriptural texts, theological classics and church teachings as elements of a faith tradition. Woodbridge and Song (2007) call it "a biblical and denominational perspective". Our own convictions esteem church traditions, denominational positions and theological texts only to the extent that they align the Bible's teaching, although recognising that they may uphold values and practices that are biblically neutral. We would propose the goal of this stage is to present a theological model based on a biblical perspective. Your interpretation of the biblical materials should be informed by church traditions, denominational positions and, especially, scholarly research.

If you are writing a thesis in the field of practical theology, what is expected with reference to the biblical analysis? Usually, this takes the form of a survey or overview analysis of scriptural teachings related to your topic. You should work through the scriptures in an organised manner, explaining how they address your topic. For the most part, you do not need to conduct an in-depth exegetical analysis of every passage, but you do need to ensure that your interpretations are sound and that any inferences you draw, or applications you propose, derive from the text. You may need to conduct detailed exegesis of a few pivotal texts. Even in your overview, you need to engage authorities on the texts you treat, especially major scholarly commentaries. If the degree is a Master of Theology or a Doctor of Theology, you must demonstrate proficiency at working with the biblical texts. Do not be fooled—adding the label 'practical' in front of

'theology' does not relieve you of the need for handling the biblical and theological aspects of the thesis competently.

4. Practical suggestions

Conduct *action planning* to provide a *practical framework* for transforming the present situation into the preferred scenario. Recommend feasible responses to the present situation (a list of possible interventions or action steps) in the light of:

   a) your historical and empirical analysis of the present situation (the world as it is);

   b) your synopsis of relevant biblical and theological resources to suggest a preferred scenario.

In certain instances, a research project extends to the implementation and evaluation of the action plan. In most student research, however, the study ends with practical suggestions to move from the present situation (the world as it is) towards the preferred scenario (the world as it should be).

Summary

Practical theology covers a vast, diverse array of subjects. No single model covers every study. The LIM model may be the simplest and most user-friendly model available. Although there are more specialised models, the LIM model is suitable for most studies (perhaps with minor adjustments to fit the logic of the particular project).

It is such a good model because it is true to life. Many research projects begin with a real-life problem. When tackling a real-life problem, it makes sense to begin by

investigating the present situation. Once you have a clear picture of the problem situation, it makes sense to analyse the biblical ideal, that is, to construct a theological model of a preferred scenario. Lastly, change is the aim of practical theology, so the study must conclude with an action plan presenting practical suggestions for moving from the present to the preferred.
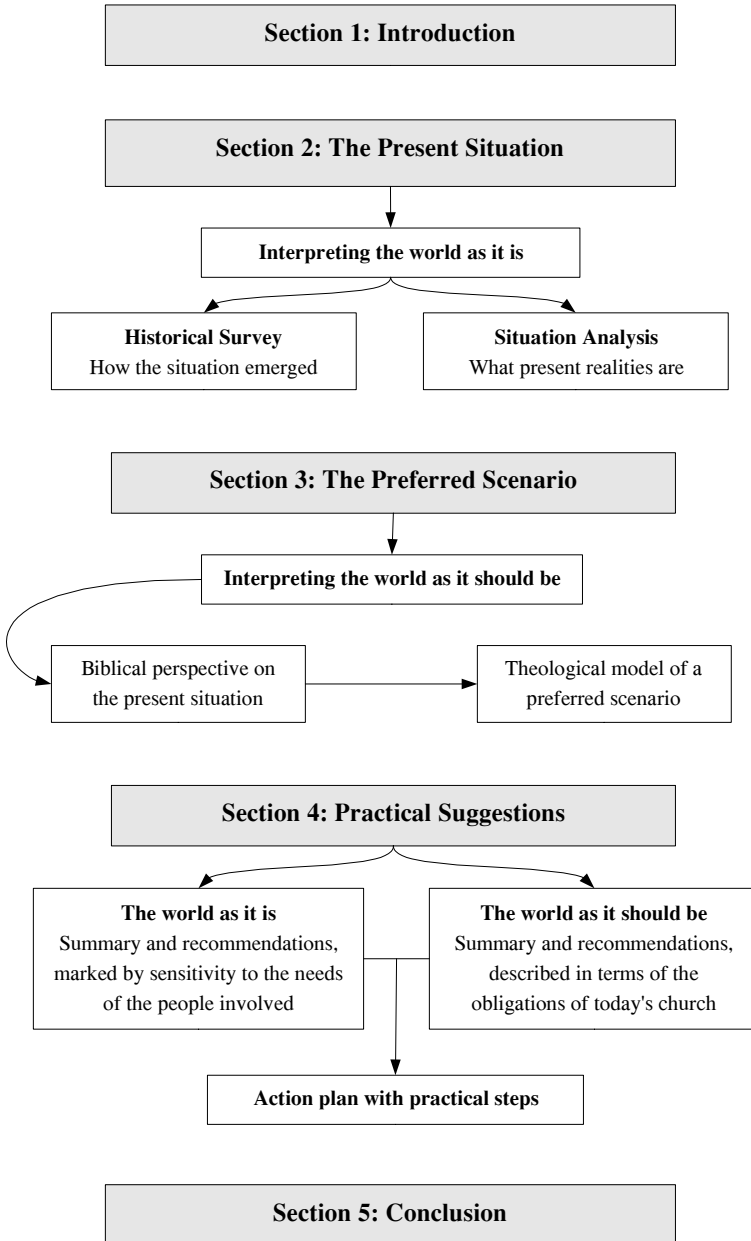
Section 1: Introduction

Section 2: The Present Situation

Interpreting the world as it is

Historical Survey	Situation Analysis
How the situation emerged	What present realities are

Section 3: The Preferred Scenario

Interpreting the world as it should be

Biblical perspective on the present situation	Theological model of a preferred scenario

Section 4: Practical Suggestions

The world as it is	The world as it should be
Summary and recommendations, marked by sensitivity to the needs of the people involved	Summary and recommendations, described in terms of the obligations of today's church

Action plan with practical steps

Section 5: Conclusion

Figure 17: Design for a Practical Study

Chapter 14:
The Literature Review

"It is essential that every research project begins with a review of the existing literature" (Mouton 2001:86). In many theses, chapter 2 is a literature review. Even if a thesis does not contain a separate chapter for its literature review, it must demonstrate awareness of the history of research and interact with the major contributors in the field.

