

Research (JOY) Papers

What?

A “term paper” is a ‘highly scaled-down version’¹ of a postgraduate research paper. We know you have limited time on your placement. This is not going to be anything like the ‘final word’ on an issue or a full dissertation. It’s an opportunity to *begin* to investigate a specific area:

- **a biblical theme** – e.g. sacrifice; idolatry; priesthood; faith; mission to the nations; the Word of God and the Spirit of God; God as the husband of his people; the first Adam and the last Adam.
- **a doctrine** – e.g. the blood of Jesus; justification; the sinfulness and helplessness of humanity; the sufficiency of Scripture; the two natures of Christ; grace alone; Christ alone.
- **pastoral theology** – e.g. biblical models of servant leadership (Moses, David, Jesus, Paul etc.); biblical models of discipleship (content, goals, method); the relationship between faithful Bible teaching and servant leadership.
- **the gospel perspective on a contemporary issue** – e.g. music; gambling; single-parenthood; corruption; different types of ‘marriage’ arrangement.
- **Christians attitudes or understanding in relation to a particular issue** – e.g. the role of music in the church; what do Christians think are the appropriate roles in marriage; what do people understand by the word ‘ministry’; what do they think is the significance of holy communion; why do they think they will be allowed into heaven
- **facts on the ground** – e.g. quantity and content of singing in church; church attendance/regularity; languages spoken; ratio of youth to older; literacy; identifying an unreached community; influence of TV & media; marriage/lack of

2000-2500 words excluding the front material (contents page etc.) and bibliography – that is 5 to 6 A4 pages of Calibri point 11 one and a half spaced.

But would rather have 1 page (500 words) than nothing at all.

Why ?

1. *For our personal growth in thinking biblically* – We must be [thinking Christians](#) and reading Christians. **Titus – Truth leads to godliness.** In church history the greatest pastors and missionaries and helpers of the church were the deep thinkers like Athanasius and Augustine. The motors of the Reformation – Luther, Calvin, Cranmer – poured themselves out in hours and hours of study.
2. *Research for the body of Christ* – As Harrison and others have said, we are often ‘shooting in the dark’ when it comes to mission and ministry. We have hunches and anecdotal evidence but we don’t have much hard data on what is going on in our churches or on the mission field.
3. *Not optional – will expect you to do this* – **discipline – but as [means of grace](#)** – just as with reading, journaling, prayer letters.

How?

It may be library-based or field-based research.

It may be qualitative or quantitative.

A lot will depend on your placement – time, access to books/internet, contact with groups.

With all types of research there are certain common things that are really important:

1. Decide what area you want to look at – **by the end of this MTC.**
2. Read, talk to and learn from others who have investigated this area before.
3. Get your research question really clear.
4. Work out the best way to answer your question – referring to methodological handbooks if necessary (see bibliography below).

¹ Duncan Olumbe, ‘iServe Africa Project Paper Guidelines’, MTA, 2009, p. 1.

5. Gather all the data you need to answer the question – from books or the field – being as organised as possible with the way you record it – e.g. keep all the book and page references and write down all the names and dates of people interviewed.
6. Analyse the data – don't just tell us what other people think – engage, compare, weigh them; don't just tell us the figures – tell us what they mean.
7. Get writing early in the process. Write, write and re-write.
8. Present at MTC3.

Something else on Sources

Whether you are reading books or looking on the internet or even just talking to people, you are dealing with sources of information. Some of it is going to be very accurate and helpful, some of it will be rubbish. All of it will be coming from a particular viewpoint/worldview/bias. You need to be very careful and discerning and very honest about how you handle sources.

- What sort of source is it, who wrote it, why, where is it coming from theologically, what is their bias? [Research](#) has shown that young people are often very poor at looking at internet sources critically. There is a very helpful guideline on judging online sources [here](#).
- Reference properly – ie. quotation marks around what you are quoting and a citation – e.g. (F. Nyogesa, “The Way, The Truth, The Life”, iServe Journal of Theology, Issue 6, 2013, p. 543). Even if you are just paraphrasing (not using the exact words) or you are substantially influenced by the argument of someone you have read you must acknowledge explicitly – e.g. “I am following here the argument of S. Maina, How to Preach, iServe: 2012, chapter 4”. If you don't do that it is plagiarism which is a very serious offence in academia.
- Engage, critique – don't just tell us what other people think – compare, contrast, weight, tell us whether it is Biblical.
- Beware, beware, beware the curse of Cut-and-Paste!

