

**B. H. Carroll Theological Seminary
at
East Texas Baptist University**

Manual for Research Theses and Ministry Project Reports

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Introduction

Research writing at the graduate level, including a research paper submitted for a particular course and a Master's thesis, should demonstrate the following elements:

1. identification of a valid research question,
2. statement of a hypothesis,
3. provision of evidence relevant to the hypothesis,
4. responses to counterarguments against the hypothesis,
5. interaction with current and historical scholarship on the subject, and
6. adherence to recognized standards with respect to form, writing style, and technical issues.

The purpose of this manual is to provide students in the Master of Arts in Christian Ministry (MACM) degree program with a guide through the process of completing a graduate research thesis or a graduate ministry project report.¹ A more thorough treatment of the topics addressed here is available in *The Craft of Research*, by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams and in a condensed form in the ninth edition of Turabian,² which the student should consult in the process of preparing to conduct advanced research in the MACM degree program.

¹ The process for producing a research paper, submitted in partial completion of requirements for a particular graduate course, will be less involved than that required for the successful completion of a graduate thesis. Nevertheless, the general approach to the tasks is very similar. This manual is directed to the concerns of students pursuing the completion of a graduate research thesis or ministry project, but may be of value in the task of preparing a research paper.

² Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 3d ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 9th ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

Characteristics Distinguishing a Graduate Research Thesis from a Ministry Project

While much of the process for completing a ministry project is identical to the parallel effort required for the successful production of a graduate research thesis, the two tasks are distinct from one another. The more obvious characteristic distinguishing the two modes of research involves the immediate application inherent in a ministry project. The results of thesis research can be practical. Employment of a new methodology to demonstrate a particular nuance in a biblical text can lead to applying that text in ways that have profound practical implications for the lives of believers and for the life of the church. Nevertheless, the application of that research is not the primary focus of the research question being posed. Conversely, in a ministry project the immediate application is a necessary element of the research and is manifest explicitly in the statement of the research question.

Another crucial distinction between a research thesis and a ministry project is evident in the role of the researcher. In a ministry project the student is an active, internal participant in the phenomenon being studied whereas in a research thesis (ideally) the student is an objective observer and analyst who is external to the matter addressed in the research. Throughout this manual two examples will be employed to clarify the guidance being provided. In the research thesis example, the role of the student is to examine a New Testament text, seeking to comprehend the manner in which that text would have been understood in the context of the original readers of the document. While the student may have a personal preference for a particular answer to the research question, the goal is to consider all options as objectively as possible and to allow the evidence to determine the outcome of the research. Conversely, in the ministry project example the student is understood to be an agent engaged in the process of altering the situation being studied.

As presented here, a difference between a research thesis and a ministry project could be identified as recognizing the latter as having an “experimental” character whereas the former is “historical” in nature. The flaw in that analysis lies in the fact that a research thesis could involve experimentation. Students engaged in research in the area of psychology of religion or sociology of religion may elect to study how congregations and/or individuals respond to different situations, but these students should not be involved in advocating for a particular response.

Another errant effort at distinguishing between these two categories would be to focus on the church context of the ministry project. In addition to the counterexamples offered in the prior paragraph, a student pursuing the completion of a research thesis in the area of pastoral ministry may choose to examine the possible correlation between preaching style and church growth.

Although the student may have a personal preference for a specific preaching style, that student has a responsibility to observe the results as disinterestedly as possible. Clearly, the results of such research would be readily applicable in a ministry setting, but that application is not an inherent component of the research question. In a conceptually-related ministry project, a pastor/student would be permitted to alter his or her preaching style in an effort to promote church growth; i.e., the researcher is an agent engaged in the immediate application of the hypothesis as a means of testing that hypothesis.

Despite these essential differences between thesis research and a ministry project, much of the process is similar and many of the standards are identical. Consequently, the two modes will be treated simultaneously in this manual, with distinguishing comments where

appropriate. If a student requires clarification in determining which type of study is being proposed, the student should consult with the supervisor and/or the program director.

1. Identification of a Valid Research Question

The research process begins with a research question. These questions arise out of the student's growing acquaintance with the discipline in which the research is being conducted. Early explorations will follow paths blazed by other researchers. Most of the content of undergraduate courses (particularly introductory-level undergraduate courses) consists of well-studied topics on which a scholarly consensus has been reached. As the student proceeds to more advanced levels in the educational process, an increasing proportion of the course content is concerned with matters on which no consensus exists (i.e., reputable scholars have reached divergent conclusions) or on which no satisfactory conclusions have been presented. These frontiers in the discipline are fertile territory for research questions. Genuine research seeks

- to resolve a dispute between competing solutions to a problem,
- to approach an old problem in a novel manner (with a new methodology),
- to correct a perceived error in previously published research, or
- to offer an answer to a question for which no satisfactory solution has yet been discovered.

In each instance noted here a common quality is that the research must be unique in some way.

Recognition of the opportunity to pursue research in a particular direction will arise from detailed familiarity with the subject area (often acquired through the pursuit of undergraduate study in an academic field followed by preliminary graduate work in that same discipline), and a review of the relevant literature in which the student surveys carefully prior research on the topic of interest.

