



## RESEARCH AND WRITING

Prepared by Dr. Jeffrey Greenman for Tyndale Seminary  
Revised 2009 & 2014 by Dr. Arnold Neufeldt-Fast

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## PART ONE: DOING RESEARCH<sup>1</sup>

*This section is designed to walk you through the process of gathering information from available written resources for use in a research paper.*

### 1. Get to know the Tyndale Library and its resources

- a. Reference collection
- b. [Catalogue](#)
- c. [Online Resources](#), including Periodicals, eBooks, and Research Guides

### 2. Get clarification or explanation from your professor about what is expected in the assigned paper.

- a. What type of paper is being expected? This guide focuses on research papers, approximately 15-20 pages.
- b. What types of resources need to be consulted?
- c. What kinds of primary sources are expected? A primary source is a text such as the Bible itself, the actual sermons by Charles Wesley, writings by Augustine, diaries, letters, manuscripts, and so on.
- d. What kinds of secondary sources are expected? A secondary source is a text such as a commentary on the Bible, or Professor Shepherd's article giving an interpretation of Wesley's sermons. Secondary sources include specialized encyclopedia and dictionaries written by scholars in the field.
- e. Be sure to do the assignment that is actually assigned (e.g., conform to length specifications, or if the paper calls for addressing strengths and weaknesses of a given position or approach, don't neglect to cover both strengths and weaknesses).
- f. Professors want to read good papers and want students to succeed, so look at them as your advocates rather than your adversaries!

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<sup>1</sup> A wonderful complement to this paper is Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, [The Craft of Research](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); available as Tyndale ebook.

**3. Practical advice: Allocate your time wisely to allow adequate opportunity for research and writing.**

- a. Do not rush the research stage of your paper, since the qualities of your thinking in the research stage will determine the quality of your end product from the writing stage. A good paper needs to be well researched.
- b. Research papers are not (1) “simply a compilation of quotations”; (2) “simply rewriting other people’s words and ideas”; and (3) “a sermon” (Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers*, p. 5). The goal is to digest the material at hand, analyze it, and make it your own, so that you can write a convincing paper that presents compelling evidence in support of a clearly-stated conclusion. This process of “digestion” takes time.
- c. Do not rush the writing stage of your paper, since ideas “gel” when you put fingers to keyboard, and since the end-product is what the professor actually sees (and marks). A good paper needs to be well-written as well as well-researched.
- d. It is absolutely essential to proofread your paper at least twice before you turn it in. If your many hours of work are presented in a careless manner (e.g., lots of spelling errors or missing pages), then you will not make a good impression. Spell checkers are very useful, but they will not detect errors such as “great/grate” or “too/to/two” (i.e., words spelled correctly but used incorrectly).
- e. If you have not written many research papers in your academic career, leave yourself more time than you would ordinarily think, just to be safe.
- f. With experience, the research and writing process gets more efficient.

**4. Start your research in the Tyndale Library.**

- a. The Tyndale Library has been developed over many years by professional librarians and faculty so that the collection and electronic resources provide the resources needed to write excellent essays for Seminary classes.
- b. The school’s first priority for acquisitions to the collection is materials needed to support our courses and your assignments.
- c. Implication: think twice about starting your research on the Internet unless your professor has given you specific links to work with.

**5. Begin with the reference collection.**

- a. Use our specialized encyclopaedias and dictionaries to get an overview of the topic

(e.g., for a topic in Biblical Studies, use the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*; see also the Religion volumes in the [Gale Virtual Reference Library](#) ).

- b. Your first goal in the research process is to become familiar with the subject matter, learn its important terms and ideas, and grasp the overall “shape” of the topic at hand.
- c. Reference entries are written by recognized experts on the subject matter, and since they are carefully edited by scholars and publishers, they are generally highly credible and trustworthy (but not always perfect).
- d. Specific entries normally include a bibliography of major monographs on the topic, and sometimes even seminal journal articles.

#### **6. Move next to monographs and periodicals.**

- a. Reference work entries may lead you to major monographs. Be sure not to miss the most important books on the topic you are examining. Aim to get a handful of really good books which discuss the subject.
- b. Practical tip: Ask your professor for advice about which books would be best to consult in preparation of your paper. Is there a “classic” treatment of your topic that you simply cannot miss? They may be able to point you to a valuable resource right away, which could save you lots of time.
- c. Check the [Library catalogue](#) for Tyndale’s monograph holdings by using subject headings.
- d. Check on-line databases (<http://www.tyndale.ca/library>) for periodical articles dealing with the topic. Many full-text articles are available on-line, to supplement the library’s paper holdings. Be sure to use high-quality articles in recognized journals.
- e. Normally it is best to pay special attention to the leading journals in the field rather than popular magazines. If you have questions about which are the better quality journals, ask your professor or the librarians.
- f. Your chief task at this stage is to locate the most relevant, high-quality resources you can find on your topic.