Research as discipleship

1. [Humility](#)
 - a. Research should be a humbling exercise in itself as we start to glimpse how much we do not know or understand. Realise that these questions may have been discussed for thousands of years and thousands have spent lifetimes researching them.
 - b. Once you've done a fair bit of work it requires a *lot* of humility to accept direction and criticism and to cut stuff out ('kill your babies').
2. Love
 - a. When interviewing or interacting with people don't manipulate; get permission to use names, quotes, responses.
 - b. When writing about other people or arguing with an author you disagree with, imagine they are sitting there beside you and love them.
 - c. When writing think about your reader – how can you make it as easy and clear as possible – i.e. clear structure, explaining technical terms, **proof reading**, not just getting it all out of your head but communicating clearly to someone else for their benefit.
3. Joy – Research as enjoying Jesus. Never divorce mind and heart, doctrine and praise. It's normal to use the third person rather than the first person and there must be evidence for what you say but never forget what and who you are writing about. As we go deeper in knowing God's Word, his world, his people, and particularly his Son, there should be a joy with that. So we're now calling these “Joy Papers”!
4. Peace
 - a. Respect those you engage with – ‘Honour everyone’ (1 Pet. 2:17), ‘bless those who persecute you... so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all’ (Rom. 12:16-18), write with generosity.

- b. But ‘have no fear of them’ (1 Pet. 3:14) – ‘do not fear what they fear’ (Is. 8:12) – don’t agree with the ‘scholarly consensus’ just because it is the scholarly consensus.
- 5. Patience and perseverance
 - a. Haraka haraka haina baraka. Data collection, reading and writing can’t be rushed. ‘The real task is much harder than to be intelligent. It is to unlearn all that, to relax and to slow down.’²
 - b. Better is the end of a thing than its beginning (Ecc. 7:8) – write down anything, keep writing, revise, revise, keep going, finish.
- 6. Faithfulness and honesty
 - a. Don’t use [fallacious arguments](#) e.g. a ‘straw man’ or a false dichotomy.
 - b. Don’t make an assertion without evidence.
 - c. Don’t cut corners or pretend to have more evidence than we have.
 - d. Don’t just look for evidence that supports your argument – look just as diligently for counter-evidence.
 - e. Don’t steal words (Jer. 23:30) – When using sources (whether books, internet or spoken) reference properly with the author, the title, date of publication and the page number whether you are paraphrasing or quoting their words with speech marks.

Writing

Style – the only real rule is CONSISTENCY – use the same font style throughout, the same way of referencing authors throughout, the same abbreviations throughout.

Structure – should be something like this:³

- Cover/Title Page
- Table of Contents
- Main Body
 - Introduction (don’t feel you have to define the terms of your title or subject here and please don’t just give dictionary definitions – just describe the general context of the debate or why you are looking at the particular issue and leave it to the body of the discussion to define the terms)
 - Literature Review (where necessary/appropriate)
 - Body / Main Discussion / Analysis (feel free to break this down into manageable sub-topics)
- Conclusion
- Bibliography (only for books and articles referenced in the essay)
- Supplementary bibliography (if necessary – for any other relevant materials you have read and found helpful but not actually cited in the essay)
- Appendices (if necessary)

Presentation

During the April MTC we hope that a number of you will have an opportunity to present a summary of your findings and receive some feedback. In some cases it might be appropriate, with your permission, to make useful data and insights more publically available, e.g. on the blog.

‘It is... hoped that your final paper will remain relevant, incisive and thus contribute to the cause of Gospel ministry in Africa.’⁴

² George Watson, *Writing a Thesis: a guide to long essays and dissertations*, Harlow: 1987, p. 11.

³ Based on Olumbe, ‘Guidelines’, p. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Bibliography

Duncan Olumbe, 'iServe Africa Project Paper Guidelines', MTA, 2009.

George Watson, *Writing a Thesis: a guide to long essays and dissertations*, Harlow: 1987.
Really talking about PhD theses but there are some useful principles for shorter papers.

Supplementary Biography

Emil Chandran, *Research Methods: A quantitative approach with illustrations from Christian ministries*, Nairobi: Daystar University, 2004.

Philip E Dow, *Virtuous Minds: Intellectual Character Development*, IVP, 2013.
A good summary and review is available [here](#).

Graham Kalton, *Introduction to Statistical Ideas for Social Scientists*, Chapman and Hall, 1973.

Graham Kalton, [*Introduction to Survey Sampling*](#), Newbury Park: Sage, 1983.

Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Excellence: The Character of God and the Pursuit of Scholarly Virtue*, Crossway, 2011. *Excerpt pdf available [here](#) and review [here](#).*

Aylward Shorter, *Practical Fieldwork Methods in Social Anthropology*, Limuru: Paulines, 2000.
A Catholic author and publisher so read with discretion (e.g. re. inculturation) but some useful practical advice.

Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, [*Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology*](#), Zondervan, 2001.
Becoming the new set text on the subject.

And some web resources:

<http://andynaselli.com/john-frames-advice-30-suggestions-for-theological-students-and-young-theologians> - brilliant must-read article

http://www.wts.edu/resources/westminster_center_for_theolog/become_writerhtml/beginning_our_research.html - Westminster Theological Seminary guide to writing papers

<http://www.theologynetwork.org/> - very good sound stuff on biblical studies and historical theology

<http://thegospelcoalition.org/publications> - the *Themelios* journal of The Gospel Coalition

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/> - a good number of online articles, not all evangelical

<http://www.crosswire.org/sword/index.jsp> - very useful free downloadable Bible software for doing word studies etc.