

PURPOSEFUL AND EFFECTIVE RESEARCH

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Chapter 1

Writing and guidance of a Research Proposal – Part 1

1.1 Introduction

Why is research necessary? Over the years the question is asked why people are engaging in all kinds of processes to do research. Some of the probable answers could be the following: I want to improve my career; it is a status symbol, et cetera. The reason, however, should be that we, as Christians, want to do research to contribute to the brought corpus of knowledge in our field; to create and propose new knowledge in our field, but eventually to contribute to humanity to enrich and enhance the lives of the people around us. In theology – although it is very important – we are not only busy with a pious life and spirituality. We also want to improve the lives of others if we consider poverty, domestic violence and all other problems in the lives of South Africans and also of people throughout the globe. When this is our inspiration, it becomes more and more fruitful to contribute by means of research.

True research is an ongoing process. The thesis or dissertation you present, is only one brick in the building of knowledge. To do research and submit your thesis and then stop, could be harmful to yourself as well as to science.

Therefore, we must see our Master's degree and Doctoral thesis as just a stepping stone to grow further in knowledge and research, and contribute to the benefit and improvement of the lives of others.

1.2 Writing of a Research Proposal:

1.2.1 Introductory remarks

The Research proposal (RP) is a very important first step in the whole research process. When people normally present a proposal which is accepted by the faculty and university, nearly 40% of the study is already completed. With a good RP, the rest is easy. You have a clear map where to travel; you know where you are going; you recognise the resting places; thus, you know how your argument will develop. When you struggle with your RP, you also struggle with writing the eventual document.

Therefore, Chapter 1 (Parts 1 & 2) will entirely about the RP: for the prospective postgraduate student; for the academic colleagues who will be assigned as study leaders to guide students in writing a good RP; and what the major stumbling blocks are.

1.2.2 The purpose of a thesis

- The purpose of a M-thesis

To prove that you are a Master of research techniques and methodology, and qualify to be a good scholar and researcher. You are thus ready to do a thorough research where the answer will lead to new knowledge that can be utilised in your specific field of knowledge.

- The purpose of a PhD

When you write a PhD, you have a certain recommendation based on your research in this body of knowledge to address a certain problem and to take the knowledge and argumentation surrounding the problem even further. The research has to produce something new – to put new knowledge on the agenda for further discussion.

1.2.3 Paradigmatic approach

Over the last two centuries in the field of science and research, the methodology was driven by positivism – all research was done from a neutral and objective basis. A researcher was like an empty space who looked at data, interpreted it and came to a conclusion. During this stage of positivism approach, there were much critique against theology. It was not considered as a science. At some institutions, theology faculties had been closed and the focus shifted to the study of religion, history of religion, et cetera, but not really on the revelation of God. Since the middle of 20th century with the development of new philosophy in science, people in all disciplines started to question neutrality and objectivity. Postmodernism supposes that all science and research are paradigm driven – the conscience, character, religion, culture, sex, to name a few, of the researcher plays a role in process of research. They came to the idea that what you see depends on where you stand. You cannot see everything, because you do not have a bird's-eye view. You are perhaps affluent or poor, male or female, young or old, Christian believer or not – all these contexts create pre-suppositions, and they determine how you eventually see things. The acknowledgement of the role of context and pre-suppositions are nowadays the major philosophy of science. In earlier days when you endeavour to study something, you could not say you do it from a specific perspective. Nowadays, it is fundamental that you can say from what perspective you do the study. Even when you read the Bible, you do it from a certain perspective: from the confession of your church or faith community's perspective; from an affluent or poor person's perspective, and so on. Where you stand, affects what you see and what you read. In the writing of a RP, it is important to say this is your problem statement; this is your perspective; this your point of departure and this is your pre-supposition. Do not hesitate to do so, because, in the end, by researching the topic further, you will be confronted with people focusing on this problem from another paradigm, and, in such a way, we really enrich each other. When you consult a probable study leader with your topic, do not hesitate to inform him or her of your paradigmatic approach.

1.2.4 Preliminary research

What is also very important is some preliminary research to gain a body of knowledge on your topic. Preliminary research refers to reading popular material, reading scientific material, papers, research articles, and so on, to focus your attention to a certain problem. Failing to do so, can be problematic when you ask the study leader's opinion about a topic. When you approach your study leader with such preliminary research, it can be very stimulating, because it focusses your attention on the problem you want to deal with. Try to define or demarcate a research problem you want to deal with.