Literature Review

In consultation with the supervisor, the student will identify a sufficiently specific area of interest and will begin the process of refining the study of the topic to the point where an appropriate research question can be posed. An essential component of this process is the conduct of a literature review. The student is responsible for examining scholarly publications on the topic to discern what research has been conducted in the past, what results have been obtained, and what gaps exist in the study of this field. Classic studies of the subject should be consulted, but the focus should be on recent scholarship on the specific topic being addressed.

Some of this recent scholarship will have been published in book form (or eBook form), but the student must examine the relevant scholarly journals and databases of recent theses and dissertations. The supervisor will assist the student in locating the necessary relevant publications, but the responsibility for the thoroughness of the review rests with the student.

When the student has determined that viable opportunities for research remain in the

selected research area, the results of the review are summarized in written form. A narrative summary should address the results of prior research on the subject, including gaps or conflicts in that research.

The narrative portion of the literature review need not mention every resource examined, but all relevant materials should be included in the bibliography. The length of this narrative will vary from study to study, depending on the quantity of research in the relevant discipline/sub-discipline. In any case, the narrative should be comprehensive, though not necessarily exhaustive in an absolute sense. Similarly, the bibliography will provide a thorough presentation of scholarly work on the subject, but need not include every book and every article published in the field.

The Research Question

Based on the results of the literature review, the student is prepared to propose a valid research question. Answering this question will seek to accomplish one of the goals identified above:

- to resolve a dispute between competing solutions to a problem,
- to approach an old problem in a novel manner (with a new methodology),
- to correct a perceived error in previously published research, or
- to offer an answer to a question for which no satisfactory solution has yet been discovered.

The preliminary answer to the question constitutes the hypothesis for the research being proposed. Consequently, meaningful research questions must not be answerable with a simple “Yes” or “No.” Booth, Colomb, and Williams discussed the kind of question that will lead to productive research: “Questions that begin with *who*, *what*, *when*, or *where* are important, but they ask only about matters of fact. Emphasize instead questions that begin with *how* and *why*.”³

The relationship between the literature review and the research question is dynamic; each influences the other as this early stage of the project advances. A common problem faced by novice researchers (including most graduate students) is that the initial statement of the research question is too broad to be answered adequately by a study of the scope envisioned in Master’s degree thesis research. In consultation with the supervisor, the student will need to consider how to focus the question to the point that a manageable research project can be defined (and, ultimately, completed).⁴

Consider the following example. Based on prior study, the student has developed an interest in the imagery employed in the Book of Revelation. The initial stage of the literature review might lead to a question of the form

What is the significance of the imagery employed in the Book of Revelation?

³ Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 42.

⁴ For additional discussion of the research question, consult Turabian, 9th ed., 10-24.

Consultation with the supervisor and initial results of a literature review would soon demonstrate that this question is too broad to be completed as a Master's thesis (or even a Ph.D. dissertation). A slightly narrower question would be

What are the sources of the imagery employed in the Book of Revelation?

Again, as would be clear in the ongoing literature review, this question is too broad for adequate treatment in a Master's thesis.

At this point the student will need to limit the scope of the study in some manner. Limiting the scope of a research project is a legitimate practice as long as the researcher is not motivated by a surreptitious desire to evade difficult questions with a direct bearing on the research.⁵ A reasonable approach to reducing the magnitude of this hypothetical study would be to narrow the question as follows:

What are the sources of the imagery in the descriptions of the two beasts in Revelation 13?

This tighter focus on a limited set of the imagery in Revelation allows the literature review to proceed productively. The thesis remains valid because the narrative describing the two beasts is a coherent component of the document and is a literarily distinctive element of the whole.

Considering the comment by Booth, Colomb, and Williams, cited above, additional revision of the question should be contemplated. Transforming the "what" question could yield the following (fourth) formulation:

Why did the author of Revelation depict the two beasts of Revelation 13 in this manner?

In this question the sources of the imagery remain relevant but now the inquiry is about more than "matters of fact." Concerns about motive, purpose, and meaning surface, suggesting that a more provocative study will result. A literature review driven by this question will need to address studies of the two beasts, analyses of the overarching message of Revelation, examination of imagery recognizable to first-century C.E. residents of the Roman province of Asia (the location of the seven cities named as destinations for Revelation), and, methodologically, investigations of the function of imagery in first-century Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature. Other avenues to pursue may be uncovered as the review progresses. Eventually, the researcher will be prepared to propose a research hypothesis, as detailed in the next section of this manual.

⁵ In the example under discussion, the researcher may legitimately exclude questions of the precise identification of the author of Revelation ("Was he John the Apostle or was he someone else?"). Conversely, the ethnic and cultural background of the author should not be delimited in this fashion, because the background is relevant to the sources upon which he may have drawn for his imagery and how he would have understood that imagery.