#### **7. Consult the Web only as needed to supplement your findings.**

- a. Beware the temptation to go to the Web too soon just because it is fast and easily accessible from your desk.

- b. Warning! The Web is “unedited” and “unsupervised” territory, which can generate thousands of useless “hits” to your search, and waste lots of valuable time. Avoid older, lower-quality materials which are easily accessible on the Web simply because they are now in the Public Domain.
- c. Critical scrutiny is essential—you need to use all your available knowledge and skills to figure out if the source and information is credible and trustworthy (e.g., someone with suitable credentials and genuine knowledge of the subject).
- d. The Internet is best for finding primary sources (e.g., official documents by the Pope, or to look at the Dead Sea Scrolls) or locating information on current topics (e.g., how various leaders have responded to some contemporary issue). Full-text journal articles are also very useful.
- e. Some on-line journals (i.e., those that exist only on the Web and not on paper) are peer-reviewed just like “paper journals”, but others are not (see our [e-journal databases](#) , esp. ATLA and ProQuest); another source is [Google Scholar](#)). Peer review is a process whereby scholars in a given field serve as editors who evaluate the articles before they are published, thereby assuring a high level of quality control for the material. If a source from the Web has not peer-reviewed, it still could contain accurate information, but you have less certainty about its quality.
- f. Practical tip: Ask your professor for advice if they could recommend any good websites related to the topic (e.g., see Dr. Neufeldt-Fast’s [Virtual Reading Rooms](#) designed for Tyndale’s MTS Modular Program). For screen snapshots, bibliographic management and note-taking while reading the texts below, [Zotero](#) is highly recommended ("a free, easy-to-use Mozilla Firefox extension to help you collect, manage, and cite your research sources").

**8. Begin to read the materials assembled in order to focus your topic on a specific, relevant research question.**

- a. Your task at this stage is to find a topic that is workable—not too large, not too narrow. It must be capable of being researched with the materials available.<sup>2</sup>
  - Example: “Is conversion important?” – much too vague and uninteresting!
  - Example: “What does the Bible say about conversion?” – still too broad.
  - Example: “How does Jonathan Edwards understand the process of conversion?” – still too big for a 15 page paper, but on the right track.
  - Example: “How does Jonathan Edwards understand the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of conversion?” – just right for a 15 page paper.

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<sup>2</sup> See also Booth, Colomb, and Williams, [The Craft of Research](#), 40ff. (Tyndale ebook).

- b. Read the materials through to get an overview of what is being said.
- c. Aim to identify one clear, simple and relevant research question as the focus for your paper. Finding this research question is vitally important because it allows you to have a specific question that you seek to answer in your paper.
- d. A specific, relevant research question allows you to sort the assembled research materials – only those that have a bearing on your question need be “kept on the front burner” of your research.
- e. Practical tip: Once you have done of digging for relevant resources and are working to identify your research question, you could seek some guidance from your professor. Go to them, or send them an email, and ask, “I was thinking that X would be a good research question to address in my paper. Does that sound like a promising question?”

**9. Identify important primary and secondary sources for your paper.**

- a. Normally, professors at Tyndale Seminary expect you to engage a primary source text. Fear not: as C.S. Lewis commented, reading Plato is much easier than understanding people who write about Plato.
- b. Locate the secondary articles that help you answer your research question. Keep your focus—do not be distracted into interesting territory that is “off topic” for your purposes.

**10. Be an active, critical reader.**

- a. Critical reading is an exercise in critical thinking (involving careful analysis).
- b. Critical thinking is *not* being negative, harsh, nit-picking or fault-finding.
- c. Critical thinking is a rational process of making analytical and evaluative judgments based on evidence and supported by reasons.
- d. The goal of critical reading is “not only to understand *what* is being said explicitly but to see as well *why* it is being said” (James Sire, *How to Read Slowly*, my emphasis).
- e. Work at discerning the author’s argument.
- f. An argument in the academic sense is *not* something quarrelsome and contentious.
- g. An argument is a series of statements giving reasons for belief: argument move from

premises to conclusions (what is argued for).

**11. Ask lots of good questions as you read: fifteen questions to assist critical reading (Ron Fry).<sup>3</sup>**

- a. Is there a clear message communicated throughout?
- b. Are the relationships between the points direct and clear?
- c. Is there a relationship between your experience and the author's?
- d. Are the details factual?
- e. Are the examples and evidence relevant?
- f. Is there consistency of thought?
- g. What is the author's bias or slant?
- h. What is the author's motive?
- i. What does the author want you to believe?
- j. Does this correspond with your own beliefs or experiences?
- k. Is the author rational or subjective?
- l. Is there a confusion between facts and feelings?
- m. Are the main points logically ordered?
- n. Are the arguments and conclusions consistent?
- o. Are the explanations clear?