1.2.5 Ethical clearance

In the past, ethical clearance was not regarded as very important. When empirical research was done during the Second World War, people were forced to be involved in

research as human guinea pigs and it led to erroneous results and undignified treating of people. Many of the empirical research reports of the past decades were erroneous in this particular aspect. A lot of human rights were violated, for example the right to privacy and protection. Later in the Western world, people who were exploited in such a way requested the courts to protect them and many legal processes developed due to research that violated basic human rights. Therefore, universities developed a strict process of ethical clearance. If you want to work with people, for example, in practical theology, there are certain ways to do it in a legal way: by gaining their permission; the questions that they must answer should not be abusive or leading. Nowadays, for every RP, ethics clearance by an ethics committee is mandatory to determine if you are sufficiently protected. Legal action can be taken against researchers who insulted a certain tradition, culture or people to only name a few examples. You should pay particular attention to the comments given to you by the ethics committee. Previously, ethical clearance only involved empirical research when working with humans as such, as this was considered a high-risk ethical position. Lately, although considered as a low-risk ethical position, ethical clearance must also be obtained for comparative literary studies which mean the reading of books, reports, other empirical studies and its results, and comparing your conclusions with those of different other authors. Concerns considered are, for example, the following: How does this researcher treat the material? Does he or she offer a balanced view of what the material indicates, or is there any form of plagiarism or deviation from what has already been proven, or is there any form of misuse of the material? Therefore, comparative literary study also should get ethical clearance.

To summarise: Points to take in consideration when you approach your study leader for the first time with your RP:

- Where do you stand/what is your point of departure?
- Preliminary research
- You want to have the insurance that your study and methodology is ethical sound so that you can present something without any questioning of your motives or that you are accused of giving information that is not proved or true.

Writing and guidance of a research proposal – Part 2

1.3 First some background:

In the past, you could have studied anything; later, in line with global developments, universities realised that they cannot be specialists in every aspect of academic training and therefore started to specialise in certain fields or focus areas. Research must therefore be done in these fields. Every faculty has the opportunity and obligation to propose what fields they are going to specialise in. In the Western world, research is expensive. A lot of money is invested by the government and private sector, and therefore all research should contribute to knowledge that can be utilised in society and can develop a community. Research must be valuable and correspond to the money invested. With the new liberal commercialisation of universities where universities are managed in business fashion, they must at least generate their own income to make the university going. The best way to finance our research and to make it valid in a society is that universities must focus on certain issues. Faculties of the NWU defined 14 focus areas in which they will become experts. In Theology two units are defined: first, Ancient Texts: Text, Context, and Reception; and second, Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the SA Society (consisting of eight subprograms) which main focus and guiding principal is the view of Scripture. Studies are done based on the authority of Scripture. It is done on the basis of hermeneutical theory: the Bible as the revelation (Word) of God, and the meaning of the Word of God for modern day and contemporary life.

1.3.1 Where to start

1.3.1.1 First step

The process started with enrolling to the university and indicating your field of study.

The application must be sent to the administrator of the faculty where it will be processed, and the student will be registered. The registration and intention of the student will be sent to a leader of the one of the subprograms. A study leader will then be appointed after deliberation with other experts.

Another way is that the researcher, based on his or her preliminary study, identifies an expert in the same field of study, approach the university with your application and your preference for this person as your study leader. Usually such a request is accepted.

1.3.1.2 Start with a “one pager”

The one pager should contain the following three points:

- Your research question
- Aim of the study – What do you want to achieve; answering the research question; making some recommendations
- The hypothesis: the central theoretical argument

1.3.1.3 General responsibilities of the stakeholders

IMPORTANT

Close co-operation, engagement and guidance between researcher and study leader is non-negotiable from this point. Both the researcher and the study-leader should have at least one contact session per week

- The responsibility of the researcher

The researcher must approach the study leader and notify him or her of the researcher's intention to do research and of the specific problem or topic that will be researched. The study leader must also be informed about the researcher's preliminary reading or experience regarding the research topic. If the researcher is, however, uncertain about his or her research problem or topic when approaching the study leader, the progress of the research will be delayed and money will be wasted, because it will take much longer to complete the study.

- The responsibility of the leader(s):

It is usually found that a considerable amount of time passes between the application and feedback from the faculty regarding acceptance of the proposal and designating the study leader. It is therefore imperative that the moment a study leader is appointed, he or she must contact the student immediately; even before the student receives any feedback from the faculty. Arrange a meeting with the student, introduce yourself and start developing a working relationship, because students are normally very tense regarding cooperation with the study leader: What does my study leader expect from me, and will I meet these requirements? Therefore, the sooner a working relationship is established to address these issues, the sooner a relationship of trust can be founded that is essential for good and untroubled cooperation.