Some prefer to call it a review of scholarship, since as a researcher your interest does not lie in just any kind of literature; it lies in scholarly writings. "In short, you are interested in the most recent, credible and relevant scholarship in your area of interest" (Mouton 2001:87). Others refer to it as a history of research, because it provides a bird's-eye view of previous research leading to the point at which your study enters the debate.

Why you must do a literature review

Why is a review of research such a crucial part of writing a thesis? What are the most important reasons for conducting a literature review at the start of every research project? There are many reasons. For example, a literature review will help you to:

- avoid duplicating research that has already been done;
- identify gaps in the existing research that call for further study;
- interact with the most recent theories and empirical findings; and
- narrow your research idea in the light of greater insight into the field.

You cannot just dive into a topic that interests you. You must position your inquiry within the context of questions that have already been asked and answered. You want to research questions that either have not been answered yet or have, in your judgement, been answered inadequately. Doing a thorough literature review helps you to channel your energy, focusing on real gaps and needs. It also helps you to approach your research from an informed perspective, aware of how others have handled similar studies and what their findings have been. In the long run, it saves time!

How your literature review will be judged

In all things, if you know what is expected, it is easier to meet the expectations. So what is expected in a literature review? Mouton (2001:90-91) lists these as criteria by which a literature review is judged:

1) *It should be exhaustive in its coverage of the main aspects of the study*. If your study touches on four interrelated aspects, your literature review must cover all four aspects. Furthermore, it must show that you are familiar with *all* the

major studies on each aspect.[18] If your topic touched on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts and you did not mention the extensive debate between Gordon Fee and Roger Stronstad in the 1990s, your examiners would conclude that you had not done a thorough job. You must cover all the major contributions.

2) *A good review is fair in its treatment of authors*. Theological students are notorious for allowing bias to creep into their research. When reading first-draft MTh proposals, we often get the feeling the student already knows the answer(s) to his study. He has made up his mind, and intends to use the thesis to prove it. This attitude is incompatible with research, which requires objective, open-minded inquiry. When the researcher is biased, his treatment of sources in the literature review is often unfair. If he disagrees with a source, he does not present a fair summary of its views and arguments. Sometimes, the problem is not so much bias as sloppiness— the researcher has not personally read the source, so he is unable to do it justice. To write a good literature review, you must conscientiously read the works you review and present an unbiased, accurate evaluation of them.

3) *A literature review should be topical and not dated*. By 'topical', we mean up to date and of current interest. While it often needs to begin with a brief historical overview, the bulk of the review should be devoted to the current state of the debate. What are the current hot-potato issues in the field?

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[18] This is true at the MTh and DTh levels, but less is required at the BTh level.

Who are the major spokespersons for different views? What recent publications have contributed to the discussion? Your review should answer these kinds of questions.

4) *A good literature review should be well organised and interpretive*. A literature review should *not* read like an annotated bibliography, merely a list of works with a few words about each. Instead, it should reveal your interaction and interpretation of the history of research. That is, you must interact with key works in a way that shows how you interpret the history of scholarship. This implies organisation. There are various ways to organise the review. The best for your study might be chronological, by schools of thought, or by divisions of your study. The system you choose must allow it to show your interpretive interaction with scholarship.

These, then, are the essential criteria. Your review should be exhaustive, objective, current and interpretive. We have looked at *why* a literature review is important and *what* it should look like. Now let's turn to *how* to obtain the sources you need.

How to obtain sources for your literature review

Conducting a literature review is daunting chiefly because it is difficult to identify and access all the relevant literature. In other words, you must face two challenges:

- You must identify all the relevant literature on your topic.
- You must access most of the literature you have identified.

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If you have ready access to a major theological library, you should have little difficulty accessing information. If, however, you are a distance education student and do not have access to a top library, identifying and accessing relevant literature is one of the greatest research challenges you will face. But, do not be discouraged—you can succeed! How? Let's answer that in a 'question-and-answer' style.

What tools do I need to identify and access relevant literature? You need two tools: a library and the Internet. During your study, you will need access to a good theological library. This may mean you have to travel to the nearest one and spend a couple of weeks there. During my doctoral studies, I made three two-week trips to the University of Stellenbosch to use the library. While there, I photocopied as much as I could so that I could use the resources at home.

You must have access to Internet-based resources! In the early stages of your research, this is even more helpful than a library. There are two reasons for this: (a) there are many good e-books and e-journals available full-text online and (b) even if a particular resource is not available full-text, you can become aware of its existence when it appears in your search results. Also, you may be able to find abstracts or book reviews of these works.

What kinds of literature am I seeking? The general answer is *high quality academic sources,* particularly recent ones (the last 10 years). To be more specific, you should focus on three major kinds of sources:

- *Journals*. Journal articles are *the best source* of academic literature. They are shorter and more up-to-date than books.
- *Books*. You must access major books in your field, especially seminal works and major scholarly treatments.
- *Theses*. Theses are academic research; if someone else has done related research, you need to be aware of it and engage it.

By the way, the bibliography is one of the first things assessors look at when assessing a thesis! What do they look for? Firstly, recent publications—books and articles from the last 10 years. Secondly, quality resources—the major titles and the best journals on the topic. Thirdly, key authors—the leading scholars, specialists in the field.

How to find the key books on my topic? Here are some simple ways of finding key resources quickly:

1) *Read literature reviews.* Academic publications—monographs and theses—typically begin with a literature review (just as you will do). In their reviews, they will identify the key authors and works, briefly summarising their content and contribution. The works that receive the most attention are the most important in the field! They are must-read resources for you.

2) *Study bibliographies.* When you locate a key resource (book, article or thesis), study its bibliography for other relevant titles. You will be amazed how quickly you will locate all the critical works in your field. Everyone will quote them,

so they are easy to find—just look for the names that come up time and time again.