**12. Underline your copies of materials while reading—but *never* mark in a library book or journal!**

- a. Underlining also involves the kinesthetic sense and assists memory – get active!
- b. Underline only the most important information (10% of text).

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<sup>3</sup> See also Booth, Colomb, and Williams, [The Craft of Research](#), ch. 6, "Using Sources". (Tyndale ebook).

- c. Write in the margins of your books to note items of interest to which you can return later. Note key issues or ideas, with page numbers, on the back pages of the book so you can find them again later.
- d. Highlight the thesis statement of a paragraph or section.
- e. Mark passages you don't understand or statements that raise questions for you.
- f. The task at this stage is to personalize the materials—you are working through them, pen in hand, with an eye to a specific research question for your paper. The challenge of research is to make the materials “your own” and to allow them to stimulate your own thinking. An implication of this is that you could read and underline a given article or chapter for a paper on one topic, but go back to that same source a year or two later for research on a different topic – and when you go back to it, you might underline very different ideas or quotations, given the nature of the new topic being considered.
- g. Develop your own system of markings and underlining – it needs to make sense to you, but no one else!
- h. Find a place and technique to note any important ideas, quotes or topics dealt within the book or article that are especially relevant to the paper you are writing.

**13. Certain techniques can assist the research process as you take notes.**

- a. Make an outline of each of your sources as part of your note-taking. If a given text doesn't include a natural outline, develop one in order to grasp its structure.
- b. Maxim: “The more difficult the book, the more necessary the outline.” If you have a primary source that is quite challenging reading, but essential to your research, be sure to take the time to outline it as a way to gain deeper understanding of its arguments and supporting evidence.
- c. Jot down terminology you don't understand (e.g., inside a book's back cover) to be looked up later. Be sure to get clarity about key words, archaic phrases and technical jargon being used by the author.
- d. Write down memorable quotes you might want to use in an essay (maybe 3 X 5 card or on your computer) or use a note-taking tool like [Zotero](#) .
- e. Sometimes it helps to write a one-paragraph summary of an entire chapter of a book you are using.

#### **14. Plan to read your key materials at least three times in the research stage.**

- a. First reading: what is the author saying? Your task is to understand “what is said” and the conclusions being drawn. Reading for “what” should happen in the early stages of your research. This level of reading can be undertaken at a normal rate of reading speed and shows a familiarity with the literature on your topic.
- b. Second reading: why is the author saying what she is saying? Your task is to understand “why this is being said” and the evidence being given in support of the conclusions. Reading for “why” should happen in the middle stage of your research. This level of reading should be undertaken by reading quite slowly and builds an understanding of the literature on your topic.
- c. Third reading: why does Smith say X and Jones say Y about my topic? Your task is to grasp similarities and differences between different interpreters of the topic. Reading for “comparisons” should happen in the latter stages of your research. Where and why do people agree or disagree about the answer to your research question? This level of reading builds toward a mastery of the literature on your topic.
- d. Practical tip: Get as much mileage as possible from your high-quality sources. There is more value in concentrating on fewer sources at greater depth than working with many sources at a superficial level.

#### **15. Organize your notes on the research materials into an outline—a proposed method.<sup>4</sup>**

- a. A key intermediate step before you write is to organize your notes from your reading into a usable outline of your findings. Don’t attempt to outline your paper right away—outline your research findings, then edit them into the paper outline.
- b. Begin to list your main findings and key ideas in outline form (I, II, III, etc.).
- c. Fill in supporting evidence for these ideas (A, B, C, etc.).
- d. Insert quotations from sources in the outline (be sure not to lose the reference, since you will need it for a footnote or endnote).
- e. Sit back and look at your research findings. What ideas are becoming well-developed with solid supporting evidence? What ideas are undeveloped and lacking in substantial support? (Drop them.)
- f. Edit your outline of research findings into a shorter outline for your essay by deciding how many points have sufficient support to be included in the writing stage, and

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<sup>4</sup> See also Booth, Colomb, and Williams, [\*The Craft of Research\*](#), “Quick tip: Outling,” in part IV, “Preparing to Draft, Drafting, and Revising”. (Tyndale ebook).

where more research is needed.

- g. Some good ideas will not find their way into your final paper—in fact, a strong indicator that you have done your research well is when you have more good points in mind than you can actually use in your paper, given the assignment’s stipulations about length.

Keep expanding your essay outline by filling in more supporting evidence, more quotations from your research. Some writers simply continue expanding their outline until the paper is virtually complete, which means the writing stage can be focused primarily on actually writing the essay (e.g., providing transitions between ideas, presenting the material with a readable flow of ideas) rather than assembling the materials to get ready to write.