Another concern could be that, after the student receives his or her first assignment, the student's response is belated due to some or other reason. A possible solution for this could be to enter into an agreement stating that contact must take place on a regular basis to discuss progress.

Thus, from the moment of appointment, the study leader must be engaged with the student and guide the student. It could happen that the study is unnecessarily delayed due to a lack of engagement and guidance from the study leader on a continuous basis. If a study has been delayed due to the above-mentioned reasons and the student must enrol for another year, it leads to a waste of money and time.

IMPORTANT

The RP must have the following contents:

- **Problem statement/Research question**
- **Aim and objectives**
- **Central theoretical argument or the hypothesis:**
- **Methodology**
- **References**

Remember: demarcation is significant!

1.4 The development of the Research Proposal (RP):

1.4.1 The RP should not be longer than ten pages

The longer the proposal, the vaguer it becomes and it is clear that the candidate is not totally sure about the subject and how to approach it.

1.4.2 Problem statement/Research question

No one is able to deliver a perfect RP after the first try. An RP is a growing “organism”. It grows in your mind, your study leader’s mind; it becomes part of your family’s daily life. It needs to be nurtured like a rare plant. It is a process that will take some time. It must be emphasised that a good RP means that 40% of your study has already been completed, because then you will have the roadmap to do the necessary and effective things you have to do to be successful in the end.

The RP starts with a good background: some preliminary reading has been done; a problem has been encountered which need to be solved; or a contribution to the solution of the problem is needed. Start a process of engagement with this specific problem. The problem statement should not be longer than two or three sentences.

Example

Preliminary research has been done in the field of ethics regarding marriage and cohabitation. The problem that is encountered is the fact that young people do not want to marry. They only want to stay together and depart whenever they feel like that. Although research could be done on either the counselling or ethical matters on such a relationship, in this example, ethical matters will be addressed. The study leader will be approached and informed that there are young adults who live together and who are not interested in marriage. When they were approached, the man indicated that he does not want to commit. He wants to keep an open door to escape if there are responsibilities he does not want to fulfil. The problem is the following: Why do they not want to commit? Research will be done on this either as an empirical study or by comparative literary study by analysing empirical research that has previously been done by others on the same problem in another context.

To demarcate is a very important part of the initial process, because a lack of demarcation could easily lead to unnecessary work and the possibility that some of these valuable but needless work has to be deleted. Thus, reading too much and too widely on a subject usually leads to big frustration. It is totally human to feel that this extra and mostly unnecessary information should somehow be added into the thesis or dissertation because of all the hours spent gathering the information. Dissertations and theses of years ago sometimes ran up to 900 pages or more with lots of resources. To read this work now, makes you realise that, although all these information may be interesting, it is pointless to read it all, because, in the end, there is only a short and simple conclusion. Keep therefore in mind that too much information does not have the impact than a well-defined concise piece of work.

Example

The research question is to establish why young men in a relationship do not want to commit. It is not about a study of elderly men who do not want to commit; it is not about the study of young women's perspectives of the marriage; it is not about people who are too poor to officially get married – the study is exclusively about the phenomena of young men's reluctance to commit to marriage. This is demarcation. Limits must be set. Use therefore in your preliminary research only material that is dealing with this specific problem. It prevents doing too much reading that results in gaining too much information which, in the end, means that it has to be forced into the thesis. It is thus very important that the demarcation, with the problem statement as mentioned above, are very clear and to the point. Information is always enriching, but do not hesitate to leave it out if it turns out to be redundant.

- 1.4.3 Aim and objectives: the aim of a study is to determine what are the reasons for such an argument

Example

What are the reasons why some young men do not want to commit to marriage?

- 1.4.4 Central theoretical argument or the hypothesis

This is not stating your eventual point of view. It is like a person standing at a crossing deciding in which direction the objective could be found. You could have an idea what the outcome of the problem could be; you have done the preliminary research and it gave you a good idea what the result could be, but this is not yet your answer. Be careful not to start with the answer and then do your study to prove this answer.

Thus, after formulating the problem very clearly, you often have a very good idea in which direction the answer could be found. If you, however, realise at any stage that it is not the right direction, get back and take a different course and indicate that this direction is rather your hypothesis. The formulation of the central theoretical argument is very important to the student and the study leader. If you err in this respect at this early stage

of the study and, eventually, after completing your study, you *then* realise that you do not really answer your problem statement because you have followed the wrong direction, your study will not be successful even if it is neat with good language and arguments.

Therefore, during your study, often revisit your central theoretical argument and ensure that you are still convinced that this is the right direction where you will find the answer. If you find that you are no longer convinced, even at a later stage when your RP is already accepted and the title registered at the university, it is still possible to make some changes rather to carry on with a research and produce a thesis that does not answer the research question. Keep in mind that the most difficult part of the RP is to formulate the central theoretical argument. It should also be concise with only a few sentences and not paragraphs or pages.

