



Birmingham Theological Seminary
2200 Briarwood Way
Birmingham, Alabama 35243
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ST1410 Introduction to Theological Research and Writing / ST1410 Introduction to Theological Research and Writing (ThM) Syllabus

Semester: Spring, 2026

Day & Time: Thursdays, 7:30 PM

Professor: Pat Sanders, PhD

Email: pat.sanders@bts.education

Course: ST1410 Introduction to Theological Research and Writing

Room: VC

Credits: 2

Phone: upon request

Course Notes

Note that the 9th edition of the Turabian book is required. Any editions of the other books are acceptable, but contact your professor if you purchase any version of Vyhmeister other than the 4th edition, so that you can get a correlation chart for the required reading.

If you're a ThM student, you'll need to choose the "theology" research focus. This option is only available to ThM students. See "Research focus and book critique" on page 3.

I prefer to communicate with students via email, rather than Blackbaud messages.

Course Description

The basic principles of effective communication for the church and the Christian worker's overall task will be considered with special emphasis on written communication skills and research. The students will be involved in several writing projects during the semester. Oral communication within the congregation and the broader community will be covered as well. This class is required for all degree programs.

Course Objectives

Cognitive (Content)

- Know how to identify scholarly sources and analyze them
- Know how to properly cite information and sources according to Turabian guidelines for footnotes and bibliographies
- Know basic formats for three types of papers: the book critique, exegesis paper, and research paper
- Know the components of a research paper

Affective/Motivational (Character)/Comprehension

- Distinguish between various types of theological writing assignments and understand how to apply the principles derived to academic and ministry contexts
- Reflect on the development of research paper topics and questions
- Reflect on the issue of plagiarism and the use of AI
- Understand the process of developing a research paper

Volitional/Application (Competencies)

- Improve and affirm grammar and Turabian skills
- Write an annotated bibliography and synthesize those sources in order to identify a problem, develop a research question, and hypothesis
- Organize and synthesize data and state the results of research in theological papers and theses
- Write a book critique and exegesis paper

Required Texts

1. Five Required Texts:

1. One book of the student's choice from the list in the Collateral Texts section. *
2. Kapic, Kelly M. *A Little Book for New Theologians: Why and How to Study Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012. If you receive a dictionary within the binding of Kapic's book: *A Little Book for New Theologians*, I can send you a PDF from the publisher with the correct text. Please email your professor if you experience this issue.
3. Pazmiño, Robert W. *Doing Theological Research: An Introductory Guide for Survival in Theological Education*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009.
4. Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 9th ed. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.
5. Vyhmeister, Nancy Jean. *Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and*

Theology. 4th ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020.

2. In addition, the student will need:
 1. Microsoft Word to submit assignments.
 2. Microsoft PowerPoint (or a similar product like Prezi) for a presentation at the end of the semester.
 3. Logos Bible Software. Please contact the seminary office for information on acquiring the Logos Remote Learning Library.
 4. The [BTS Form and Style Guide](#).
 5. The [BTS Research and Writing Center](#).
3. For this class, the estimated number of pages of required reading is 500. The student will identify additional reading for their research, as needed.

Collateral Texts

Research focus and book critique. The student will choose a research focus for the semester from the list of topics below:

1. Philosophies and Political Systems of the Second Temple Period
2. Church History: Church Fathers, Monasticism, Schism, Reformation, Missions
3. Early Heresies, Councils, and Creeds
4. Ancient Near Eastern Social Settings
5. The Spiritual Disciplines*
6. Literary Analysis of Scripture
7. Biblical Intertextuality between the Old and New Testaments*
8. Science and Religion
9. Missions
10. Theology (If you're a ThM student, you'll need to choose the "theology" research focus. This option is only available to ThM students.)

*As a research focus, this topic is harder than one might expect. Discuss with your professor before choosing this one.