3) *Search online bookstores.* The largest bookstore in the world is www.amazon.com. Amazon lists almost every published book. Go there and search on the key words or topics of your study; you will find every significant book on the topic (even some that are not yet published). You will also find book reviews and some links to related books. The value of this kind of search is that you will find the latest releases, sources that were not included in literature reviews and bibliographies.

4) *Use Google scholar and Google books.* Normal Google searches and alerts will probably be of limited value because you will find too many popular (as opposed to scholarly) resources. However, there are two Google initiatives that can be goldmines for sourcing information: Google scholar and Google books.

Google scholar (http://scholar.google.co.za) is a search facility that locates for scholarly (as opposed to popular) sources on the web. You can find journal articles, theses and dissertations, research papers, and so on. Many of the results can be viewed full-text on the Internet; others can be previewed. As contrasted with a normal Google search, the results from a Google scholar search will have much greater academic value.

Google books (http://books.google.co.za) is an initiative to make published books available online. A vast number of books have already been uploaded; more are being added

daily. Books in the public domain (no copyright restrictions) are full-text. Copyrighted works are also uploaded full-text, but you cannot read the entire text. You can, however, search the full-text of the book, view the contents pages and read excerpts (sometimes quite substantial extracts). The site often provides links to reviews of the book.

How do I find journal articles on my topic? The old way was to go to a library and search its catalogues for articles. If you have access to a major theological library with a sizable collection of journals, this is still helpful. However, many journals are now available on the Internet. Online journals occur in two forms: (1) full-text: you can download the actual article; (2) citation: you find the bibliographic entry and, sometimes, the abstract. Obviously, full-text articles are more helpful because you can access them immediately. The problem is finding them. There are a few ways:

Databases. There are massive collections of articles on searchable databases. These databases are specifically designed for research purposes and are used mainly by university libraries.

- *EBSCOhost* is the world's largest collection of journals; find out if your institution subscribes to it. You can access many articles and book reviews full-text.
- *JSTOR* (www.jstor.org) is a project designed to make journal resources available online. The platform already includes a vast collection. You can conduct a

full search of all resources on the site and you can access all the articles full-text.

- *ATLA and ATLAS* is the largest listing of academic works for theology. Many of the entries only contain bibliographic information, but a significant minority can be accessed full-text. Searching ATLA will give you a good idea of what has been written on a theological topic. ATLAS contains many of the articles listed on ATLA in full-text.

- *OT and NT Abstracts* (available on EBSCOhost) provide brief abstracts of almost every important book or article published in the fields of Old or New Testament studies. The abstracts cover works published in all major theological languages, but all the abstracts are in English. Skimming the abstracts related to your topic is a great way to begin a literature review. Within a couple of hours, you can form an idea of what is happening in a field of study by reading dozens of abstracts. (I always begin my biblical research here!)

- *Religion and Philosophy Collection* contains more than 300 full-text journals! All the articles are available full-text. It provides extensive coverage on a wide range of topics in theology, religion and philosophy.

- *The Theological Journal Library* is a collection with approximately 500 volumes of journals from Bible-based publications on CD-ROM. You can search and

view extracts of articles online at www.galaxie.com/
journal.php. The collection is reasonably affordable,
so you may even consider buying your own copy.

- *SA e-Publications* (www.sabinet.co.za) is an online
  platform that publishes electronic versions of South
  African journals, including a sizeable *religion
  collection*. The platform is fully searchable and all the
  articles are full-text.
- *Directory of Open Access Journals* (www.doaj.org): a
  large collection of online journals that can be
  searched, including 46 religion journals and 63
  philosophy journals; the articles are available full-text.
- *Ingenta* (www.ingentaconnect.com) allows you to
  search a religion database with 63 journals (all
  religions). All articles are searchable, but not all are
  free; most are pay-per-view.

In addition to these collections, there are literally hundreds of
scholarly journals available on the Internet. Google scholar
will help you to find the ones that relate to your topic.

How to I find theses and dissertations on my topic? In
addition to looking on institutions' websites, you should try
www.tren.com. The Theological Research Exchange Network
is a library of over 10,000 theological thesis/dissertation titles
representing research from many different institutions. TREN
also makes available conference papers presented at annual
meetings of several academic societies. The level of access to
documents varies. For some, you can only view the
bibliographic information and need to purchase the thesis or

paper. Others have previews/abstracts that you can peruse. A few are available free.

A complete listing of all thesis and dissertation topics in South Africa is available on the National Research Foundation website (see www.nrf.ac.za). For international theses, try to access the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database and look at the listing of thesis databases on www.asrp.info.

Summary

A review of existing scholarship is an essential first step in most research projects. It helps you avoid duplicating what others have done, identify gaps, interact with recent findings and narrow your research idea. Your review must focus on scholarly sources, and should be exhaustive, objective, current and interpretive. Journals, books and theses are valuable scholarly sources. Internet sites may be helpful, but should be used with care. If you do not have easy access to a good theological library, you can access many of the best sources online.

Chapter 15:
Descriptive Research

Descriptive research, also referred to as survey research or descriptive-survey research, is a key research tool for studies in the field of practical theology. Many studies in practical theology involve fieldwork (empirical) research in which the researcher uses interviews, surveys and/or questionnaires to gather original data about a church, community, organisation, event, custom, or something else. The purpose of this chapter is to offer practical guidelines for doing descriptive research in theological studies.

Understanding descriptive research

Its nature

Descriptive research does exactly what its name says—it describes—usually one or more characteristics of a group of people, technically called a population. Sometimes the information gathered is strictly quantitative (numbers and percentages). At other times, it is qualitative, including the why along with the what and the how many (see Vyhmeister 2001:126).

Like all research, descriptive research seeks to examine a problem (Research Methods, 2008). It typically uses data derived from interviews, questionnaires, surveys and case studies to form the conclusions and recommendations of a study or report. Descriptive research provides data about the subject of the study, describing the 'who, what, when, where and how' of a situation. It provides a systematic description that is as accurate and factual as possible. This approach lends itself well to statistical (quantitative) research. However, it can also be qualitative in nature, seeking to describe a phenomenon (Educational Research, 2005).