Example

The central theoretical argument is that an investigation about the sense of responsibility of young men can lead us to the answer on why do they not want to commit. If you later discover that responsibility has nothing to do with the lack of commitment, turn around and take a different course.

1.4.5 Methodology

The first link to methodology is your paradigmatic statement – looking at a problem from a certain paradigm. Do not approach the issue neutrally or objectively.

Example

You are a Christian counsellor, and you are counselling young men who do not want to commit in marriage. Your central theoretical argument is that the reason is because of a lack of responsibility. You are approaching it as a Christian or Bible scholar. You have a certain idea of responsibility. To you responsibility means responsibility to God, to the woman involved, to the faith community, and the family. From this perspective, you are going to look at your problem. Remember the answer you will find, depends on your angle of approach. If you approach it from another angle, for example that it has nothing to do with responsibility, or it is the free will of a young man to decide whether he wants to commit or not, you must then realise that, if this is your approach, your answer will be totally different. The methodology flows from your paradigm or point of departure.

Methodology can be two ways of research:

- A comparative literary study: To see what other experts wrote about your research question. You are going to compare findings of several experts in the specific field of study, compare it with each other and come to the conclusion of what is good material to use further.
- Empirical research which can be qualitative or quantitative – it depends on the number of people you are going to use to solve the problem. A skilful questionnaire

should be drawn up. With skilful is meant that you cannot, for example, formulate your questions to determine the outcome you would like. Your study-leader should refer you to experts in the field of empirical research to advise you on how to draft a good scientific questionnaire and how to interpret the answers.

1.4.6 Correlation questions-aims-chapters

You need to formulate your problem statement or research question and, flowing from this problem statement, a couple of sub-questions must be composed.

Example

- **Why do young men enter in such a relationship?**
- **How do they experience it?**
- **Why do they want to keep a door open to escape from the relationship?**
- **Why are they willing to leave and, in the process, leave children behind?**

The aim will be to answer these questions and the answers will develop into four chapters. There is thus a correlation between the problem statement, the central theoretical argument, the direction which will be taken to reach the aim by getting answers on the mentioned questions and the answers which will develop into four chapters – every chapter dealing with one of the sub-questions which will be the topic of the specific chapter. Then you will find that there is a consistent pattern of reasoning throughout the dissertation.

There is an example of the research proposal template on the web page.

Link to research proposal template

<http://services.nwu.ac.za/it/sc/nwu-templates-postgraduate>

[Proposal Template](#)

On the last page of this document is a space where students can include columns with a summary of the research:

First column: Main question with the 4 sub-questions, the aims and headings of the chapters. This could help you to construct the road map for the rest of the study.

1.4.7 References

Each proposal must have a list of references which only include the resources you refer to in your research proposal and not the sources you are going to visit for the rest of the study. For the purpose of the proposal, you should refer to certain books, articles of any other research material. These references serve as proof that you are really dealing with a certain problem in a certain way.

Something to keep in mind: You can compare a thesis or dissertation to a report, for example delivered by a commission to the state president. The commission has a

mandate to set up a report. Proof must be delivered whether they dealt with the mandate to investigate a certain problem and came to certain answers. The same is true in a certain extent for a proposal: You have a specific problem, and the proposal is your report. Your report is addressed to the academic community to prove that you have answered the question and that you are able to make some recommendation.

Chapter 2

From research proposal to writing a thesis

Our next two chapters will deal with the process from the RP to writing the thesis.

Before kicking off, a few things from the Part 1 to remember:

IMPORTANT

- **Writing a perfectly correct RP will require the submission of several drafts.**
- **Start with a one-pager**
- **The RP should not be longer than 10 pages**
- **The RP will serve as the first chapter of your eventual thesis**

It is extremely rare that everything about the RP is correct when initially submitted. In fact, it is almost impossible. A RP is a growing organism that grows in your mind. Therefore, do not become sceptical of the university or the study leader if you are required to write six or seven drafts of the RP. Some of my best students presented very good dissertations in the end even though they had to write several drafts of the RP because of the growing process. This process includes, among others, the formulation of your research question, the demarcation as well as the formulation of the central theoretical argument. If your RP (of not more than 10 pages) is correct and approved after a final submission, you have the road map for the rest of the research and you will see that you will find it much easier to write the thesis from that point onwards.

Therefore, start with your one pager: state the problem you want to deal with; your paradigmatic approach – what you see in the end depends on where you stand; and your central theoretical argument. *Before you enrol or even apply to the university, you are welcome to send me your one pager and I am willing to give advice to anybody.* After you enrolled, you are then obliged to communicate with your study leader.