Literature Reviews and Research Questions for Ministry Projects

In the interest of simplicity and clarity, literature reviews and research questions have been discussed in the context of a research thesis rather than a ministry project. Nevertheless, the substance of the guidance presented above applies to the pursuit of a ministry project. The project emerges from the student's concern about a particular problem (e.g., socio-economic segregation of congregations). With the guidance of the supervisor, a literature review commences and a preliminary research question is posed (“*What factors contribute to the socio-economic segregation of congregations?*”). Eventually the dynamic process described above leads to a more refined, unique research question (“*How can socio-economically segregated congregations in Harrison County, Texas be induced to relate more closely to one another?*”). Empowered with this refined form of the question the literature review can be completed.

Research with Human Subjects

A ministry project is conducted in the context of a *vital caution* that must be considered at each stage in the process. Because a ministry project sometimes involves research with human subjects, ethical and legal issues must be addressed. Informed consent must be obtained from the people involved in the project and this consent must be documented carefully. Detailing the safeguards governing research involving human subjects is beyond the scope of this manual. *Close cooperation between the student and the supervisor and consultation with university officials responsible for such matters is an ethical and legal obligation and necessity when the research involves participation of people as research subjects.* Ultimate responsibility for the conduct of such research resides with the researcher (i.e., the student), but the supervisor is a valuable resource to ensure that proper standards are maintained.

Concerns about research involving human subjects are not limited to ministry projects. A student pursuing a research project within the field of psychology of religion might elect to interview people about their religious experiences. In that case, as with a ministry project, the cautions regarding use of human beings as research subjects apply.⁶

⁶ For ETBU's policies and procedures on research with human subjects visit <https://www.etbu.edu/about-etbu/campus-offices/institutional-research-and-effectiveness/institutional-review-board>

2. Statement of a Hypothesis

Once a well-refined, carefully-crafted, valid research question has been posed, the statement of a hypothesis involves proposing an unambiguous answer to that question. Completion of the literature survey, in conjunction with prior study on the subject, should have prepared the student to advance a thesis that reflects the highest standards of scholarship in the relevant discipline.

A well-constructed hypothesis must be a falsifiable assertion of fact. For a statement to be falsifiable it must be vulnerable to a reasoned argument that demonstrates that the statement is false. Statements of personal opinion are not falsifiable. As a trivial case, the declaration “I like the taste of vanilla ice cream” is not a falsifiable statement because no one other than the person advancing the “hypothesis” has access to the relevant evidence. Similarly, statements of opinion are not falsifiable. “In my opinion, Napoleon Bonaparte was a good leader of the French people” is not a satisfactory hypothesis because the author of that pronouncement may hold that opinion despite any evidence offered to the contrary.

A corollary to the requirement that the hypothesis be falsifiable is the recognition that genuine research may conclude that the hypothesis was incorrect. The true goal of research is not to confirm the hypothesis, but to test the hypothesis. Usually when the researcher has sufficient knowledge of the discipline and significant familiarity with the issues involved in the research question, the hypothesis will be supported by the subsequent research. Nevertheless, a researcher should always be open to the possibility that the evidence will refute the hypothesis. Such a negative result does not negate the value of the work conducted; a negative result can serve the valuable function of alerting other scholars that a seemingly promising approach was, in fact, misguided.⁷

Recalling the examples provided above, in response to the question

Why did the author of Revelation depict the two beasts of Revelation 13 in this manner?

the researcher might advance the following hypothesis:

The author of Revelation depicted the two beasts of Revelation 13 in a manner intended to encourage his readers to reject Roman claims of ultimate dominion and to resist local pressures to conform to the hegemony of Rome.

This statement is an unambiguous falsifiable assertion of fact. Relevant, publicly available evidence can be provided and that evidence can be evaluated by the audience to whom the researcher’s results are presented. Gathering, organizing, and presenting that evidence will be

⁷ The transition from research question to hypothesis is discussed in Turabian, 9th ed., 19-21.

a challenging task, and various researchers may evaluate the evidence differently (and may reach conflicting conclusions), but this statement satisfies the essential requirements for a hypothesis.

Turning to the second example offered above, the question

How can socio-economically segregated congregations in Harrison County, Texas be induced to relate more closely to one another?

could yield the hypothesis

Socio-economically segregated congregations in Harrison County, Texas can be induced to relate more closely to one another through joint involvement in disaster relief projects.

As with the Revelation example, an unambiguous falsifiable assertion of fact has been presented for testing. The first step in testing that hypothesis is the gathering of relevant evidence, and that task is the subject of the next section of this manual.

3. Provision of Evidence Relevant to the Hypothesis

Identifying Primary Source Data and Secondary Source Data

Having posed a valid research question and proposed a hypothesis as the response to that question, the next task is the collection of all relevant data. Identification of “all relevant data” is determined largely by the claims embedded in the hypothesis. The falsifiable assertions of fact in that declaration must be supported by data.

Returning to the Revelation example, the hypothesis is

The author of Revelation depicted the two beasts of Revelation 13 in a manner intended to encourage his readers to reject Roman claims of ultimate dominion and to resist local pressures to conform to the hegemony of Rome.