The required book (any edition) will be the subject of the book critique and corresponds to each research topic as follows:

1. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* by Everett Ferguson (Review a 200-page excerpt of your choice.)
2. *Turning Points* by Mark A. Noll
3. *The Story of Creeds and Confessions* by Donald Fairbairn and Ryan M. Reeves
4. *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity* by David A. deSilva
5. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney
6. *The Hermeneutical Spiral* by Grant R. Osborne (Review an excerpt that spans from "Historical and Cultural Backgrounds" through "Systematic Theology," which is about 200 pages.)
7. *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* by Richard Hays

8. *Science and Religion: A New Introduction* by Alister McGrath
9. *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* by Paul G. Hiebert
10. *Approaching the Study of Theology: An Introduction to Key Thinkers, Concepts, Methods & Debates* by Anthony C. Thiselton (If you're a ThM student, you'll need to choose the "theology" research focus. This option is only available to ThM students.)

For example, if you choose to study research topic number 8, "Science and Religion," your required reading and the subject of your book critique will be *Science and Religion: A New Introduction* by Alister McGrath.

Course Requirements and Assessments

COURSE REQUIREMENT	GRADE WEIGHT	COMMENTS
Completion of Assigned Reading	5%	The reflection papers and a student assessment of the percentage of completed reading will be used for this grade.
3-Part Research Exercise	5%	
ITRW Worksheet	5%	
Book Critique	10%	
Biblical Exegesis	10%	
3-Part Citations Exercise	20%	
Mid-term Paper	20%	
Final Paper	25%	

Plagiarism and use of AI for any assignment will result in a grade of zero for that assignment. Part of writing well is learning to write within the parameters given. Please observe the guidelines below, as well as those provided in Blackbaud for individual assignment descriptions. Submitted papers are subject to plagiarism and AI-detection software.

Required reading. The student is expected to complete all assigned reading. At Birmingham Theological Seminary, we aim to utilize textbooks that are aligned with a biblical, reformed worldview. At times, we assign textbooks that provide students with exposure to a range of perspectives and encourage thoughtful engagement. The fact that a book is required does **not** mean BTS endorses all of the author's views. We encourage you to read with discernment and evaluate every resource in light of Scripture and the seminary's confessional commitments.

Weekly research and writing assignments. The student is expected to complete weekly research and writing assignments, including an annotated bibliography, a book review and an exegesis paper. Logos Bible Software and the BTS Writing Center provide

resources for research, bibliography, footnotes, and biblical exegesis assignments. A detailed description of each assignment is provided in Blackbaud.

Mid-term paper. The mid-term paper will correspond to the research topic chosen above. The mid-term paper will be a survey paper of secondary sources that includes:

- (1) a title page,
- (2) an introduction including definitions related to the topic,
- (3) a survey of 6-8 scholars and their works related to the research topic. The survey should contain a summary of the elements of research (topic, problem or opportunity, research question or purpose, thesis) for each source. In other words, students do not argue their own position in this paper but, instead, report what others have written on the topic.
- (4) a conclusion including current issues/debates regarding the topic, and
- (5) a bibliography that includes all of the scholarly sources you found for your citations exercise. Do not include the annotations in this bibliography. You may add other scholarly sources as well.
- (6) The mid-term paper will have six to eight pages, exclusive of title page and bibliography.

Final paper. The final paper topic will also correspond to the research topic chosen above. The student, in consultation with the professor, will narrow the focus of the paper and develop a research question related to the chosen topic. The final paper will be a research paper with at least 12 sources in the bibliography, and no more than one secondary source may be more than 50 years old. An outline will be provided. The final paper will have ten to twelve pages, exclusive of title page, contents page, and bibliography. The final paper may be longer for ThM students; please see the assignment description.

BTS Format, Style, and Writing Standards

All research papers must be formatted in accordance with Turabian standards including the title page, footnotes, and bibliography. All papers are to be 12-point, Times New Roman font and double-spaced. *Any paper not conforming to these standards will automatically be dropped one letter grade.* Please see the BTS Form and Style Guide for more information. The BTS Form and Style Guide and other resources are available on the BTS Research and Writing Center webpage:
<https://www.btswritingcenter.net/>

In addition, the BTS Research and Writing Center runs 2-3 Writing Workshops every semester. They are very helpful and highly recommended.