Technically speaking, questions relating to the causes and cures for a situation fall outside the scope of pure descriptive research. In a qualitative study, the researcher may probe the population's views as to what caused a situation and/or how to cure problems, but in doing so he is reporting someone else's subjective perceptions rather than factually and objectively describing causes. Good descriptive research usually lays a solid platform from which the researcher may diagnose causes and propose cures, but these steps are inferences drawn from the description, not part of the description itself.

Its purpose

The main goal of descriptive research is to describe the data and characteristics about the problem or issue being studied (What is Descriptive Research? 2008). In other words, the purpose is to make reality known. You may draw

conclusions and take decisions based on the description (Vyhmeister 2001:126).

In technical language, according to Isaac and Michael (1971:18), descriptive research serves four main purposes:

1. collecting detailed information that describes existing phenomena;
2. identifying problems or justify conditions and practices;
3. making comparisons and evaluations; and
4. determining what others are doing with similar problems or situations and benefit from their experience in making future plans and decisions.

In the context of ministry in the local church, descriptive research is designed to report current ministry conditions or strategies. Based on the description, the researcher may critically evaluate the research findings and suggest ways to improve the ministry situation (Applied Research Project, 2005).

Its characteristics

Leedy (1993:187) indicates that the descriptive survey has the following salient characteristics:

1. The descriptive survey method deals with a situation that demands the technique of observation as the principal means of collecting the data.
2. The population for the study must be carefully chosen, clearly defined and specifically delimited in order to

set precise parameters for ensuring discreteness to the population.

3. Data in descriptive survey research is particularly susceptible to distortion through the introduction of bias into the research design. Particular attention should be given to safeguarding the data from the influence of bias.

4. Although the descriptive survey method relies upon observation for the acquisition of the data, that data must then be organised and presented systematically so that valid and accurate conclusions can be drawn from them.

Its value

The following points highlight the significance of descriptive research (Types of Research in Education, 2008).

1. Descriptive research describes the current and present phenomena, problems and/or opinions.

2. This method is very easy and direct to use and, hence, is a popular and widely used research method.

3. Descriptive research not only describes the current problem, but also many times suggests valuable solutions to the problems.

4. Descriptive research is helpful in developing the data collection tools like questionnaires, schedules, check-lists, and so on.

5. By dealing with the relationships between or among the variables, descriptive research is useful in develo-

ping new generalisations, principles or theories, which possess universal validity and utility.

Its limitation

Descriptive research can accurately describe a situation and report common perceptions as to possible causes and cures, but it cannot objectively diagnose causes or prescribe cures. It can lay a sound, factual platform from which the researcher can infer likely causes and propose practical solutions, but the researcher must recognise these as extrapolations from the results of the survey study.

In other words, it cannot establish a *causal* relationship between variables (Educational Research, 2005). Patwardhan (2007) cautions that descriptive research:

- does not focus on the 'why' in trying to understanding phenomena;
- cannot be used for prediction and control purposes.

Failure to recognise these limitations of the method will cause researchers to overstate their conclusions. If you are aware of them, it will safeguard you against this tendency.

Conducting descriptive research

The descriptive research process may be divided into nine steps:

1. State the objective
2. Review related research
3. Design the approach
4. Develop the instruments
5. Select the participants

6. Describe the data collection procedures
7. Analyse and interpret the data
8. Draw conclusions
9. Write the report

For the rest of this chapter, we shall look at each of these steps in a little more detail.

Step 1: Set the research objective

All research is directed by a research problem or objective. In a theological thesis, the main research problem will govern the objective of the descriptive component of the study (see chapter 8). When the main research problem is divided into subproblems or key questions, one of these will set the objective for the empirical study. In rare cases, the descriptive research project will be the entire project. Whether it forms the entire study or part of a larger study, the descriptive survey must be guided by a specific problem and a clear objective. You must state the objective of the descriptive research in a single sentence.

All we have said previously about stating research problems applies here too. The value of the study is particularly important in this kind of research, since it must be of sufficient significance to motivate potential respondents. The objective governs every other aspect of the study. It determines the selection of research design, the kind of information needed, the selection of participants, the sample size, the questions to be asked, and much more.

Typically, the objective (or question or problem) will use wording that points to the research method to be employed, at least to its *quantitative* or *qualitative* nature. For example, 'What influence does growing up in the home of an evangelical minister have on one's adult church involvement?' suggests a qualitative study. On the other hand, 'What is the correlation between a church's teaching about giving and the percentage of their income that its members give to ministry?' suggests a quantitative approach.

Step 2: Review related research

Before you rush off and conduct your own descriptive study of a population, you should demonstrate familiarity with related research projects. You should discuss *previous research* in the same field (or relevant, related fields). Research Methods (2008) suggests your review accomplish the following:

- Summarise the findings of other research projects along the same line of enquiry as your study.
- Summarise the findings of other studies that have some degree of relevance to the proposed study.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of the methods used for other similar studies. In this point, you should indicate the conclusions drawn by researchers who have previously reviewed the related research.
- Indicate any applications of previous research findings to professional practice.

This review of related research is typically presented in a section called 'literature review'. The literature review often requires an entire chapter. If it is rather short, include it in the introductory chapter of a thesis. For research in theology, you must also provide a biblical-theological and theoretical basis for the project, explaining the rationale for your research design. This description must be informed by previous research on this and related topics (Applied Research Project, 2005).

Step 3: Design the approach

When you know what you need to know (a clear objective) and how other studies have achieved similar goals (review of research), the next step is to decide on the best way to obtain the information you need. Personal *interviews* may be appropriate to gather some data (qualitative research). Using a *questionnaire* is the best way to glean other information. You can obtain certain kinds of information from *records*. Personal *observation* is also valid. For each of these different approaches, you need to develop a strategy. You must be able to provide a clear rationale for each kind of data collection tool you plan to use. Your rationale should indicate *why* this is the most suitable method to achieve the objective. Your strategy should also describe in detail *how* you intend to use each approach. If you plan to conduct interviews (or questionnaires), describe how many interviews, who will be interviewed, why those people, how long the interviews will take, how you will access the interviewees, what data will be

gathered, and so on. If you plan to use records or archives, indicate what is available and how you will access it.