## PART TWO: WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER<sup>5</sup>

*This section is designed to walk you through the writing stage of your research paper by explaining the expectations of structure and content for a good essay at the graduate level.*

- I. **There is no substitute for learning from personal experience.**
  - a. Practical tip: A young, aspiring writer once asked the acclaimed Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood: “What advice would you give a young writer starting out?” She replied, “Read and read and read and write and write and write. That’s all.”
- 2. **Your task is to develop a well-researched, well-written essay that addresses a focused, relevant research question, and that presents your own thinking about the answers to that question.**
  - a. **Well-researched:** a research paper needs to show you have evidence in support of your conclusion.
  - b. **Well-written:** a research paper needs to have a cohesive structure that makes your presentation of information easy to follow.
  - c. **Research question:** a research paper should be organized around the task of addressing one significant research question.
  - d. **Your own thinking:** a research paper needs to present your own conclusion or interpretation in response to the question at hand. Your own “voice” needs to be heard. Remember: a mere compilation of quotations from your research notes does not constitute a research paper. Most professors will either reject a “collection of quotes” entirely, or give it a very low mark.

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<sup>5</sup> See Booth, Colomb, and Williams, [The Craft of Research](#), section IV (Tyndale ebook).

### 3. Abide by some basic “rules” of good writing.

**Note:** A classic work on this topic is: William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style* (New York: Macmillan, 1959). The direct quotations below are from this source.

- a. Carefully plan the structure or design of your essay before you start to write
- b. Clearly articulate a thesis statement: “The purpose of this essay is ...”
- c. “Make the paragraph the unit of composition.” Each paragraph should have one main idea being discussed. Use short, clear sentences rather than long, convoluted ones.
- d. “Use the active voice.” (Avoid the passive voice, since it makes writing less direct, less bold and less concise. Contrast: “I shall always remember my first visit to Boston” vs. “My first visit to Boston will always be remembered...”).
- e. “Put statements in positive form.” (It is better to say “I believe...” rather than “It is not unreasonable to believe...”).
- f. “Use definite, specific, concrete language.” (Avoid the tendency toward long, abstract nouns and technical jargon so common in academic writing.)
- g. “Write with nouns and verbs.”
- h. “Omit needless words.”
- i. Avoid vagueness (meaning of a word is unclear or imprecise in a given context).
- j. Avoid ambiguity (meaning of a word can be understood in at least two ways in context).
- k. Avoid “chameleon” words (words with no accepted limits surrounding their use, e.g., feminist, liberal, radical). Be sure to provide a definition of any such word.
- l. “Avoid a succession of loose sentences.”
- m. “Avoid fancy words.” (Abstain from technical terms and theological jargon.)
- n. “Do not overstate.” (Don’t argue for too bold a claim.) Humility is a virtue of academic life.

For other examples, see J. Straus, *The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation* (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2007), or the *University of Victoria Writer’s Guide* .

**4. It is acceptable to make appropriate use of the first-person.**

- a. Tyndale Seminary faculty agree that it is acceptable to use the first-person in your papers. We would rather have you say “I will argue that Smith is mistaken” rather than “this writer will argue” or “one might argue” or “we will argue that Smith is mistaken.”
- b. Statements such as “I believe” or “I conclude” or “My view is” are acceptable, even if you have been told in previous academic work that this is a cardinal sin.
- c. However, do not overuse the first-person. Your research paper should not make constant reference to “I” and “my.”

**5. Develop a coherent structure for your essay.**

- a. A solid essay needs a strong introduction, a well-developed body of the paper (presenting evidence in support of important ideas and claims) and a strong conclusion.
- b. Practical tip: If you organize your research notes into an outline of your findings, then edit that outline into your working outline for the essay itself, your paper will never suffer from a poor structure.
- c. Practical tip: The biggest weakness in Tyndale Seminary student essays is the lack of a coherent structure, rather than a lack of good ideas. Be sure to avoid the “string of pearls” essay which is a loosely-connected series of ideas or quotations.

**6. The essay should have a well-crafted introduction.<sup>6</sup>**

- a. Write this section of your essay last, when you have completed the body of the essay and the conclusion.
- b. A good introduction should introduce the whole paper, not just the first page of it.
- c. Take time to write a strong introduction—it is your “first impression” as you greet your reader, and you want to establish the reader’s interest and desire to read the paper.
- d. An introduction should establish a context within which the issues or ideas can be located (“...this topic currently is being vigorously debated among Protestant

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<sup>6</sup> See also Booth, Colomb, and Williams, [\*The Craft of Research\*](#), ch 14 “Introductions and Conclusions.” (Tyndale ebook).

theologians...”).

- e. An introduction should announce a specific intention or subject matter (“In this paper I will examine...”).
- f. An introduction should use a thesis statement to identify the one question you are wanting to answer in your paper. An introduction should tell the reader how you will go about answering the question under investigation (i.e., the method used to approach the question).
- g. Where appropriate, an introduction should relate your work to views of others (“I will examine the contrasting views of three leading scholars on this subject...”)
- h. An introduction indicate the importance or relevance of your work; it should show the reader why this is worth thinking about.
- i. An introduction should generate interest and stir up the reader’s curiosity.