2.1 Submission of final RP:

IMPORTANT

Road to the acceptance of RP:

- **Submission to Science Committee**
- **Submission to Committee for Advanced Degrees**
- **Submission to Ethics Committee**
- **Registration of the title**

2.1.1 Submission of final RP to the Science Committee

The first step will be to submit your RP to the study leader who will send it to the scientific committee. Here I first want to address our study leaders. Do not submit a RP that is not ready. Sometimes at the Science Committee, proposals with orderly mistakes are received and then it has to be sent back with a remark that it does not comply with the rules and means and therefore cannot be accepted. Thus, ensure that the RP meets all the requirements before sending it to the Science Committee.

The Science Committee comprises of academics in the same field of your studies. The Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the SA Society of the Faculty of Theology has seven such fields or subprogrammes:

Links to subprogrammes

- Bibliological Perspectives <https://theology.nwu.ac.za/unit-reformed-theology-and-development-sa-society/bibliological-perspectives>
- Ecclesiological Perspectives <https://theology.nwu.ac.za/unit-reformed-theology-and-development-sa-society/ecclesiological-perspectives>
- Ecumenical Perspectives <https://theology.nwu.ac.za/unit-reformed-theology-and-development-sa-society/ecumenical-perspectives-development-society>
- Missiological Perspectives <https://theology.nwu.ac.za/unit-reformed-theology-and-development-sa-society/missiological-perspectives>
- Moral Development of the Society <https://theology.nwu.ac.za/unit-reformed-theology-and-development-sa-society/moral-development-society>
- Practical-Theological Perspectives <https://theology.nwu.ac.za/unit-reformed-theology-and-development-sa-society/practical-theological-perspectives>
- Public Practical Theology and Civil Society <https://theology.nwu.ac.za/unit-reformed-theology-and-development-sa-society/public-practical-theology-and-civil-society>

Each subprogram has a leader and three or four members. Usually, the RP will be sent to two members who will read it thoroughly and give some advice. They will look, for example, at issues such as the feasibility of your study; how many other PhD studies are there in this field, et cetera. For a Master's degree, you need to prove your mastery of research. Therefore, it is not necessary to answer a total new question.

Your study leader is not involved in this part of the process; only the committee dealing with your field of study.

The committee will now send the RP back to the study leader with some suggestions such as other sources that could be used, the rephrasing of some parts and the insertion of some items, or, and that should be avoided at all costs, they will send it back and declare that the RP is not suitable and does not comply with the rules and means.

2.1.2 Submission of final RP to the Committee for Advanced Degrees (CAD)

After processing the committee's proposals, the RP will be sent to the CAD. They will look at it only superficially. They will not do a thorough study again like the Science Committee.

2.1.3 Submission of final RP to the Ethics Committee

From this point, it goes to the Ethics Committee to look at the ethical aspects and to determine whether there are low risk, medium risk or high-risk issues, especially when people and empirical research are involved, before ethical clearance can be issued. They will establish whether your questionnaires and the people you have selected to do the research answer to all the moral and ethical requirements for such a thesis. It may seem like a lot of hassle, but, in the end, it is for your own protection. If they have given the clearance, you can rest assured that you can proceed and that you are really protected by the university when someone could challenge you later with some moral issues.

Normally, these processes are quickly resolved. The Science Committee could, however, procrastinate, especially if the study leader submits a RP which is not yet ready.

2.1.4 Registration of your topic

After ethical clearance is issued, your topic will be registered at the university and be reserved for your study.

2.1.5 Commencing with your thesis

To save time, the study leader must take the responsibility to advise the student to commence with Chapter 2 at the stage where he or she decides that the RP is good enough to be submitted to the Science Committee, even though the RP –or Chapter 1 – is not yet approved by the Science Committee. (Remember, your RP, containing the problem statement/research question, a clear demarcation, aim and objectives, central theoretical argument or the hypothesis, methodology, correlation questions-aims-chapters and references, becomes the first chapter of your thesis or dissertation.) These committees do not convene frequently, for example the Science Committee meets once a month and the CAD and the faculty only meet a few times per annum. Therefore, if you wait for the committees to meet, you will waste two to three months which is unnecessary.