For example, will you interview all the deacons? If not, how will you select those you choose to interview? When and where will you do the interviews? Will the survey of the church members' impressions of the deacons' work be anonymous? How can you get the greatest number of church members to reply to your survey? The research design needs to address these and other practical questions (Vyhmeister 2001:128).

Step 4: Develop instruments

You can use a variety of data collection methods, including questionnaires, interviews and observations.

Questionnaires (mainly for quantitative research)

The questionnaire as an instrument used in surveys. Data sometimes lies buried deep within the minds or within the attitudes, feelings or reactions of men and women. As with oil beneath the sea, the first problem is to devise a tool to probe below the surface. A commonplace instrument for observing data beyond the physical reach of the observer is the *questionnaire* (Leedy 1993:187).

Surveys have become increasingly popular in recent times. People are asked what kind of toothpaste they use, for which political candidate they will vote, or how they feel about interracial marriages. Some surveys are done orally. Some use questionnaires to which a person must respond in writing. While information obtained from a questionnaire is extensive,

it tends to be shallow. This type of research is called *quantitative research* and depends largely on the number of respondents (Vyhmeister 2001:132).

Preparing questionnaires. Preparing questionnaires takes much time and expertise. Questionnaires should be attractive, brief and easy to complete. A well-prepared questionnaire can obtain data that describes reality and elicits the information that is required.

Do's and don'ts when preparing questionnaires. Here are some practical guidelines (Do's and Don'ts, 2008) to help you in constructing questionnaires. The list is by no means an exhaustive one, but it provides some of the key components of a well-written questionnaire. First, the do's:

- Do start your questionnaire with a title and introduction or welcome message.
- Do provide confidentiality and anonymity.
- Do follow the KISS (keep it simple, stupid) principle.
- Do write questions and responses with clear objectives, concise language, complete sentences, simple words and correct spelling and grammar.
- Do be specific in asking each question.
- Do place personal and confidential questions at the end of the questionnaire.
- Do require respondents to read each question carefully by varying the way you ask the questions.
- Do design mutually exclusive responses.
- Do allow 'don't know' and 'not applicable' responses where appropriate.

- Do test your questionnaire by means of a pilot study.

Now for some don'ts:

- Don't be vague.
- Don't ask double-negative questions.
- Don't use many abbreviations, acronyms or clichés.
- Don't ask objectionable or value-laden questions.
- Don't ask leading questions.
- Don't ask open-ended questions unless necessary.
- Don't ask 'double-barrelled' questions.
- Don't ask hypothetical questions.
- Don't ask respondents to make unnecessary calculations.
- Don't ask non-essential questions.

Types of questions. Many different kinds of questions appear in questionnaires. However, they can all be classified as either *open* or *closed* (see Vyhmeister 2001:133-134).

- *Open questions*. An open question allows respondents to answer however they wish, without prompting. Because answers vary so greatly, tabulating open questions is involved and time-consuming.
- *Closed questions*. In closed questions, respondents choose from a list of given answers. These questions are easy to answer, but the answers may not be very accurate.

Pre-testing the questionnaire (pilot study). Conduct a pilot study to gather information about deficiencies in the questionnaire and ideas for improving it. Test the question-naire with 5-10 respondents who do not form part of the main

study. This provides the questionnaire, as a research instrument, with greater validity.

Interviews (mainly for qualitative research)

Interviews permit a deeper and fuller understanding of the attitudes of the respondents. Whereas the survey (using questionnaires) may have room only for 'agree' and 'disagree' answers, an interview can tell the researcher why the person disagrees or agrees. Interviewing takes time but provides information not available through a survey. In order for an interview to afford the most information possible, the interviewer should record the conversation, but only with the express permission of the person interviewed. Go to the interview with a written outline of the questions you plan to ask. The conversation may depart from this outline, but at least you will have a framework for your interview (Vyhmeister 2001:136).

Summary of the steps of handling an interview. Leedy (1993:195) recommends the following steps for successfully handling the interview as a technique for gathering data for research. They are simple, but very important:

1. Set up the interview well in advance.
2. Send the agenda of questions you will ask the interviewee.
3. Ask for permission to record the interview.
4. Confirm the date immediately in writing.
5. Send a reminder together with another agenda of questions ten days before the interview.

6. Be prompt, follow the agenda, and have a copy of your questions for your interviewee in case he has mislaid his copy.

7. Following the interview, submit a typescript of the interview and get either a written acknowledgement of its accuracy or a corrected copy from the interviewee.

8. After you have incorporated the material into your research report, send that section of the report to the interviewee for final approval and written permission to use the data in your report.

Step 5: Select the participants (population sample)

Sampling. Choose the sample so carefully that you can see all the characteristics of the total population (Leedy 1993:200). When a Gallup poll is undertaken to discover which candidate the citizens will elect, the researchers do not ask each one of the registered voters. They sample the population. That is, they poll a representative group. Regardless of the kind of instrument used to get information —survey, interview or checklist—sampling is a way to get a lot of information from not so many people. For a sample to represent the total population, it should have all the characteristics of that population. A sample should be large enough to represent the population and it must contain the same types of people in the same proportion in which they appear in the total population (Vyhmeister 2001:130-131).

Sampling techniques. When selecting participants, use an appropriate sampling technique. Ensure that participants are

both able and willing to provide the desired information (Educational Research, 2005). Vyhmeister (2001:131-132) describes three main sampling techniques:

- *Representative sampling.* To represent the population, the sample should include in proportion all the different kinds of people in the group. Thus, a representative sample (often called a stratified sample) will include men and women, old and young, rich and poor, black and white, and whatever other kinds of people are in the larger group.