The initial data will come from the text under consideration, Revelation 13. The specific imagery employed constitutes a productive starting point in the quest for data. This hypothesis makes claims about the presentation of that imagery; consequently, other data from the same historical and cultural context must be collected. These additional data would include examples of imagery employed by the Romans and by their local supporters to advance and promote Roman hegemony. Because the hypothesis identifies a political motive in Revelation 13, examples of political rhetoric from the Greco-Roman world constitute another group of relevant data. The author of Revelation presented his argument in an apocalyptic form; therefore, evidence for the political use of apocalyptic rhetoric must be considered.

In assembling the data, *primary sources should always be preferred over secondary sources*. Primary sources are data directly from the geographic, historical, and cultural context being examined. In strictest terms, a primary source should be studied in the original language in which that source was composed. Secondary sources are the conclusions drawn by other researchers based on their examination of the same (or closely related) primary sources. Secondary sources are useful in research in various ways:

- a means to evaluate the researcher’s own assessments of the data,
- an index to identify primary sources of which the researcher was previously unaware, and
- a source of expert opinion in disciplines with which the researcher is less familiar (e.g., analysis of Roman civic architecture when the researcher’s primary expertise is in literary analysis of ancient Greek texts).

All researchers will consult secondary sources, but the weight of the argument being presented must be supported by the primary sources.

Obvious primary sources for the Revelation study would include first-century and second-century C.E. texts (mostly in Latin and Greek) advocating support for or resistance to

Roman rule in the provinces. Other primary sources would include imperial and provincial edicts, public inscriptions, sculptures and other public political monuments, and city plans suggesting the role of imperial institutions in civic life. Secondary sources would include the voluminous (and sometimes contradictory) assessments of these data. (Upon completion of the M.A. thesis, the student will have created a new secondary source.)

Turning to the ministry project example suggested earlier, the hypothesis is

Socio-economically segregated congregations in Harrison County, Texas can be induced to relate more closely to one another through joint involvement in disaster relief projects.

Secondary sources for this project would include studies of socio-economic segregation of congregations and studies of socio-economic segregation in Harrison County, Texas. Because of the inherent nature of a ministry project, the bulk of the primary source data for this research will be the direct results of the actions taken in the conduct of the project. Assessments of the degree of segregation among the specific congregations being studied would be essential preliminary primary source data. Details of the tasks undertaken to promote joint involvement in disaster relief projects would also be vital primary data. Documentation of the degree of cooperation in disaster relief projects and of any subsequent changes in the degree of interaction between the congregations in other activities would constitute primary data essential to assessing the validity of the hypothesis.

Implicit in the above statements is the ability to measure segregation/interaction. Secondary sources should be consulted in the process of devising a valid procedure to quantify this parameter; the actual measurements will be primary data.

“Critical Texts” of Ancient Documents

When dealing with ancient documents (e.g., the writings of Aristotle, Tacitus, Pausanias, Pliny, Plato, Xenophon, Thucydides, Herodotus, Cicero), the researcher must be aware that the available manuscripts of a particular text are not usually identical to one another, i.e., variants exist among the extant manuscripts. The problem confronting the researcher is to determine which variant text to employ. In this situation the standard approach by scholarly researchers is to use a “critical text.” A critical text is the result of a scholarly examination of all available manuscripts, with the goal of reconstructing (as accurately as possible given the limited material available for the task) the original text of the document.

For most ancient Greek and Latin documents, the standard critical text is the text presented in the Loeb Classical Library (LCL) series (now published by Harvard University Press). The LCL volumes are published with the original language critical text on one page and an English translation of that portion of the text on the facing page. When depending on English translations of these documents, the LCL English translation is a standard translation for the purposes of scholarly work. Researchers may disagree with the choices made in identifying the critical text or with the manner in which the text has been translated into English, but explanations of those disagreements must be based on sound text-critical

principles and translation practices.

A similar situation to that described above applies to the biblical text. For the Old Testament the standard critical text is the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*; the current standard New Testament critical text is the United Bible Societies *Greek New Testament*, 4th edition or the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th edition.⁸ Students who are not equipped to translate the biblical text for themselves should consult their supervisor concerning which English translations are appropriate for the research in which they are engaged.

Finally, if the non-biblical ancient text needed for a particular research endeavor is not available in the LCL series, a critical text may be available from another publisher. Students should consult their supervisors to determine which texts and/or translations are acceptable for the research being conducted.

Preparation of a Prospectus

Many academic programs require the student to submit a research prospectus prior to proceeding to the latter stages of the research. The purpose of the prospectus is to confirm that the proposed research is well-founded and to demonstrate that the student is equipped sufficiently to complete the research successfully.

Due to the relatively short nature of the thesis and project courses (15-weeks), the student will submit a prospectus document to the program director no later than two months before enrolling in the corresponding CHRM 5390 or CHRM 5398 course. The document will include the following elements:

- A statement of the research question. The process by which an initial topic was refined to yield this final form need not be described.
- A statement of the hypothesis to be tested in the research thesis or ministry project (if applicable).
- A selected bibliography.