BTS Plagiarism / Generative AI Policy

As noted above, plagiarism and use of AI for any assignment will result in a grade of zero for that assignment. In addition to the BTS plagiarism policy, BTS is implementing a new Generative AI policy. Unless clearly directed by the instructor, the **students should submit their own work, independent of artificial intelligence tools**. Use of generative AI to write papers or to write significant portions of assignments is considered an ethical violation of our Student Code of Conduct and to be a violation of general academic integrity, which could result in a zero on the assignment and/or a lowered letter grade for the course by the professor. Submitted papers are subject to plagiarism and AI-detection software. If determined to be an egregious violation, it could lead to further sanctions administered through the Academic Committee, including expulsion from BTS.

Course Schedule

Week	Date	AGENDA / TOPIC	DUE ON THIS DAY/DATE
1	1/22	Introduction, Divisions of Theology, and the Research Process, Topic, and Question	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Before class:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Please order your books.b. Read Kapic and Pazmiño.c. Read Vyhmeister chaps. 1, 11-14.d. Choose a research topic from the syllabus under Course Requirements and obtain the required books.a. Email the signed student agreement at the end of the syllabus to your professor.2. After class:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Begin work on the ITRW Worksheet provided by your professor (due in week 3).
2	1/29	Reading, Notes, and Organization of Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Before class:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Read Turabian pp. 1-24.b. Read Vyhmeister chaps. 10, 15.2. In class, write and submit one reflection paragraph of 3-5 sentences on Kapic and one reflection paragraph of 3-5 sentences on Pazmiño. Due by 11:59 PM. See the suggested outline.3. You may continue to work on the ITRW Worksheet (due in week 3).

3	2/05	<p>Sources, Bibliographies and Footnotes (Use Turabian chaps. 15-17 as a reference for citations.)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Before class: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Read Turabian pp. 25-50. b. Read Vyhmeister chaps. 18 and 21. c. Begin reading the required book for your research topic. 2. In class: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Write and submit two reflection paragraphs of 3-5 sentences each on the Turabian reading on sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 about how to engage sources. Due by 11:59 PM. See the suggested outline. b. Submit the ITRW Worksheet. Due by 11:59 PM. 3. After class, find 13 sources (to be submitted later) related to your broad research topic as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) 5 scholarly books b) 5 peer-reviewed journal articles c) 3 other sources (book review, PhD dissertation, and a biblical passage)
4	2/12	<p>Book Summaries, Book Critiques, Avoiding Plagiarism</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Before class: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Read Turabian pp. 81-83. b. Read the required book on your research topic. c. Find and read a book review in an academic journal. Bring it to class to discuss the language used (a strong, positive evaluation vs. a cautious or negative evaluation) and attitudes conveyed like surprise or doubt about the claims of the book. This exercise is for your information before you submit a book review next week, but it does not have to be submitted. 2. Submit (by 11:59 PM) the books citation exercise using part 1 of the citations template. Annotate 2 entries.

5	2/19	Mid-term Paper Survey Paper, Biblical Exegesis as Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Submit (by 11:59 PM) the academic journal citation exercise using part 2 of the citations template. Annotate 2 entries. 2. Submit (by 11:59 PM) a book critique on the book required for your research topic. (Note: If you chose <i>Backgrounds of Early Christianity</i> or <i>The Hermeneutical Spiral</i>, the review should cover only the indicated excerpt, not the entire book.)
6	2/26	Spring Break (no class)	
7	3/05	Biblical Exegesis as Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Submit (by 11:59 PM) the other sources citation exercise using part 3 of the citations template. Annotate 2 entries. 2. Submit (by 11:59 PM) the mid-term survey paper.
8	3/12	Biblical Exegesis Presentations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Before class: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Read Vyhmeister chap. 2. 2. In class, discuss your exegesis results. 3. Submit (by 11:59 PM) the exegesis paper.
9	3/19	Synthesis, Analysis, Outlines Organizing and Formatting the Paper	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Before class: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Read Vyhmeister chaps. 16-17, 20. b. Read Turabian pp. 50-134. 2. Submit (by 11:59 PM) your research proposal (part 1 of the 5% research exercise). Your professor will send instructions.
10	3/26	Making Sound Arguments, Review a Sample Research Paper	
11	4/02	Speaking/PPTs and Listening	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Submit (by 11:59 PM) a statement of the percentage of reading completed: "I completed --% of the reading."
12	4/09	Final Paper Presentations (Title, problem, question, thesis, arguments, conclusion)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In class, present your research using a PPT of at least three slides (part 2 of the 5% research exercise) and a reflection (part 3 of the 5% research exercise). 2. Submit the PPT and reflection (by 11:59 PM).