- *Random sampling.* Random sampling is a technique used to ensure, as far as possible, an unbiased representation of the population. Here 'random' does not mean 'chance'. The researcher designs ways to achieve this by polling every tenth name on the list or interviewing every fourth candidate. Random sampling can be applied to the total population. For example, every sixth member of the church—regardless of age, sex or other factors—receives a questionnaire.

- *Cluster sampling.* Cluster sampling selects sample clusters. For example, Brian wants to study Baptist churches in the Western Cape. He finds 29 churches affiliated to the Baptist Union of South Africa. Analysing them by race, he finds 16 are predominantly black, 9 white and 4 coloured. He divides them by size, noting that three have over 300 members, fourteen have 100-300 and ten less than 100. After he divides the

churches into categories, he can randomly choose one church from each category.

Step 6: Describe the data collection procedures

Collecting the data is an exciting part of the research. After all the hard work of preparing, it is fun to send out the questionnaires and get them back. The ideal would be to have a 100 percent return, that is, to have every one of the questionnaires completed and returned in time for the tabulation. This rarely happens. Either a letter gets lost, or a respondent fails to return the questionnaire or a questionnaire is not filled in correctly—and the survey results give information on a limited part of the population (Vyhmeister 2001:130-131).

Procedures for collecting the information needed in the research deal with questions such as: How will the data be collected? Who will collect the data? What procedures will be used? Data collection procedures can be divided into two phases: the preparation phase and the collection phase.

Preparation phase: prepare the cover letter. When sending out questionnaires, include a cover letter with each one. The cover letter should do the following (see Educational Research, 2005):

- Briefly explain the significance of the study. (Please note, the significance does not lie in the fact that you are doing a thesis; it lies in the value of your research to the community or the church. Helping you finish a thesis will not be important to most people.)

- Briefly describe what is being asked of the respondent and why.
- Address the potential respondent personally and individually.
- Provide an endorsement by the research supervisor to add credibility to the letter.
- Guarantee the respondent complete anonymity and confidentiality.
- State a specific date (deadline) by which the questionnaire should be returned.
- Sign the letter personally.
- Provide a self-addressed, stamped return envelope.

Collection phase: follow-up strategies. The response rate of returning completed questionnaires tends to be low (30-50 percent). For this reason, researchers need to use certain follow-up strategies to increase the response rate.

Initial follow-up strategies can increase the response rate up to 20 percent. We recommend two early strategies. First, send a reminder by SMS, e-mail or postcard. A little later, send a second packet with a new, positively worded cover letter, and another self-addressed, stamped, return envelope.

Secondary follow-up strategies can increase the response rate up to 10 percent (Educational Research, 2005). The most effective of these techniques is to telephone the slow responders to encourage them to return the completed questionnaire.

You must record and systematise the data gleaned through the survey (Leedy 1993:216). When you have retrieved

enough questionnaires, record every piece of data in an organised fashion (Vyhmeister 2001:129).

Step 7: Analyse and interpret the data

Raw data do not convey meaning on their own. You need to analyse, organise and interpret the data. You need to collect the data and then treat them with appropriate analytical techniques. In the case of quantitative data, these techniques will include tools of statistical analysis. For qualitative data, you need a system of coding, organising and analysing non-numerical data.

When analysing numerical data (in other words, when doing quantitative research), you may use one or more of these data analysis tools (see Educational Research, 2005; Research Methods, 2008):

- *Discriminant item analysis*: Provide the response rate for each item as well as the total sample size and the overall percentage of returns, since not all respondents will answer questions (that is, a numeric profile/tally of your results, percentages, and so on).
- *Cluster analysis*: Group items into clusters that address the same issue and develop total scores across an item cluster in order to avoid 'information overload'.
- *Inferential (analytic) statistics*: Use the statistics to test your hypothesis.

Qualitative data, on the other hand, are not numerical in nature. They include observations, journal entries and existing

documents (for example, archives, minutes). Most often, however, they take the form of open-ended responses to surveys or interviews (Educational Research, 2005). To present such data in a succinct, accurate and honest manner, you need to code, organise and discuss/analyse them.

- *Coding*. To protect the anonymity of your respondents, use a coding system. For example, the code MGBC could conceal these properties: M for male, G for Gauteng province, B for Baptist denomination and C for aged 40-49.
- *Organising*. To help your readers to follow your discussion, you need to find a sensible way to organise and present your data.
- *Discussing*. Finally, you need to comment on the trends you observe and the likely reasons for them. This constitutes analysing or interpreting it.

There are many specific techniques for doing the analysis. Most of them revolve around identifying similarities and differences between responses, dividing them into groups or categories, and then discussing the trends and the possible causes for them.

While analysing your data, you should relate your findings to existing theories and interpret your results in their light. You should also see if your findings build a new theory or confirm existing ones (Types of Research in Education, 2008).

Step 8: Draw conclusions

The research process must result in conclusions. These conclusions will be valid to the extent that the underlying data collection and analysis is properly done. The process of drawing conclusions has three main steps: (a) state the findings; (b) verify their credibility; and (c) consider their implications. We shall discuss each step in a little more detail.

State the findings. You should present the findings of your research as clearly and concisely as possible, relating the results to the research problem. If you asked a question, what answer did you discover? If you tested a hypothesis, do your findings lead you to accept or reject it?

The strength of your findings may range from conclusive to inconclusive; between these two poles are tentative conclusions. Your conclusions are *conclusive* if you believe they represent the definitive answer to the problem. They are *inconclusive* when the data conflict, failing to suggest a clear answer. Most conclusions fall into the *tentative* category. This occurs when the data suggest a solution, but you are not yet able to claim it as the final word on the matter. As a rule, it is best to understate rather than overstate your conclusions.

If your study revolves around testing a hypothesis, both 'accept' and 'reject' are acceptable research results. You should not feel pressured to 'prove' your hypothesis. If you do, it will cause you to distort the data analysis to ensure a positive outcome. This compromises the research.