The student will work with the program director to make sure the prospectus is reviewed and approved before the student enrolls in the corresponding CHRM 5390 or CHRM 5398 course. The student will provide the supervisor a copy of the approved prospectus.

Presentation of the Data and the Primary Argument

Much of the task of documenting research involves presenting the relevant data to the readers, enabling those readers to comprehend the argument being communicated and empowering them to evaluate those data independently. Approaches to the presentation of the data vary depending on a wide array of factors: the personal writing style of the researcher, the standards of the specific academic discipline, the character of the methodology employed in the research, and the requirements of the publisher or academic institution to which the research will be submitted. Familiarity with publications within the

⁸ Despite their different titles and histories, these two Greek publications now contain the same critical text.

academic discipline, documenting closely-related research, in concert with the assistance of the supervisor, will provide vital guidance in this task. In any case, the researcher should compose the report in a logical manner that facilitates comprehension by the readers.

The primary argument in support of the hypothesis should be integrated into the initial presentation of the data. Such integration promotes the logical clarity necessary in a research thesis or ministry project report. When presented successfully, the reader will comprehend readily why a particular set of data is being introduced at each stage in the presentation.⁹

A clear, concise evaluation of the research hypothesis should be included in the presentation of the primary argument. As the student continues to revise the argument, addressing counterarguments and reflecting on the breadth of scholarship on the subject, the evaluation of the hypothesis may need to be revised. Nevertheless, the thesis/project report should incorporate an unambiguous evaluation of the main hypothesis of the research.

⁹ Planning the argument is addressed in chapter five of Turabian, 9th ed., 51-65.

4. Responses to Counterarguments against the Hypothesis

Paradoxically, identifying and discussing the weaknesses in an argument supporting a hypothesis can strengthen the overall presentation of that argument. This phenomenon is true for a variety of reasons. First, by acknowledging and addressing objections and counterarguments to the primary argument being advanced, the researcher has an opportunity to modify that argument, thereby clarifying or reinforcing the primary argument in anticipation of any objections that critics might raise. Such anticipatory responses can create an opportunity to convince the prospective critic before that person has become an adversary.

Second, when weaknesses cannot be reinforced (because the necessary data do not exist) or when no amount of clarification can resolve a conflict, by addressing the counterarguments in the context of the research thesis or project report, the researcher has an opportunity to frame the discussion in terms of his or her own choosing. In this way, the momentum of the dispute is shifted and the researcher and the presentation are perceived more positively.

Third, failure to address the counterarguments in the initial presentation could create the impression that the student has failed in his or her obligation to examine thoroughly the relevant issues. The competence of a researcher is always a matter of concern, and apparent ignorance of weaknesses and counterarguments creates an impression of incompetence.

Fourth, academic researchers have a responsibility to the academy. That responsibility includes the obligation to advance understanding, which is accomplished in part through the documentation of the research, and the duty to provide guidance for successors. This latter element of the researcher's responsibility can be addressed through identifying new questions for which answers should be sought. When the limitations of a research project are acknowledged, the researcher has begun to fulfill this duty.

Finally, an honest admission of weaknesses creates an impression (hopefully a valid impression) of an appropriate degree of humility on the part of the researcher. As implied in the previous paragraph, the academic researcher is a member of an academic community ("the academy"). Perceived arrogance on the part of the researcher can increase resistance from others in the community, whereas humility can promote helpful (and ultimately useful) criticism.

A final caution is in order. When addressing real or potential counterarguments, the researcher should apply a sort of "golden rule" to the presentation, analysis, and response to those counterarguments. When an interlocutor's counterargument (real or hypothetical) can be interpreted in more than one way, the respondent should always address the strongest possible form of that counterargument. Following this practice will ensure that the response will be as thorough as possible; failure in this regard risks succumbing to the "straw man" fallacy.

5. Interaction with Current and Historical Scholarship on the Subject

Both in the presentation of the primary argument and in the responses to counterarguments, researchers are expected to interact with current and historical scholarship on the subject. As described above, involvement in academic research involves participation in a community. That community extends across national and linguistic frontiers and through time, and the voices of the members of the academy are reflected and preserved in the scholarly production of the community. In the literature review the student should have become familiar with much of this material. The initial refinement of the research question, the formulation of the hypothesis, and the presentation of the primary argument must reflect familiarity with this international, diachronic conversation.

Research is a dynamic process; the conversation arrives at final, definitive answers slowly and often progress is non-linear. This dynamism should characterize the process that leads to the completion of the research thesis or ministry project report. As the work progresses the researcher should expect to encounter previously unfamiliar materials. Some of these resources will compel the student to rethink conclusions and to reconsider arguments in light of the newly acquired information.

Because the questions being asked in contemporary research are related to inquiries that have intrigued people for decades, centuries, and millennia, intricate knowledge of all potentially relevant material is an unattainable goal. Nevertheless, thoroughness remains the goal. Ultimately the researcher will need to conclude the task, but the conclusions will almost always be tentative (a further inducement for the humility discussed above).