## **7. The body of the essay should be well-developed.**

- a. You should probably write this section first.
- b. The body should aim at rational persuasion, since you want the reader to share your point of view.
- c. The body should make it plain what claim you are making, what conclusion you are drawing. Do not leave your reader searching for the main points.
- d. The body should show what reasons and evidence support your conclusion (why are your reasons relevant? Adequate?). Practical tip: Beware of overstating the conclusions that can be drawn from the evidence.
- e. The body should not merely list the data or report findings you’ve made (“Smith says X, Jones says Y”) but should interact with the data (organize it, sift it, evaluate it).
- f. Ideally, the body should implicitly (if not explicitly) defend your position against possible criticisms or counter-arguments.
- g. Ideally, the body should have a strategy to supply a “thread” stylistically: moving from the clear to the unclear, the obvious to the unobvious, the easy to the difficult, the least interesting to the most interesting.
- h. Practical tip: The most important single insight you should gain from this guide is simply that your essay needs to make a point. Do not leave your reader wondering,

after 15 pages, “What was the point of this essay?” Your point is the answer to your research question. Your answer need not be completely original, in the sense of breaking new ground in the academic world. The important thing is that you show the reader that you have made the material your own—it has been chewed over and sifted and organized good ideas about the topic into an answer that makes sense to you, for reasons you explain clearly to the reader.

- i. Practical tip: The typical 15-20 page paper can have only one point. It is a common weakness of student essays to attempt to address lots of research questions rather than focusing on making a single point that answers a single, relevant research question. The result is a superficial essay that jumps around from one good observation to another, without developing an argument or presenting sufficient evidence to be convincing.

## **8. The essay needs a strong conclusion.<sup>7</sup>**

- a. You should probably write this section before the introduction but after the body.
- b. The conclusion should pull together all the threads—decide what is most important!
- c. The conclusion should draw out the implications and consequences—why does this matter? In short: so what?
- d. The conclusion should leave a lasting impression with a vivid ending.

*Example of an essay outline on the topic of abortion*

### I. Introduction

- Examines four major alternatives regarding morality of abortion
- Goal: identify underlying reason or reasons for divergence of views
- Goal: determine which view is most adequate morally and theologically
- Relevance to public voice and presence of church in contemporary culture

### II. Body of essay

- A. Abortion on demand and “freedom of choice” positions
  - i. View stated – refer to best exponent of view
  - ii. Strengths and weaknesses of view morally and theologically
- B. Abortion as regrettable but sometimes justified morally

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<sup>7</sup> See also Booth, Colomb, and Williams, [\*The Craft of Research\*](#), ch 14 “Introductions and Conclusions.” (Tyndale ebook).

- i. View stated – cases or scenarios that are claimed as acceptable (e.g., abortion to save the mother’s life)
  - ii. Strengths and weaknesses
- C. Abortion as usually wrong but allowable under extreme circumstances
  - i. View stated
  - ii. Pregnancy via rape and incest
  - iii. Severely deformed fetuses
  - iv. Strengths and weaknesses
- D. Abortion as always or absolutely wrong
  - i. View stated
  - ii. Strengths and weaknesses

### III. Conclusion

- Areas of possible overlap or convergence – what do they agree about?
- Reasons for divergence and disagreement – why do they disagree?
- Most adequate position in my view is ...
- Reasons why this view is preferable
- Relevance of this conclusion to contemporary society, church, etc.

### **9. A good essay has been carefully edited.**

- a. Search out and annihilate useless words! Be concise, never wordy.
- b. Scrutinize your essay’s thesis statement – is it strong and clear?
- c. Examine your topic sentences in each paragraph – are they lucid?
- d. Examine your transitions – is there a flow that is reader-friendly?
- e. Examine your supporting sentences – have you made your case?
- f. Look at your verbs: use active voice, avoid “academese.”
- g. Don’t forget to proofread – consider getting someone else to proofread, too

### **10. A good essay avoids the most common stylistic problems.**

- a. Wordiness – don’t beat around the bush!
- b. Rambling, convoluted sentences.

- c. Paragraphs that contain too many diverse thoughts.
- b. Excessive quotation – avoid producing a “string of pearls.” Practical tip: “one way to keep from putting together a patchwork of quotes and ideas from others is to write a rough draft without all of your research notes in front of you” (OBC “Manual for Writing Research Papers”).
- c. way to keep from putting together a patchwork of quotes and ideas from others is to write a rough draft without all of your research notes in front of you” (OBC “Manual for Writing Research Papers”).
- d. “Manual for Writing Research Papers”).
- e. Too many long quotations – avoid citing passages more than 3 lines long. Use longer quotes only if they are absolutely necessary evidence to support your argument. If you cite a passage more than 3 lines long, you should use a block quotation— indented and single-spaced. If you use a block quote, be sure to explain it and really engage its significance. Be sure to avoid more than one block quote per page.
- f. Gender-exclusive language (e.g., “man’s problem is sin”) – use inclusive language, as per Tyndale’s style policies.