Validate their credibility. You should check, double-check and check again to ensure that the data do indeed support the

conclusions you draw from them. Did you analyse and interpret the data correctly? Might there be influential factors or causes you overlooked? Are there other plausible ways to interpret the data? Are your conclusions based on facts rather than opinions? Are the data sufficient to justify the claims you base on them? These are the kinds of questions you need to ask to ensure your findings are credible.

Consider their implications. The final step is to consider the implications and applications of the findings. What practical or ministerial implications do you see? Who might benefit? What principles can be drawn from the study? This issue of drawing principles is both necessary and dangerous. On the one hand, your study is likely based on a small, specific population, so it is dangerous to generalise broadly as if what is true of that population is true in general. On the other hand, there likely are common elements your population shares with other communities, who may also benefit from the research. To strike the balance between these two, it is appropriate to discuss broader applications of your findings (to other populations), but it is wise to do so in tentative, understated language, recognising that your conclusions apply directly to the actual population you studied and only indirectly to others.

In most research projects, the study does not speak the final word on the topic. The researcher recognises the need for further, related research to clarify or corroborate the findings. He can see how his study has gone one step beyond previous research, but also realises there are many more steps to be

taken. If this describes how you feel at the end of your study, you should end it with some recommendations for further research.

Step 9: Write the report

The last and most important step of a study is to write an appropriate and clear report of what you have done and found, so that others may also take advantage of this new knowledge (Types of Research in Education, 2008). The report typically has five sections.

Introduction (covers step 1). As in all other research, there must be an introduction. This gives the background, the definition of the problem, the purpose, the limitations and delimitations, and the definition of terms.

Literature review (covers step 2). Following the introduction, a descriptive research thesis needs to have what is termed as a 'review of literature'. This section reports on the preparatory reading, both on the topic or population investigated (youth, deacons, women administrators, and so on), the methodology used (surveys, scales, rankings, and so on), and the theoretical framework, if appropriate.

Research method (covers steps 3-6). This section deals with the research method employed. You should describe step by step everything you did—the approach (qualitative or quantitative), the instruments, the sample size and sampling techniques, the data collection procedures and any other steps or details that someone would need to know if she wanted to duplicate your study. Two matters are of particular

importance here. The first is to describe how you developed, tested and applied the questionnaire, or, in the case of interviews, to describe in detail how you planned and conducted them. The second is to explain the procedures you used to organise and analyse the data.

Results (covers step 7). What did you discover? The topics are organised in some logical way and described in turn. Often the questions of the survey are taken one after the other, or, if the questionnaire is long, by related groups of questions.

Consider including all your hypotheses, questions, objectives, or purposes as well as the data needed to address each one and the measures needed to collect the data. Finally, describe the method you will use to analyse the data (Research Methods, 2008).

Records of data resulting from observations may be presented in the form of tables, charts, graphs, and other summary and trend-indicating techniques (Leedy 1993:186).

Summary (covers step 8). Finally, summarise the whole process. On the basis of the summary, draw conclusions and make recommendations for further study (Vyhmeister 2001: 129-130)

If you are writing a theological thesis, the descriptive study probably only constitutes one major section of the study. We recommend you conduct and report the descriptive study section as we have described the process here. For example, a thesis in practical theology using the LIM model could have three main parts. The part containing the descriptive study,

the 'present situation' part, could be written up in the form of a descriptive research report.

Summary

Descriptive research is a valuable ministry tool for developing an accurate portrait of a present reality to lay a platform for diagnosing causes and prescribing cures. There are two main forms, namely, quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative studies employ surveys and questionnaires to gather data that lend themselves to statistical analysis, while qualitative approaches rely on interviews, focus groups or personal observations; the data collected do not lend themselves to statistical analysis.

Chapter 16:
Other Types of Research

We want to close our treatment of research models by discussing some methods that do not warrant their own chapter, but are valuable tools for ministry and research. First, we offer guidelines for doing a critical book review. Last, we discuss three variations of studying specific events or issues in ministry—pastoral case studies, congregational analysis and theological issues in ministry.

Book reviews

The values and types of reviews

A book review is a special kind of theological writing. Students may be required to write book reviews on prescribed readings. Scholars write reviews of new publications in their field of expertise. Reading reviews is a valuable means of keeping abreast of the vast body of literature being published. So many works are published each year that it is impossible to read every work in a field; by reading good reviews, you can keep track of the latest research.

Book reviews fall into two types: descriptive and critical. Descriptive reviews simply summarise a book. Our interest

lies in the critical review. Critical reviews describe and evaluate books. The reviewer critiques it against accepted standards and supports his evaluations with evidence.

The components of a critical review

The first step in doing a book review is to read the book carefully and take notes. You should read it at least twice, preferably with a gap between readings. In your first reading, familiarise yourself with the book and form initial impressions. In the second reading, test your impressions and gather evidence to support your conclusions (Draper 2007).

There are many ways to write a critical review. As a rule, the review should have one central thesis (main point) and should be organised logically to support that thesis (Colford 2000). The review must have four components, which may or may not be used as headings to organise the review:

1. Details of the book

Provide a full bibliographic entry for the book. Include the total number of pages in the book. Some reviews also list the price and ISBN number.

2. Background of the author

Do some research about the author—her qualifications, background, church affiliation, ministry position or experience, previous publications, and so on. *Briefly* note anything about the author that sheds light on the book (see LAVC 2005).

3. Description of the purpose

The description should *not* be a summary of the book (Colford 2000). Rather, it should extract and state the author's main purpose and thesis (authors often state their purpose in the preface or introduction), then describe how he sets about achieving the purpose and developing the thesis. Those who read your description should have a clear understanding of the book's main purpose and how the author went about achieving it.

4. Evaluation of the book

The longest and most important part of the review is to evaluate the book: (a) How effectively did the author develop his thesis? (b) How well did she achieve her purpose? It is crucial to evaluate the book against the author's stated purpose. If the author set out to write a devotional commentary for teenagers, criticising her for failing to evaluate textual variants is unfair. Similarly, you would not blame someone writing 'a layman's guide to Bible doctrines' for leaving out technical data. However, a critical commentary that neglects important variants or an academic monograph that fails to engage critical sources should be exposed.