Some academic disciplines place legitimate historical constraints on the prior research that must be addressed in current work. Astronomers need not deal with arguments based on a geocentric universe and geographers are not compelled to refute claims that Europe, Asia, and Africa comprise the entirety of the habitable Earth. Generally, students in the theological disciplines find themselves in a different situation. The writings of the ante-Nicene fathers of the church deserve consideration in discussions of the doctrine of the Trinity and Reformation-era theologians should be allowed to speak when the issue of justification arises.

Not all historical scholarship is granted this privilege. With the “discovery” of Koine Greek as the language of the New Testament, theories based on the existence of “Holy Spirit Greek” were discredited thoroughly. Familiarity with current scholarship on a subject and the advice of the supervisor should guide the student in determining which sources must be incorporated into the task at hand.

6. Adherence to Recognized Standards with Respect to Form, Writing Style, Technical Issues, and Schedules

Upon completion of any research report, the organization to which the report is submitted will control the submission schedule and will dictate standards for form, writing style, and other technical issues (e.g., length, transliteration of words in other alphabets, translation of foreign terms). Carroll Seminary at ETBU has established standards for research theses and ministry project reports submitted for the MACM degree program.

MACM Research Theses and Ministry Project Reports submitted to Carroll Seminary at ETBU must meet the following standards.

1. Writing style will be in accordance with the standards specified in the *Carroll Seminary at ETBU Writing Style Guide*. This Guide is available on the ETBU website/academics/academic schools/B. H. Carroll Theological Seminary/programs/Master of Arts in Christian Ministry (MACM)/Manual for Research Thesis and Ministry Project reports (<https://www.etbu.edu/academics/academic-schools/b-h-carroll-theological-seminary/programs/master-arts-christian-ministry-macm>). The supervisor and/or the program director can provide this document to the student also.
2. Words in the Hebrew/Aramaic alphabet or in the Greek alphabet do not need to be transliterated. Words in other non-Latin alphabets should be transliterated.
3. With the exception of foreign words that have become technical terms in the relevant academic discipline, foreign words should be translated. Translations of single words or short phrases may be placed in parentheses and quotation marks following the foreign word/phrase in the text. Longer translations of foreign phrases, sentences, or paragraphs should be presented in footnotes and within quotation marks.
4. Unless a different form is specified in the *Carroll Seminary MACM Writing Style Guide*, the latest edition of Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* is the definitive guidance for matters of form and style.¹⁰
5. Theses and ministry project reports must be no less than 10,000 words in length (**approximately 40 pages** for a double-spaced 12-point font) and no more than 15,000 words in length (**approximately 60 pages**). *Note:* These word counts include only the body of the text; footnotes, table of contents, bibliography, etc. are not to be included in the word count for the purposes of this requirement.
6. The thesis/project should incorporate an *abbreviated* literature review. The information in the review most relevant for understanding the final presentation

¹⁰ As of the preparation of this manual, the current edition of Turabian is the 9th edition, published in 2018 by the University of Chicago Press.

- should be emphasized, summarizing the remainder of the review if necessary.
7. The student must submit a copy (Microsoft Word format or pdf format) of the thesis/project to the supervisor.
 8. The supervisor or student will submit a final copy of the thesis/project with the graded corresponding evaluative rubric to the MACM Program Director not later than the last regular class day of the semester in which the student is enrolled in CHRM5390 Thesis or CHRM 5398 Project.

A student submitting a thesis or ministry project with a score of less than 70% will have the option to accept a grade of “Incomplete” in the corresponding course. If the student elects to accept this option, the student will have the opportunity to remedy the problem(s) and to resubmit the thesis or ministry project report not later than the conclusion of the mid-semester period for the following semester. If a thesis or ministry project with a score of 70% or higher is not submitted by that deadline, the student will not receive credit for the corresponding course.

A student who does not receive credit for CHRM 5390 Thesis or CHRM 5398 Project will be required to complete an elective course in order to complete MACM graduation requirements.

Conclusion

The process discussed above depicts the dynamic and non-linear qualities of research. The process is dynamic in that conclusions are tentative; they are subject to revision as the research proceeds toward publication of those conclusions. Non-linearity is present because these revisions will require the researcher to return to the library or the laboratory to collect additional data and will demand that a previously sound interpretation be modified to account for the new information.

Done properly, research is a rewarding endeavor and a creative task. Genuine research adds to the collective stock of human wisdom. To do research is to think thoughts that no one has contemplated before and to discover intellectual territory that has never before been traversed.

Because of the “undomesticated” nature of research, any attempts to define the process too precisely will falter. The goal of this manual has been to place the novice researcher at the trailhead, and to encourage commitment to the adventure that lies beyond that “tame” starting point. Where that journey will end, only the scholar and the data can determine.

To the two disciples who were intrigued with the message of the new rabbi Jesus, responded “Come and see” (John 1:39). A similar invitation is presented to each student commencing a research endeavor; those who go will see.

Appendix 1
B. H. Carroll Theological Seminary at ETBU
Master of Arts in Christian Ministry
Deadlines for Research Thesis/Ministry Project Submissions

Deadline for Submission of Prospectus

A copy of a prospectus must be submitted to the program director not later than two months prior to the first day of class of the semester in which the student is enrolled in CHRM 5390 Thesis or CHRM 5398 Project.