Some examples of gender-inclusive alternatives:

- Use humanity or humankind rather than man
  - Use people, society or humanity rather than mankind
  - Use worker rather than workman
  - Use brothers and sisters rather than brethren or brothers
  - Use clergy, member of clergy, pastor rather than clergyman
  - Use lay person or laity rather than layman
- g. An overly-casual, excessively first-person style.
  - h. Use of jargon: avoid it as much as possible, make clear what you mean by a technical term.
  - i. Use of slang expressions.
  - j. Use of contractions (e.g., “don’t” or “can’t” must be avoided).
  - k. Spelling mistakes – use “spellcheck” on your computer and proofread.  
Practical tip: the most frequent spelling mistake on Tyndale Seminary papers is the misuse of “its” and “it’s” in essays. The word “It’s” means “It is.” The word “Its” is the possessive of it, and is anomalous in English because it has no apostrophe. Never make this mistake.
  - l. Improper punctuation – proofread.
  - m. Attempts to flatter the professor by citing his/her lecture notes—please don’t!
  - n. Misspelling the professor’s name or the names of the authors you cite – this can be

very embarrassing!

**11. A good essay avoids the most common forms of logical error.**

- a. *Appeal to nostalgia*: use of the past as an unquestioned authority (“If we don’t dramatically change direction, ten years from now we won’t be living in the same country we grew up in.”)
- b. *Slippery slope*: fallacious use of a sequential form of reasoning (“If we tinker with the health care system, eventually our whole social order will collapse.”)
- c. *Straw man/ Straw person*: misrepresenting an opponent’s argument or view to make it easier to attack, or attacking weaker opponents while ignoring stronger ones (“My opponent is saying we should cut taxes so that the rich can get richer...”)
- d. *Ad hominem*: either an attack on the person or source of the idea rather than the idea itself by using an argument (“We can dismiss Nietzsche’s philosophy because he went insane in his final years”), or a personal, emotional appeal to the reader rather than argument (“Any sincere Christian will have no use for Nietzsche’s ideas about religion”).
- e. *Begging the question*: assuming what you have to demonstrate.

**12. A good essay avoids bloopers through attentive proofreading – these are real examples from real papers your professors have received!**

- a. “Life begins at the moment of conceptualization.”
- b. “Since there are so few livers available for transplantation, how are they to be allocated in a just and fair manor?”
- c. “...the construction industry is an industry known for fowl mouth communications.”
- d. “a fully disorganized Persian Empire was not achieved until 480 B.C.E.”

**PART THREE: MAJOR TYPES OF ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS**

*The purpose of this section is to familiarize you with the different types of writing assignments commonly used at Tyndale Seminary, so you can plan your research and writing strategy appropriately for each type.*

### **1. Writing a research paper**

- a. This guide deals with research papers, approximately 15-20 pages.
- b. The principles of good writing apply to all types of essays!

### **2. Writing a reflection paper**

- a. Reflection papers or “personal reflections” are designed to stimulate personal reflection on a given topic, issue or book – e.g., “What are the main ethical issues you face as a Christian?”
- b. Reflection papers normally do not call for library research or use of additional sources.
- c. Typically, the assignments call for you to examine your own experience, e.g., “What is God showing you about himself? Yourself? Ministry?”
- d. Myth #1: reflection papers are void of content. No, reflection papers draw upon different “primary sources” from other papers, but there still should be content and substance being talked about.
- e. Myth #2: issues of quality and proper style do not apply. No, reflection papers need to be carefully structured and well-written.

### **3. Writing an integration paper**

- a. Integration papers involve more than reflection—they incorporate your reflection in response to an article, a book, a lecture, etc.
- b. The goal is to apply the article or book’s insights or message to yourself, not to review the book per se.
- c. In preparation for a reflection paper, read for personal application above all else.

### **4. Writing a book review (usually 3 to 5 pages) or book notation (usually 1 or 2 pages).**

- a. Read with an eye toward structure, main ideas, thesis, strengths and weaknesses.
- b. Underline or keep a running list of most important quotes or underline passages that sum up the book’s gist.
- c. Develop a coherent structure: introduction, summary of main ideas, critical

interaction with main ideas, final assessment of book's value and contribution.

- d. You can follow the book's structure to organize your essay.
- e. A review is more than just a summary! A summary has no evaluation, but a review should put forward an interpretive and evaluative "point of view" and give reasons to back it up.
- f. Outstanding book reviews allude to other approaches to the question under investigation in the text being reviewed (e.g., "one weakness of Smith's work is that he does not engage in any discussion of the views held by other contemporary scholars, such as Chan and Fernandez, who have dealt with the issue in a radically different way").