It is the responsibility of both the student and the study leader to carry on with the thesis as soon as possible. It is also the responsibility of both to be specific and punctual regarding feedback to each other. If a chapter is submitted by the student to the study leader, determine a date for feedback to the student and adhere to it. If the student receive feedback from the study leader in which suggestions are made, once again determine a date when the student will respond to the remarks and stick to the date. While the student is waiting for response from the study leader, start with the next chapter, send it to the study leader for his or her comments, and start with the next chapter. Repeat this until you have the comments on four or five chapters. Only then you can return to the comments of chapter 2 and address it within the framework of all the comments of the different chapters. Afterwards, send a complete draft of your dissertation with the implemented comments to the study leader. This is a good way to save time. At the end, you have a coherent document. Refrain thus from working over and over on one chapter; rather work on the full draft. This will be more productive for you and the study leader.

After you have completed each chapter, do the language editing, correct the spelling errors and typos, and do the technical editing such as the referencing. Referencing becomes very difficult when you do it at a later stage. If you send a poorly edited chapter to your study leader, he or she ponders so much on the language and spelling errors instead of the content. He or she will also have a negative attitude towards the work.

To summarise. Send your first chapter to the study leader and then carry on with your next chapters. After you have completed all the chapters, process all the recommendations and comments of all the chapters, and use it to complete your draft.

2.2 Intensive research:

2.2.1 Finding research material

After you have completed your RP (first chapter), you are now ready to start with chapter two. You have a good idea of the material available, and you are going to do a search for more material. We are blessed with the internet and excellent libraries. This means that material is easily available and accessible from anywhere in the world. However, you must find the relevant material that will answer your research question.

Example

Young men do not want to commit when they are in a cohabiting relationship. The thesis, as mentioned before, will focus on an ethical, theological ethical as well as from a Reformed, Pentecostal or any other denominational perspective. This means that you do not need juridical ethical material, philosophical ethics or psychological ethics. You will also not use material from the Russian Orthodox Church because you want to do it from a Reformed perspective.

This means that you must delimit your material available, because other material will not really add any value to your thesis. You may, however, find relevant material in this area, but the key is that you must narrow your search down and concentrate on quality rather than quantity of material. There are search engines that are not scientific (e.g. Wikipedia). It is not controlled and corrected by peers in the field and should be avoided. Wikipedia could be used to find a date or birthdate of a person, because this is not scientific material. Scientific material is material that is produced by a good academic with sound academic methodology that provides answers and recommendations that can be founded on well-argued facts. Also avoid opinion statements, especially when the author is unknown. Stay away from using material gained from social media because they are not scholarly material. The number of references must be determined by quality and not quantity.

2.2.2 Focus on recent research findings

Give preference to recent research. You are a scientist in this field, and this is the reason why you must start with recent research done in this field of study. In the field of Theology, especially in Systematic Theology, Old Testament and New Testament, there are, however, the evergreen sources that you could always use repeatedly: Augustine and his Confessions, Thomas Aquinas, Calvin, Luther, and others. These sources will always be timeless, and you can use them with boldness. This means that old sources are

not necessarily inferior, but you need to find a method to distinguish between them. Modern sciences such as, for example, Ethics will lean more on new sources, because it is a young science. When you encounter two research studies, for example one in 1995 and the other in 2012, you would rather use the newer research, because you must remember that you want to develop and contribute new knowledge. This means that the 1995 study has already been used in researched documents and might be outdated.

2.2.3 Determine context of research findings

I want to briefly repeat the matter of paradigmatic approach or paradigmatic position. In the RP, you indicated that you see your problem from where you stand – from a certain angle: you are a Christian theologian and stand on the confession of the Bible as the authoritative Word of God. This is your point of departure; this is where you stand. From this position, you are going to look at your research problem. Just remember when you read material, whether it is a book, an article or any other research material, that they present the findings of a researcher from his or her point of view. When you read the material, you must always consider the pre-supposition of that particular author – where that particular author stands – and interpreted the findings of the author within the contexts of his or her own paradigm. If you do not do it, you could misinterpret such a person. This means that, if the person does not write from the same philosophical tradition and you refer to this author without also mentioning his or her point of departure of standing position, it could lead to total confusion. Interpret the material you use within the context of the paradigm of the person presenting the research. Be cautious not to use a researcher's output in an a-historical way. If the study was done in 1944, for example under soldiers, you need to mention the date and condition under which the referred study was conducted and why you think that this specific study is relevant to your study. You put the relevant source in context as well as in the historical context, and this will give more credibility to your own research. Caution must be taken when you refer to two different authors at different times with different opinions. Both authors' contexts, historical context and standing must be mentioned to give credibility to your reference and argument.

Chapter 3

From writing a thesis to submission of a research article

3.1 Argue the case:

3.1.1 Information

After the acceptance of your RP, the registration of the title of your thesis and building a good relationship with your study leader, which resulted in good cooperation, you are ready to commence with the writing of your thesis.

