Academic Writing and Theological Research: A Guide for Students

Kevin Gary Smith

with contributions from
Noel Woodbridge
Mark Pretorius

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Email: kevin@sats.edu.za

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version* (NIV). 1984. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

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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.

[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 illustrate 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?

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*.

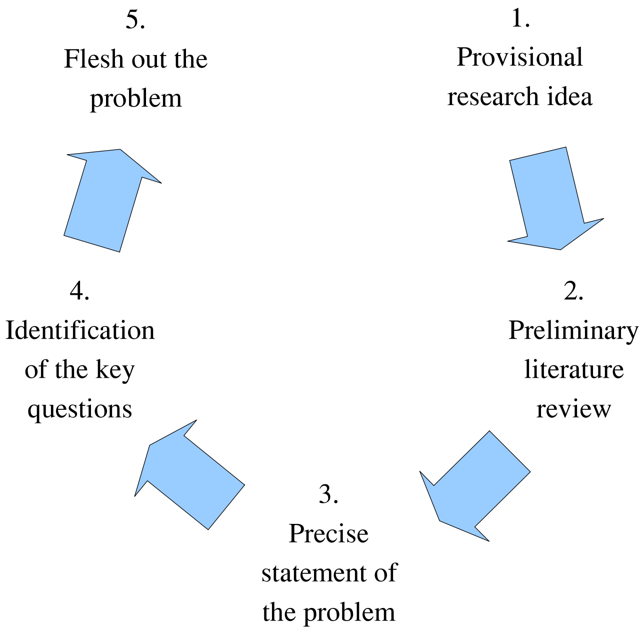

Figure 12: Formulating the research problem

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!

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:

[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.