State how well you believe the author has achieved his purpose, then back up your conclusion with evidence from the book. Here are some criteria you might use to evaluate a theological book:

- *Bible*. Does the author engage scripture adequately? Is her exegesis consistent, thorough and sound?

- *Scholarship*. Does the author demonstrate familiarity with relevant recent scholarship? Does he engage that scholarship appropriately and sufficiently?
- *Presuppositions*. Does the author state his assumptions honestly? Are they appropriate? Does personal bias undermine his objectivity or cloud his judgement?
- *Organisation*. Is the book clearly and logically structured? Does it use suitable structural devices to support its purpose (for example, tables, indexes, transitions, headings).
- *Methodology*. If it is a research work, is the author's methodology sound and suitable? Did she describe it transparently?
- *Accuracy*. Has the author done thorough research? Did you notice any factual errors? Does she represent others' views fairly and truly?
- *Suitability*. How suitable is the book for its target audience? Is it readable? Is it interesting? Is it useful?
- *Comparisons*. How does the book compare with other works in the field? What contribution does it make? Does it meet accepted norms?
- *Impact*. How did the book affect you? What was your personal response to it?

The language and structure of a review

The tone of your review should reflect a courteous and gracious attitude. Even if you disagree with the author, write

in a collegial manner. Many academic debates are conducted in a manner unbecoming of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Scholars use combative language to humiliate those who hold opposite views. We urge you, in all your writings, to treat others as brothers in Christ.

You might structure your review by using the four components as headings (see above), but you need not do so. Many reviewers prefer to weave components 2-4 into a flowing essay. If you write the review in an essay format, arrange it around the central thesis of your evaluation and use the normal three-part structure: introduction, body and conclusion.

- *Introduction*. The opening statement should set the tone for the review. Colford (2000) suggests a statement about either (a) the review's thesis, (b) the author's purpose or (c) the book's significance as good options for the opening sentence.
- *Body*. The body should develop your review in a clear, organised manner. It should weave together description and evaluation, providing evidence in support of its judgements.
- *Conclusion*. "The concluding paragraph may sum up or restate your thesis or may make the final judgement regarding the book. No new information or ideas should be introduced in the conclusion" (Colford 2000).

Even if you use the four components as headings, you could still apply this three-part structure to the material under

the two main headings, namely, the description and the evaluation.

Summary

Book reviews rank amongst the most valuable types of theological writing. They enable readers to keep abreast of recent trends without needing to read every new work. Although descriptive reviews have some value, critical reviews are much more valuable.

The objective of a book review is to evaluate how well the author has achieved her purpose. The review should describe her purpose and explain how she tried to achieve it. The reviewer should state how well he believes the author has achieved her purpose, supporting his conclusions with evidence from the book.

Pastoral case studies

Vyhmeister (2001:144) describes a case study in pastoral research this way:

> It studies one situation, the activities of one group, or one incident. Naturally, a pastoral case study looks at an event or person or situation related to ministry. It must analyze the background of the incident, all the factors that contribute to the interplay and interaction, and what actually happens.

A case study of a pastoral ministry issue requires four steps (Vyhmeister 2001:145-149):

1. *Observation*. The case itself is written out based on careful observations. You may use any of the tools of descriptive research (including personal observations)

    to compile the case. All essential details must be included in a written description of the case.

2. *Analysis.* "Once the case has been written out, the next step is to carefully analyze the events, interactions and reactions of the person or persons involved in the case. … The task of analysis is to understand, not to make judgments regarding the rightness or wrongness of anyone's actions" (p. 147).

3. *Interpretation.* Now the case is critiqued theologically. "The key question is: What do the Bible, theology, and the church's tradition and doctrine say about the case?" (p. 148).

4. *Action.* The study ends with action planning, where "one evaluates any action already taken and outlines appropriate future pastoral strategies for responding to the case" (p. 149).

A case study can range in size from a short paper to a full thesis. It is, in essence, a specific form of practical theology research, closely akin to the LIM model (see ch. 13). A specific kind of case study that can be valuable in ministry is congregational analysis.

Congregational analysis

Hendriks (2004) developed a research model for studying congregations. He called it contextual analysis. Its value lies in creating an accurate portrait of a congregation that helps leaders to make informed decisions. The goal is to work out

where a congregation is so that its leaders can make informed decisions about where to go and how to get there.

The method has four steps. It requires that one conduct a detailed study of a church's history, culture, theology and experiences. A Contextual Analysis of a Congregation (2008) offers nine questions you should try to answer:

- What is the history of your church?
- What is the culture of the area in which you live?
- What is the culture represented in your church and how does the culture of the area reflect there?
- What is the primary theology/message represented at your church?
- What are some of the major experiences your church has been through?
- What was your experience the first time you entered the doors of your church?
- What kept you coming back?
- In the course of this study, what did you learn about your church that you did not know before?
- How might a contextual analysis help your church in making major decisions?

Lastly, in ministry you will face challenges related to theological issues and their outworking in real life. This brings us to the last kind of study we wish to mention.

Theological issues in ministry

Vyhmeister (2001:152-154) also presents a model for writing "papers on theological issues in ministry". Her model

resembles our design for practical theology, except that it analyses a theological issue *in a local church* and applies the results to that situation. Studying theological issues in ministry contexts provides a practical way for students to broaden their theological knowledge and skills, *and* at the same time equip themselves for thoughtful and creative ministry (p. 152).

Vyhmeister (2001:152) believes this kind of study will help you develop these skills:

- accurate and objective observation,
- imaginative analysis,
- theological reflection,
- statement of a pastoral-theological point of view,
- planning effective strategies, and
- writing all of the above.

Like the LIM model (see ch. 13), a paper about a theological issue in ministry typically requires three main sections:

1. Analysis of the issue
2. Theological reflection
3. Application to ministry

The logic is simple. The paper begins with a real-life issue in a local congregation. After describing the situation and identifying the theological issue(s) underlying it, it engages in biblical and theological reflection. This results in a particular point of view on the issue. The final phase examines how this point of view can be applied in the life of the congregation.

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Topical Index