Keep in mind that, when writing the thesis, you must guide your reader through your argumentation.

Start to argue a point – develop certain information to come to an argument. A problem that could occur during the writing of a thesis is that the student keeps on quoting references. At the end, you will have a compilation of a lot of arguments with no contribution of your own. This is not really an argument.

3.1.2 Evaluation, findings, outcome of research question, contribution and recommendation

An argument is when you utilise other researchers' arguments by comparing it with each other, questioning it and build your own argument on it throughout your thesis. Which is very helpful, is that you come to a conclusion at the end of each chapter in which you argue a case: You have argued these points of view from these authors; You agree with author A, but author B approach it from a different point of view that can also be taken into account and your conclusion is the following: [a bulleted summary could then be provided].

Start your next chapter with a brief overview of the previous chapter and to what conclusion you came. To take the reader over the bridge to the next chapter is very important. A lack of this bridge will result in the reader not following the argument. Guide the reader. Your initial and most important reader is your examiner for whom such guidance, which determines whether there is a clear and logical transition from one chapter to another, indicates a large part of the ultimate success of the study.

In the last chapter, take the conclusion of each chapter and use it to write a short summary of no longer than two pages by linking these statements to each other to reach a final clear-cut description of your outcome.

You have written your thesis chapter by chapter, send each chapter to your study leader, he or she makes recommendation which was implemented in a compiled draft. Read through it several times and ask yourself whether you answered your research question.

Example to determine outcome of research question, contribution and recommendation

In your environment, there are couples cohabiting and the men in those relationships do not want to commit themselves to marriage. Your question is: Why is this happening? The answer on this means that you answer your initial research question. Make recommendations which could probable be solutions for this problem. In your research, you encountered issues surrounding your initial problem and you recommend that, in the discipline of Psychology, a study should be done on this specific problem. Thus, you've answered your question, you came to certain knowledge, you present new knowledge from the perspective of your field of expertise – your contribution – you give direction to the corpus of science by recommending that some other work should also be done in the field of Psychology, e.g. How does the woman in the relationship experience this reluctance of her partner to commit to marriage?

Remember:

Why do **you** want to do research in your field of expertise? From a Christian perspective: to contribute to humanity, to the church or to certain population groups in South Africa.

You are proud of **your** contribution! To contribute is very inspiring when you experience consultation and citation of your research.

3.2 Plagiarism:

3.2.1 Definition of plagiarism

Presenting another person's research as if it is your own

Sometimes there is no intention to plagiarise, but the mode of arguing and writing is in such a way that it has the ring of plagiarism. If you quote someone, be careful of verbatim similarities without the necessary citations. You could also rather paraphrase the quote and draw your conclusion directly afterwards. Mention the author's name with the necessary bibliographical details in the text as well as in the list of references according to the NWU requirements.

Links to NWU requirements for referencing

- <https://library.nwu.ac.za/referella>
- <http://library.nwu.ac.za/sites/library.nwu.ac.za/files/files/documents/referencing-guide-2020b.pdf>
- <http://library.nwu.ac.za/sites/library.nwu.ac.za/files/files/documents/verwysingsgids-2020b.pdf>

Universities receive subsidies for academic research outputs and the authors, in turn, receive incentives from the university for their outputs for further research. This system can lead to the tendency to produce more and more in the shortest possible time which can then eventually lead to plagiarism.

Keep in mind that, to use other people's work as if it is your own – which quite often happens – is unethical and morally dishonest. It is, in the process of doing research, without any integrity to commit plagiarism. It is also for the researchers themselves a very negative experience when you receive your degree, but have the feeling that the work is not your own. You totally fail to benefit from the feeling of pride that you succeeded to contribute to your field of science. You can compare your thesis to a mother

with her first child: proud and with the feeling that this work of yours is the best ever produced.

3.2.2 Turnitin/Ithenticate report

This is a measuring tool on how to prevent plagiarism or to curb this tendency to plagiarism. Before a thesis can be submitted for examination, it will be submitted to either Turnitin or Ithenticate and the report will show every sentence from other sources that has been taken verbatim. It will also show the origin of the source.

3.2.3 How do I interpret and deal with the Turnitin report?

Remember, this report will indicate the similarities with other material. If you intend to directly quote another person and you meet all the correct requirements to refer to this person by providing the bibliographical details in the text as well as in the reference list, it could happen that the report will still pick up the similarities, because those are verbatim quotes. In such a case, it is not plagiarism. You must just make sure that your references are correct, or you can consider paraphrasing the direct quote. If the reference is, however, not adequately, it can be interpreted as plagiarism. If there is any form of plagiarism, it reflects bad on yourself and your study leader.