## **PART FOUR: ESSAY FORMAT**

*The purpose of this section is make you aware of the expectations at Tyndale Seminary about the proper format to use in preparing your essays.*

All papers at Tyndale Seminary should be presented either in [Chicago Manual of Style/Turabian](#) format (see [Quick Guide](#)) or –for counselling papers—in APA (American Psychological Association) format.

You may choose to employ citation software, e.g., as available with newer editions of Microsoft Office. While these programs save time, they vary in quality. Students must be able to review the citations for accuracy and completeness.

### **1. Research papers should use footnotes or endnotes with bibliography (or parenthetical citations with reference list).**

- a. Check your syllabus or with your professor about whether parenthetical citations or footnotes or endnotes are preferred for a given assignment (NB: the [Chicago/Turabian](#) style has all three models). Most professors strongly prefer that you use footnotes rather than endnotes.

### **2. There are two main purposes for footnotes/endnotes – "reference" and "content"**

- a. Footnotes/endnotes are required whenever you are drawing upon or quoting from other authors. Failure to acknowledge your sources constitutes plagiarism and is a very serious matter.

- b. Footnotes/endnotes should be used to show the source of an idea, when that idea does not originate with yourself, even when you are putting the idea in your own words.
- c. Footnotes/endnotes are not needed when an idea comes from you or when the information is common knowledge.
- d. When in doubt, err on the side of caution by using a footnote/endnote.
- e. You may use a single footnote/endnote to cover a number of factual claims, rather than using one for every sentence in a whole paragraph or section. (Such a practice is tedious). E.g., in a footnote/endnote, you might say: "In this paragraph, the biographical details about William Tyndale are drawn from David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 2-8."

**3. Reference footnotes provide documentation about where the information was obtained** (Vyhmeister, 62-63).

- a. Used "to indicate that there is authority behind the statements made, in order to strengthen the researcher's assertions."
- b. Used "to help the scholar who is looking for information on the topic to easily find the material referred to."
- c. Used "to honestly admit intellectual indebtedness to another author."

**4. Content footnotes "provide information that could disrupt or unnecessarily complicate the text"** (Vyhmeister, 63).

- a. Used to "point out a contrast or discrepancy." In this case, a footnote would be used to engage in a more detailed discussion than necessary, and would be an interesting digression from the argument.
- b. Used to "give further explanation."
- b. Used to "indicate sources for further study." For example: additional biblical citations with similar texts or ideas which the reader might consult.
- c. Practical tip: "Since many readers do not read footnotes, the text should make sense without content footnotes" (Vyhmeister, p. 63).

**5. Use proper format for footnotes/endnotes and bibliography, according to Chicago/Turabian, APA, or SBL.**

- a. All papers at Tyndale Seminary should be presented in either [Chicago/Turabian](#), [APA](#) (American Psychological Association), or [SBL](#) (Society of Biblical Literature) format. Check your syllabus or with your professor regarding which style is acceptable.
- b. Generally, professors teaching theology and history prefer the [Chicago/Turabian](#) style; the Biblical Studies department [supplements this with SBL](#).
  - The SBL style is quite similar to the Chicago style and supplement each other.
  - The SBL Handbook of Style contains all the information needed to properly cite books of the Bible, various ancient sources (e.g., rabbinic works), as well as current theological journals.
  - The SBL Handbook of Style (available in the library) also explains how to deal with words in foreign languages, and how to transliterate from other languages. (i.e., represent Greek or Hebrew words in English)
- c. Generally, professors teaching courses in other fields related to the social sciences prefer [APA](#).

Each style has a standard format for citing electronic resources. It is important that students follow the style guide exactly.

## **PART FIVE: THE FINISHED PRODUCT**

*The purpose of this section is to clarify the expectations and preferences of Seminary faculty about how to present your work as a finished product.*

Comment: see sample layouts and formats of title pages, tables of contents, and bibliography in the [SBL Student Supplement](#), pp. 12-13.

1. 8 ½ x 11 inches, white bond paper should always be used.
2. Use only one side of the page.
3. Font size should normally be 12 points.
4. Use a highly readable font such as “Times New Roman” or “Courier.”
5. Papers should be double-spaced (unless otherwise indicated).
6. Top, bottom, right and left margins should be one inch.

7. Page numbers should be inserted at bottom of page or top right corner. You must number your pages.
8. Indent the first line of every paragraph five spaces (one tab).
9. Avoid using bold in your paper, except in your title or headings.
10. Use italics for emphasis, but not both. Simply underling or italics should be used for titles.
11. Final copy should be in clear crisp quality of print.
12. Canadian spelling is preferred – be sure to proofread.
13. Do not submit your papers with covers or plastic binders (unless requested).
14. Staple papers in top left corner (do not use paper clips).