13	4/16	Proof and Revision (no class meeting)	1. Submit (by 11:59 PM) the final research paper.
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Attendance Policy

Students are expected to demonstrate punctuality and attend all class sessions. Any absences should be communicated to the professor beforehand. Students may miss up to three classes with impunity.

Class Policies and Procedures

- BTS highly recommends using handwritten note taking methods in class and keeping computer usage to a minimum.
- Other electronics should be used sparingly.
- All assignments must be submitted by email by 11:59 (CDT/CST) on the due date.
- Late assignments will incur a 3-point deduction per weekday after the due date, except in cases of emergency communicated to the professor.
- Missed assignments may only be made up with an excused absence, preferably in advance of class. Excused absence assignments must be made up before the final day of the semester.
- **Approved late work will receive a grade but no feedback.**

Video Conference Policies and Procedures

- Please utilize the BTS “Best VC (Video Conference) Practices” information for the course.
- Laptops/Desktops are the preferred method of attending a video conference course. Information will be shared on the screen, so phones will be less useful.
- In Video Conference, it is preferable for the student to keep their video on (when possible) so that students and faculty may engage with one another. Extended periods of dark screen will result in follow-up and potential removal from class.
- Other electronics should be used sparingly.

Course Bibliography / Extended Bibliography

Adler, Mortimer J. *How to Speak, How to Listen*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1997.

Badke, William B. *The Survivor’s Guide to Library Research: A Simple, Systematic Approach to Using the Library and Writing Research Papers*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.

Bullock, Richard, Deborah Bertsch, Maureen Daly Goggin, and Francine Weinberg. *The Norton*

Field Guide to Writing with readings and handbook, 6th ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2022. (ISBN: 9780393884135).

Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.

Graph, Gerald, Cathy Birkenstein, and Russel Durst. *They Say / I Say with Readings: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. 5th ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2021.

Graves, Richard L., ed. *Rhetoric and Composition: A Sourcebook for Teachers*. Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden Book Company, 1976.

Hudson, Bob, and Shelley Townsend. *A Christian Writer's Manual of Style*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988.

Isaac, Stephen, and William Michael. *Handbook in Research and Evaluation*. San Diego: EDITS, 1971.

Klein, William W., Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Rev. ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004.

Langan, John. *College Writing Skills*. 6th ed. New York: McGraw Hill, 2005.

Laque, Carol, and Phyllis Sherwood. *A Laboratory Approach to Writing*. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1977.

Lederer, Richard, and Richard Dowis. *The Write Way: The S.P.E.L.L. Guide to Real-life Writing*. New York: Pocket Books, 1995.

Lester, James D. *Writing Research Papers: A Complete Guide*. 9th ed. New York: Longman, 1999.

Lindsell, Sherry L. *Proofreading and Editing for Word Processors*. New York: Arco Publishing Company, 1985.

Murray, Donald A. *A Writer Teaches Writing*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968.

Price, Jonathan. *Put That in Writing*. New York: Penguin Books, 1984.

Rico, Gabriele. *Writing the Natural Way*. Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, Inc., 1983.

Sabin, William A. *The Gregg Reference Manual*. New York: Gregg Division/McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1977.