Deadline for Submission of Thesis/Ministry Project Report

One copy of the thesis/project must be submitted to the supervisor not later than one month prior to the last regular class day of the semester in which the student intends to complete all degree requirements.

Deadline for the Submission of the Final Copy of the Thesis/Ministry Project Report

The final copy of the thesis/project and the corresponding completed evaluative rubric by the supervisor must be submitted to the MACM Program Director on or before the last day of the semester in which the student intends to complete all degree requirements. The program director (professor of record for the CHRM 5390 Thesis or CHRM 5398 Project courses) will post the final grade in Canvas.

Appendix 2
B. H. Carroll Theological Seminary at ETBU
Master of Arts in Christian Ministry
Rubric for the Evaluation of MACM Thesis

THESIS	5 Excellent	4 High	3 Satisfactory	2 Low	1 Fail	Score
	The thesis of the paper is clear, concise, and aimed toward proving or disproving one idea.	The thesis is both clear and reasonably concise.	The thesis of the paper is clear, though it may be unimaginative, largely a recapitulation of readings and class discussion.	Thesis is discernible, but the reader has to work to find or understand it, or the thesis seems to change as the written assignment proceeds.	Thesis is irrelevant to the assignment and/or indiscernible.	
Comments:						

COMPLEXITY AND ORIGINALITY	5 Excellent	4 High	3 Satisfactory	2 Low	1 Fail	Score
	The text is unusually thoughtful, deep, creative, and far-reaching in its analysis. The writer explores the subject from various points of view, acknowledges alternative interpretations in varied critical sources, and recognizes the complexity with appropriate argumentation and integration that supports the thesis. Text shows a curious/ creative mind at work.	The text is thoughtful and extensive in its analysis. It acknowledges alternative interpretations and generally recognizes the complexity with appropriate argumentation and integration that supports the thesis.	The writer goes somewhat beyond merely paraphrasing someone else's point of view or repeating what was discussed in seminar. The text does integrate other relevant works, but lacks the extensive analysis and interpretation found in the higher levels of writing.	The writer moves only marginally beyond merely paraphrasing someone else's point of view or repeating what others have written.	The text is mere paraphrase or repetition of readings.	

Comments:

ORGANIZATION AND COHERENCE	5 Excellent	4 High	3 Satisfactory	2 Low	1 Fail	Score
	The writer demonstrates control of the direction and organization of the text. The text follows a logical line of reasoning to support its thesis and to deal with counter claims, evidence, and alternative viewpoints. Sub-points are fashioned so as to open up the topic in the most effective way. Content footnotes support primary and secondary argumentation effectively.	Same as for 5 but sub-points may not consistently be fashioned to open up the topic effectively. Logical links, or gaps of reasoning, may occasionally appear in the argument.	The writer lacks control of the direction and organization of the text some of the time. The text generally follows a logical line of reasoning to support its thesis, although many gaps in logic occur.	The text contains some discernible main points, but the text lacks a clear line of argumentation.	The text lacks discernible coherence, plan of organization, or line of argument.	

Comments:

EVIDENCE AND SUPPORT	5 Excellent	4 High	3 Satisfactory	2 Low	1 Fail	Score
	The writer's claims and interpretations are backed with evidence	Same as for 5 but the writer may occasionally fail to support claims and counter-	The writer's claims and interpretations are generally backed with at	The writer's claims are often unsupported and/or large sections of the	The paper is unsupported.	

	from appropriate sources, and sensible, precise reasoning. Sources are relevant, mutually acceptable, and sufficient to support the claims or counter-claims of the argument.	claims with relevant, mutually acceptable, and sufficient evidence.	least some relevant, mutually acceptable, and sufficient evidence.	paper are without relevant, mutually acceptable, and sufficient evidence.		
Comments:						

SOURCES	5 Excellent	4 High	3 Satisfactory	2 Low	1 Fail	Score
	The writer demonstrates an awareness of the effective use of all sources. The writer interprets and integrates primary and secondary sources accurately, using them to support the argument at every level. The bibliography is adequate, deep, and demonstrates a thorough review of relevant sources.	Same as for 5 but sources may be quoted with less than full contextual explanation, interpretation, and/or integration. The writer uses direct quotation to substitute for stating the point in his or her own words. The bibliography is adequate, but may lack relevant sources.	The text incorporates some primary and secondary sources and connects them to the writer's own claims. There is limited contextual explanation, interpretation, and/or integration. The writer depends heavily upon direct quotation to support his or her claims. The bibliography lacks some necessary and relevant sources.	The text strings together primary and secondary sources with little or no explicit connection to the writer's own points. The bibliography lacks many essential sources.	There is no use of primary and secondary sources. The bibliography is inadequate.	
Comments:						

GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION,	5 Excellent	4 High	3 Satisfactory	2 Low	1 Fail	Score
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SENTENCE EFFECTIVENESS AND STYLE						
	There are no discernible departures from standard edited written English and the accepted style* guide. The sentences are easily readable; their meaning is clear. Words are precise, relationships among sentence parts are clear, parallel forms are used for parallel ideas, and sentence structure and links are used for rhetorical purposes.	There are a few departures from standard edited written English and accepted style*guide. The sentences are generally clear and readable, but the writer lacks precision of vocabulary. Sentence structure renders the meaning unclear in a few cases.	There are more than an average of two departures from standard edited written English and accepted style* guide per page. Sentence structure renders the meaning unclear in several cases.	There are more than two departures from standard edited written English and accepted style* guide per page. Sentence structure generally renders the meaning unclear.	Generally, the text departs from standard edited written English and accepted style.* Poorly constructed sentences interfere with meaning throughout.	
Comments:						

Critical Areas in Grammar, Punctuation, Sentence Effectiveness, and Style (See Turabian Style Guide):

- Spelling or typos.
- Sentence boundary punctuation (run-ons, comma splices, fused sentences, fragments).
- Use of apostrophe, -s, and -es.
- Pronoun forms.
- Pronoun agreement, and providing antecedents for pronouns.
- Verb forms and subject-verb agreement.
- Use of gender-neutral language.
- Capitalization of proper nouns and of first words in the sentence
- Turabian Style Guide, 9^h edition

<p>Score range: 27-30- A 24-26- B 21-23-C 18-20=D</p> <p>27=90% 24=80% 21=70% 18=60%</p>
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*This instrument was adapted from: Walvoord, Barbara E. *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education. 2d ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.*

Appendix 3
B. H. Carroll Theological Seminary at ETBU
Master of Arts in Christian Ministry
Rubric for the Evaluation of MACM Project Report

MINISTRY PROJECT	4 (High)	3 (Satisfactory)	2 (Low)	1 (Fail)	Score
	The project is well developed, aimed at clearly defined objectives addressing the problem as stated.	The project is well developed, aimed at broadly defined objectives addressing the problem as stated.	The project is not fully developed. Some objectives were defined to address the problem as stated.	The project is poorly developed, no objectives were defined, and the problem poorly addressed.	
COMMENTS:					
CREATIVITY	4 (High)	3 (Satisfactory)	2 (Low)	1 (Fail)	Score
	The student demonstrates originality, thoughtfulness and creativity in the identification of the problem and development of the project.	The student demonstrates some thoughtfulness in identifying the problem and creativity in the development of the project.	The problem identified is unclear. The project lacks creativity.	The project evidences no creativity nor originality in its development. The problem stated lacks relevance.	
COMMENTS:					

METHODOLOGY & IMPLEMENTATION	4 (High)	3 (Satisfactory)	2 (Low)	1 (Fail)	Score
	The project evidences careful planning. Methodology and steps for implementation are well developed and clearly stated. The procedures allow for replication of this project.	The project evidences good planning. The methodology and implementation procedures match the problem as stated. The procedures do not allow for replication of this project.	The project evidences poor planning. The methodology and implementation procedures are poorly written.	The project lacks planning. No methodology nor implementation procedures are stated.	
COMMENTS:					
DISCUSSION	4 (High)	3 (Satisfactory)	2 (Low)	1 (Fail)	Score
	A clearly-written report according to correct form and style presents and discusses the project. The presentation is clear and informative. The student demonstrates skill in the organization, flow and logical thinking of the narrative. The report addresses strengths and weaknesses of the project.	A well-written report according to correct form and style discusses the project. The presentation is informative. The student demonstrates skill in the organization and flow of the narrative. No strengths and weaknesses are addressed in the discussion	The written report shows some grammatical errors and lacks organization. No logical reasoning is followed. The discussion is minimally adequate—lacks clarity and detail.	The written report was poorly constructed. The report lacks organization and is incomplete. The student demonstrates minimal effort in the discussion.	

COMMENTS:

RESULTS	4 (High)	3 (Satisfactory)	2 (Low)	1 (Fail)	Score
	The student demonstrates a clear understanding of the results. The results are well-organized and written. The results show the problem as stated was addressed.	The student demonstrates an understanding of the results. The results are well-written. The results show the problem as stated was addressed.	The student demonstrates some understanding of the results. The results are poorly written and lack clarity. The results show the problem as stated was not fully addressed.	The student demonstrates no understanding of the results. The problem as stated was not addressed.	

COMMENTS:

RECOMMENDATIONS	4 (High)	3 (Satisfactory)	2 (Low)	1 (Fail)	Score
	The project includes recommendations that are specific, on-target and feasible to implement. The student demonstrates a deeper understanding of the problem.	The project includes recommendations that are clearly stated and feasible to implement. The student demonstrates a full understanding of the problem.	The project includes recommendations that are few, vague and difficult to implement. The student demonstrates a poor understanding of the problem.	The project includes no recommendations to address the problem as stated. The student fails to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the problem.	

COMMENTS:

FINAL COMMENTS:	Final score

SCORING: RANGE 6-24 17 = 70% 19 = 80% 22 = 92%

24 – 22 = A 21 – 20 = B 18 – 17 = C 16 and below = Fail