Suggestion: After the completion of each chapter, submit it with the assistance of your study leader to Turnitin to determine plagiarism early. You can then immediately see what you should be cautious of when writing the next chapter.

3.3 Submission:

3.3.1 Thesis

From RP to final thesis

Did you ...

- **complete your RP;**
- **complete your chapters;**
- **build bridges between chapters by formulating short statements of conclusions pertaining to your findings at the end of each chapter, and start your next chapter with a brief overview of the previous chapter's conclusions;**
- **come to a final finding using the conclusion of each chapter;**
- **ascertain that you have answered your research question;**
- **make some recommendations for other possible researchers in other fields to do some further research;**
- **check your references that only the references used in your text appear in the reference list;**
- **send thesis to be formatted according to the correct requirements of the university;**
- **send thesis to a qualified language practitioner to edit your thesis**

Now you are ready to submit your thesis to be examined. In the meanwhile, the university appointed an examiner: for a Master's degree, it is one internal (other academic attached to the faculty who is not your study leader), and one external examiner (an academic of another university). For a Doctoral degree, one internal and two external examiners of which one of the external examiners will probably be from abroad will be appointed. Usually, they will have six weeks to assess it and write a report.

They will look at the following:

- Was the study worthwhile? Was there really a good problem statement?
- Did the study come to a good conclusion? Was the problem statement answered by way of good research
- Was the methodology sound?

For a Master's degree, a certain percentage will be awarded. In other words, you can obtain a distinction. Keep in mind that a Master's degree is the door to a PhD. You must have at least 65% for your Master's degree to be permitted to a PhD.

For a PhD, there will only be a note of acceptance or rejection, because the philosophy of the university is that, to obtain a PhD, is already a great achievement and it is unnecessary to grant it an award such as cum laude. If you therefore receive your PhD, you can be certain that the university and the scholarly fraternity recognises it as a big achievement.

3.3.2 Article

It is usually expected from the student to also submit a scholarly article arising from the thesis to be published in an accredited and accessible journal, because new knowledge has been presented and it should be presented to other scholars in your field. Knowledge cannot be captive in a library. It must be accessible to others.

Such an article will qualify for subsidy for the university if published in an accredited journal. If the student is still a registered student by the time the Institutional Research Excellence Awards (IREA) pays out, the Research Entity/School director/coordinator could grant an amount equal to one half of this IREA allocation to the student in the form of a bursary. If the student is no longer in the system, the IREA allocation is allocated to the relevant Research Entity or School.

While you are waiting for your results, it is a good time to start with your article. Send it to your study leader for his or her perusal. The study leader can also add his or her name as the co-author. Usually when the study leader is willing to act as a co-author, it gives more credit to your article, because that is an indication the he or she is also proud of this research and want his or her name to be linked with it.

If you reach this point, you will certainly experience a feeling of satisfaction after all the action!

FAQ

Below is a list of general questions raised during the webinar hosted and linked to above. We thought it well to add them here along with Prof Voster's replies as other students might have the same inquiries.

1. **Can the research proposal be exactly 10 pages?**

We do not have an exact prescription in this regard. The point I made was that the shorter and clearer the research proposal the better. The explanation of the background can take two pages and if you can formulate the research problem and central-theoretical argument in one sentence each you are then sure of what you are going to research and the direction in which you are going to solve the problem. Just remember that the reference list accompanying the research proposal should contain all and only the publications you have consulted for the purpose of writing the research proposal. My experience in guiding post-graduate students taught me that a concise well-argued research proposal with clear-cut statements is more beneficial for the study. On the other hand, a vague research proposal tends to divert the direction of the researcher and the study-leader often.

2. **Must the presupposition(s) of the research student always agree with that of the study leader?**

A good study leader will respect the paradigmatic stance of the researcher if it represents a plausible approach and position. The study must then be guided within those parameters. If the leader does not agree, he/she should not accept the appointment and refer the student to someone else. The student does not have to agree with the supervisor and vice versa. The student should prove that he/she employ a scholarly methodology and that findings are valid within the paradigmatic context.

3. **Is it a requirement to use a colon in titles?**

No, it is not. You can use a colon if the title requires it. For example: Violence in South Africa: Politically motivated or a historical heritage?

4. **I wanted to know how a student proceeds if their topic/subject is relatively new and there is limited literary information available?**

All research commences somewhere. If you have a valid research question, work with the available material and do empirical research or evaluate oral traditions. In this way you could contribute to the expansion of your field. I would recommend that you state right at the beginning of your research proposal that sources are limited but you intend to take the research further by using empirical methods and oral sources. In the end readers will evaluate your findings to ascertain whether your findings are valid and plausible.