Williams, Joseph M. *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990.

Yaghjian, Lucretia B. *Writing Theology Well, A Rhetoric for Theological and Biblical Writers.*
 New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2006.

GRADING CRITERIA AND ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

A to A-	B to B-	C to C-	D to D-
Correct spelling and grammar/punctuation	Minor errors in spelling or grammar/punctuation	Multiple errors in spelling or grammar/punctuation per page	Difficult to read due to English writing errors
Smooth writing that provides for effective and efficient reading	Writing is acceptable, but not as organized and coherent	Writing is not smooth, sometimes confusing and inconsistent	Writing lacks clarity, focus, structure, and is incoherent
Person and format are proper for assignment	Person and format are inconsistent	Person and format are not appropriate	Person and format are totally inappropriate
Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are appropriately used, cited, and clearly supports main argument	Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are appropriate but need more depth and use of critical thinking	Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are inadequate for main argument and do not reflect understanding	Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are improperly used, over used, under used, or cited in error
Paper completely conforms to <i>Turabian's Manual for Writers</i>	Paper generally conforms to <i>Turabian's Manual for Writers</i>	Paper somewhat conforms to <i>Turabian's Manual for Writers</i>	Paper does not conform to <i>Turabian's Manual for Writers</i>

BTS Outcomes

1. Scripture: Students will effectively articulate the truth of Scripture and Scripture as truth, engaged with learning biblical knowledge and reformed principles of the supremacy of Scripture as God's word.
2. Reformed Theology: Students will be able to engage and reproduce the primary and essential elements of Reformed Theology.
3. Local Church: Students will be engaged in applied ministry projects in the local church
4. Wisdom: Students will grow in character; increasing in their demonstration of wisdom and its fruits.
5. Discipleship: Students will be able to understand and articulate the nature and importance of discipleship—both ordinary (means of grace) and extraordinary (biblical counseling).
6. Communication: Students will grow in the efficacy of their communication (articulation, teaching/speaking, and preaching—respective to various departments) both in content knowledge and rhetorical strategies
7. Worldview: Students will demonstrate a growing ability to apply God's word to all spheres of life, evidenced through class discussion and other assigned assessments.
8. Leadership: Students will grow in their understanding of godly leadership and ability to lead others in service of the local church.

Outcome	Rank	Rationale (one sentence)
Scripture	5	Throughout the course, in readings, lectures, and assignments, students will consider their research topics, such as intertextuality and literary analysis, in light of Scripture.
Reformed Theology	3	Students may explore Reformed theology in their readings and assignments on their research topic.
Local Church	4	Students write a stage 1 exegesis paper, which they are encouraged to apply in the life of the local church through an upcoming Bible study, Sunday school class, or sermon preparation.
Wisdom	5	The research process requires students to identify potential points of bias and to write with objectivity. Additionally, students may choose a wisdom passage for the exegesis paper and/or choose a research topic, like the spiritual disciplines, where they may further explore the application of biblical wisdom in the modern Christian's life.
Discipleship	4	Students write a stage 1 exegesis paper in which they make application of Scripture to life. Also, students may explore the nature of discipleship in their chosen research topic, such as the spiritual disciplines, the intertextuality of the Bible, the literary analysis of Scripture, church history, and counseling (with special permission).

Communication	5	Students will develop in both their written and oral communications through readings, lectures and assignments, in which they write a variety of papers and present their exegesis papers and research papers to the class. They also practice listening skills by providing feedback to each other.
Worldview	5	Students apply a biblical worldview through their exegesis papers and while bringing Scripture to bear on their research focus throughout the semester. Potential topics include science and religion, missions, spiritual disciplines, social settings, etc.
Leadership	3	Students may explore leadership in their readings and writing assignments on their research topics, such as church history, as well as early heresies, councils, and creeds, etc.

ITRW-VC STUDENT SIGNATURE

Your signature below indicates that you have read this syllabus, understand it, and willingly accept the requirements and responsibilities for successfully complete this course.

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____