



Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology

By Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, Terry Dwain Robertson

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This updated third edition of *Quality Research Papers*—fast becoming a standard reference textbook for writing research papers in the fields of religion and theology—gives improvements and added material for such things as the expanding field of online research and doing church-related research in a professional manner.

Because so many new developments have taken place in the field of research, especially in terms of electronic research, this handy reference explores the ways to do research on the internet, including how to document such research.

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In addition to substantial, current information on electronic resources and online research, this third edition preserves all of the features of the original editions, now presented in a newly revised, more logical order.

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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

This much-needed resource takes theology students from start to finish in writing a quality term paper, thesis, or dissertation. Step by step, here is the guidance you need to:

Select a topic and narrow it down to a workable area of research Effectively use library and computer resources Write clear, relevant notes Organize your thoughts Format the paper, including footnotes and bibliography Present specific research such as surveys and case studies Use statistics, tables, and graphs

Well-organized, filled with helpful examples, and written with your unique needs as a theology student in mind, *Quality Research Papers* is your one-stop desktop guide to writing superbly crafted papers.

About the Author

Nancy Vyhmeister (EdD, Andrews University) has fifty years of experience in teaching future pastors and professors not only in the United States but throughout the world. She continues to have a global ministry in her retirement years. She has authored several books, both in Spanish and English, including a Greek grammar book for Spanish-speaking students. She was editor of *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*. She currently resides with her husband in Loma Linda, California.

Terry Robertson (MA, Andrews University, MLS Indiana University) is Seminary Librarian at Andrews University and teaches the master's level research course at the seminary.

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Chapter One WHAT IS RESEARCH? What makes research different from other types of studying and writing? What are the specific objectives of research? What are the essential steps in doing research? What pitfalls are to be avoided? How can one tell research from other forms of communication? What are the values and benefits of student research? These are questions this chapter endeavors to answer. Definition of Research Research can be defined as a method of study that, through careful investigation of all evidence bearing on a definable problem, arrives at a solution. To research a topic is to collect, organize, evaluate, and present data. This process cannot take place without analysis and synthesis, for research is more than a compilation of information. The results of research must be presented in a clear and concise way so that anyone can follow the process, without having to repeat any of the steps, in order to see how you, the researcher, have arrived at your conclusions. A four-part definition of research is given by Isaac Felipe Azofeifa: 'Research is a (1) systematic search for (2) adequate information to reach (3) objective knowledge of a (4) specific topic.' Each element deserves individual analysis. 1.Systematic search. This requires effort. It does not just happen. A researcher must develop and use a clear method and a logical system. Research is not easy; it requires time, energy, thought, and effort. 2.Adequate information. Research does not look for someone's ideas about matters touching on the problem; it seeks precise answers to the questions being asked. The information presented must be from authoritative sources, speak to the problem, and be duly documented. 3.Objective knowledge. In order to reach objective knowledge, you must have prior knowledge of the topic. To this prior knowledge you will add facts, not suppositions or possibilities. Research is done

with the head and not the heart. Research looks at facts, not conjectures, nor even possibilities, much less long-cherished pet ideas . 4. Specific topic. It is impossible to do adequate research on a large topic. The research paper is not an encyclopedia. A specific, clearly delineated problem is the only one that can be solved. Research may be writing a ten-page paper on Nazareth in the time of Christ. Research is what the writer of an M.A. thesis does for weeks on end. Persistent research efforts---over long months---go into producing a dissertation. As used in this book, the term research applies to all scholarly studies at undergraduate, graduate, or postgraduate level. Some teachers may call it a research essay; others may label it a term paper. Most of what students write for classes involves research. Research is the search for truth---for God is truth---whether it be historical, scientific, or theological---it is all God's truth, as Frank E. Gaebelein points out. This makes research a very appropriate activity for believers. Yet, because God is ultimate truth and human beings are limited and finite, our arrival at truth must not be considered final. We may never be able to see the whole picture. Furthermore, what is 'truth' today may be changed tomorrow by a new discovery. For this reason, even a careful researcher must be humble. Even in the area of theology we should be open to truths not seen before. In *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, Ellen White wrote last century about the attitudes that should exist in those who study the Scriptures. 'We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view... will be disappointed.' Discussing further the search for theological truth, White wrote: 'Truth is eternal, and conflict with error will only make manifest its strength.... We must study the truth for ourselves. No living man should be relied upon to think for us. No matter who it is, or in what position he may be placed, we are not to look upon any man as a perfect criterion for us.' Thus, we research, in search of all truth, humbly using our God-given minds to accomplish our search. The Research Process

Although the research process will be studied carefully in the following chapters, at this point a brief synthesis of this endeavor is useful. In addition, we will consider some of the hindrances to the successful completion of research. In its simplest form, the process to be followed in research is to identify, collect, evaluate, and present. Once you have selected a topic, you must identify the problem or issue to be tackled. The issue must be specific, often expressed as a research question, not something vague and general. After you know exactly what the problem to be solved is, you can begin collecting data. Gather information carefully from many sources. Organize your data in a way that is clear and logical to you and others. After you have gathered all the information, you will need to analyze and evaluate it: Not all sources are equally valuable; not all opinions are of the same weight. Finally, after you have gathered the evidence, you must draw conclusions regarding the solution of the problem. You will have to write a research report that gives a clear view of the problem, of the information gathered, and of the solution reached. Some of the most dangerous pitfalls for researchers are those that relate to a previous mindset. When a cherished idea is being defended, for example, it is extremely difficult to be objective, to take into account adverse evidence, to break out of a limited thinking pattern. The prejudices (meaning here 'prejudged results') taken into a research project set the tone and often determine the answer to a question. People usually see what they want to see. It is impossible to do research without presuppositions. One must, then, recognize what these presuppositions are, state them in the introduction to the research, and proceed from there. For example, if you accept the Genesis 1:26 statement that human beings were made in the image of God, whatever conclusions you reach on the treatment of psychological problems in children will reflect that basic understanding. Other errors are those of hurriedness, inaccuracy, or carelessness. It is easy to come to premature conclusions, without having finished the research because of lack of time or bibliography. It is also easy to miss an important detail or to write down an erroneous fact. Researchers do not mean to make this kind of mistake. But these errors do happen, especially to students who are scrambling to survive the term. Research demands extreme caution and care---and much time.

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