



Quality Research Papers – Second Edition
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	ix
Introduction	xi
1. What Is Research?	1
Definition of Research	1
The Research Process	3
Kinds of Research	4
What Research Is Not	5
The Value of Research	6
2. Using the Library	9
The Library Catalog	10
Other Library Resources	14
3. Taming the Internet	21
Online Resources	21
Searching the Internet	23
Evaluating Internet Resources	25
Footnotes and Bibliographies for Internet Materials	26
4. Choosing a Topic	29
Reading	30
Asking Questions	31
Narrowing the Topic	33
Selecting a Thesis or Dissertation Topic	34
5. Planning Research	35
Basic Steps	36
The Proposal	39
Tentative Outline	41
6. Preparing Bibliographies	45
Bibliographic Records	45
Format of Bibliographic Entries	49
Final Bibliography	53

7. Research Thinking	57
Research Mindset	57
Thinking Processes	62
Asking Questions	64
8. Research Reading	67
Reading	67
Evaluating Sources	69
Taking Good Notes	72
Sample Note Cards	77
9. Footnotes: Why, When, and How.....	79
Why Footnotes?.....	79
When to Footnote	80
How to Footnote	81
Bible References	85
10. Reference Notes and Bibliographical Entries Compared ...	89
Published Materials	90
Unpublished Materials.....	98
Electronic Media	101
11. Organizing the Paper	103
Parts of the Paper.....	103
Organizing the Body of the Paper.....	107
Practical Helps for Organizing the Paper.....	108
12. Writing the Paper	113
Research English	113
The Paragraph: Smallest Unit of the Paper	115
Transitions and Introductions	118
The Writing Process	120
Help for the Novice Writer	123
13. Formatting the Paper	125
Page Format.....	126
Footnotes and Quotations	128
Tables, Figures, and Illustrations	129
Spelling, Punctuation, and Other Details	130
Sample Pages	132

14. Biblical Exegesis as Research	141
Steps in the Exegetical Process	141
Presentation of Exegesis	148
15. Descriptive Research.....	151
Steps in Descriptive Research.....	153
Sampling	156
Surveys	157
Interviews	161
16. Program Development as Research.....	163
Steps in Program Development	164
Organizing and Writing the Report.....	168
17. The Case Study as Research.....	171
The Case Study in the Social Sciences.....	171
The Case Study in Pastoral Research	172
Writing the Case Study	178
18. Miscellaneous Theological Writing	181
Papers on Theological Issues in Ministry.....	181
The Book Review.....	183
19. Statistics, Tables, and Graphs.....	189
Some Basics of Statistics	190
Statistical Tables and Graphs	199
Statistics and Honesty.....	206
20. Theses and Dissertations	209
Review of Literature	209
Theses	212
Dissertations.....	217
Model Approval Page	220
21. Doctor of Ministry Projects.....	221
Proposal.....	223
The Written Paper.....	223
Procedure	224
Specific Kinds of D.Min. Papers	225

Conclusion..... 231

Appendixes

- A: APA Citation Style 233
- B: Transliteration of Biblical Languages 245
- C: List of Common Abbreviations..... 247
- D: Tips for the Typist..... 251

Selected Bibliography 255

Index..... 257

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Tables

1. Reported contact of pastors with well-educated persons	200
2. Time spent in sermon preparation as reported by presidents, department directors, and pastors	200
3. Ages of population in countries of the South American Division	201

Figures

1. Members of Church X, by ages	191
2. Members of Church X, by ages	192
3. Members of Church Z, by ages	192
4. Normal curves	196
5. Percentage of area in each standard deviation	196
6. Skewed curves	197
7. Percentage of urban population in South American countries	202
8. Age distribution in the countries of the South American Division	202
9. A comparison of tithes, mission offerings, and local offerings from 1960 to 2000	203
10. Languages spoken by students in the three extension campuses of the Adventist University of Africa in 2006	203
11. Adventist workers sent out from one world division of Seventh-day Adventist Church to another, by decades	204
12. A comparison of the growth of Christianity and Islam in Kenya, 1970–2000	204
13. Membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on different continents, 1980–2000	205
14. Growth of world population, 1950–2000	206
15. Distorted view of the growth of world population, 1950–2000 . .	207

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.”¹ Each element deserves individual analysis.

1. Isaac Felipe Azofeifa, *Guía para la investigación y desarrollo de un tema* (San José, Costa Rica: Dpto. Publicaciones de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 1975), 5, translation mine.

Quality Research Papers has four purposes:

1. to stimulate and develop students' capacity for doing careful and fruitful research
2. to help students improve their ability to clearly express the results of their research
3. to assist theology students to meet the requirements of their educational programs
4. to allay students' fear of doing research by improving their skills and tools.

Because most people learn better when they are shown than when they are told, models are provided to show how your paper should look. In addition, many aspects of the book itself are models. The different levels of headings, the footnotes, the tables and figures, as well as the bibliographical entries show you how to do the different parts of your paper. Only four items, which enhance the graphic design of this book, do not represent what you will be doing: the lack of indentation of the first line of the first paragraph following a heading, the page-wide separator line between the text and the footnotes, full justification in the text, and the many enumerations. In your "quality research paper" you will indent all paragraphs, use a two-inch separator line (default), left justify all text, and follow the instructions for enumerations given on pages 110–111.

The first thirteen chapters present the steps and procedures of research. Chapters 14 through 18 describe specialized forms of research: exegesis, description, program development, the case study, and book reviews. Chapter 19 discusses statistics, graphs, and tables as used in research. Chapter 20 deals with theses and dissertations, while chapter 21 presents instructions for writing a Doctor of Ministry project. Together, these chapters give the basic guidelines for students in theological education who desire to achieve success in research.

May your research be fruitful, stimulating, and even enjoyable!

Nancy Jean Vyhmeister

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.² This makes research an 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 1892, Ellen White wrote 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."³ Discussing the search for theological truth, White had already written: "Truth

2. Frank Gaebelein, *The Pattern of God's Truth* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 20, 23.

3. Ellen White, "Search the Scriptures," *Review and Herald*, July 26, 1892, 1.

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.⁷⁴ Thus, we research, in search of all truth, humbly using our God-given minds to accomplish the 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 research process involves identification, collection, evaluation, and presentation. 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 then 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.

4. Ellen White, “The Necessity of Dying to Self,” *Review and Herald*, June 18, 1889, 1.