## **PART SIX: ACADEMIC HONESTY AND PLAGIARISM<sup>8</sup>**

*The purpose of this section is to explain the meaning of plagiarism and to provide guidance about how to avoid it.*

### **1. Basic definition: “to present borrowed thoughts as original.”**

- a. Plagiarism is a serious form of academic dishonesty that “gives the impression that you have written or thought something that you have in fact borrowed from someone else” (*MLA Handbook*).
- b. The most blatant forms of plagiarism are the copying of a paper from the Internet, or the patching together of paragraphs from various books to give the impression of your own research.
- c. Using another person’s exact words or ideas that are identifiably someone else’s without giving proper credit is plagiarism because misrepresentation is involved.
- d. Using another person’s outline of ideas without giving proper credit is also plagiarism.

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<sup>8</sup> See Booth, Colomb, and Williams, [\*The Craft of Research\*](#), 201ff. (Tyndale ebook).

## **2. Plagiarism and culture**

- a. Key assumption: In North American academic culture, it is expected that students will present their own ideas rather than merely repeat the ideas of others. The ideas of others that you encounter in your research are tools to assist you in thinking through the subject—they help you form your own conclusions about the topic.
- b. Simply summarizing the arguments and ideas of other writers is not sufficient, and doing so without providing any documentation about the source of those ideas is considered a serious misrepresentation of your work.
- a. There is no shame in acknowledging your sources! In fact, a well-footnoted paper demonstrates to your professor that you engaged in diligent research.

## **3. Practical tips on preventing plagiarism:**

- a. Give yourself enough time for research and writing—plagiarism often arises when someone feels pressed to get something done and takes an inappropriate shortcut.
- b. Avoid using another scholar's outline or follow the structure of someone's published article for your own paper. If you do use any outline or structure from someone else, use a footnote to document this fact.
- c. Carefully keep track of sources in your research notes so that you can cite them accurately in your footnotes or endnotes.
- d. Don't quote excessively – keep quotations short. Stringing together a long list of quotations tends to lead into dangerous territory regarding plagiarism.
- e. Use your research notes to add to your own writing rather than merely adding your own words to the research notes.

## **4. Tyndale Seminary Policy on Academic Honesty and Dishonesty (Plagiarism), as approved by the Seminary Faculty, April 23, 2003.**

### **Academic Honesty**

Tyndale expects every student to conform to the highest standard of ethics in the completion of all their assignments. **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY IS A SERIOUS MATTER.**

Honesty in written and verbal assignments requires a balance between using words and ideas that are part of the common domain and careful ascription of borrowed ideas and

words. Ideas and words of others may be used only with acknowledgment. Failure to do so is plagiarism – the literary version of stealing.

The most obvious form of plagiarism is the direct quotation of words without quotation marks, parenthetical ascription, footnote, or endnote. Less obvious forms of plagiarism consist of paraphrases of another's words and the use of an opinion with no reference to the source.

Academic dishonesty also includes the submission of work for which previous credit was given, the submission of work under one's own name which is largely the result of another person's efforts, aiding another's dishonesty, cheating on exams, and giving false information for purpose of gaining admission, credits, etc.

The submission of one paper for two courses is not permitted. Approval of faculty is required for an expanded paper, on a project common to two courses of study, to be acceptable.

Aiding and abetting in plagiarism will result in the same penalties as described below.

### **Consequences for Academic Dishonesty**

If a student is suspected of plagiarism, the following steps will be taken:

1. The professor meets with the student to discuss the situation and will report to the Dean of Students, and confer with other faculty members regarding the incident.

If, after the meeting, the professor is convinced that the student has deliberately been dishonest on the assignment, the student will be given a mark of "0" for the paper or exam.

2. When such a penalty has been imposed, the Dean of Students will notify the Seminary Faculty of the incident and notify the Student Development Committee to take appropriate disciplinary action.
3. A copy of the Dean of Student's letter to the student will be placed in the student's file.
4. If such a penalty has been imposed for more than one assignment (in the same or in a different course), the Student Development Committee will inform the Registrar and the Academic Dean, and the student will be expelled.
5. Failure to make prior arrangements to write an expanded paper for two assignments will result in an automatic failure in one of the courses.
6. Cheating on an exam will result in a mark of "0" for the exam.
7. Other instances of academic dishonesty will be dealt with on an individual basis.
8. If dishonesty is established in more than one course, the Student Development Committee will inform the Registrar and the Academic Dean and the student will be suspended from further studies.
9. An appeal may be made by following the procedure outlined under Academic

Appeals.

## PART SEVEN: BIBLIOGRAPHY

*The purpose of this section is to suggest some resources that could help you to develop your research and writing skills.*

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