Introduction to Research

• Introductions
• What is research?
• Research and our faith
• The research process
• Doing a thesis at ATS
• Thinking like a reader

Personal Introductions

• Who I am
• Who you are and why you’re here
  – Who are you?
  – Major
  – Your experience in research
  – Thesis topic
  – What you want to get out of the course
  – What you want Dr. Morton to focus on

What is Research?

• How would you define research?
• Vyhmeister, Your Indispensable Guide:
  – “A method of study that, through careful
    investigation of all evidence bearing on a
    definable problem, arrives at a solution” (1).
  – Results must be presented clearly and
    concisely.
  – Others should be able to tell how you arrived at
    the solution.

What is Research?

• “Research is a (1) systematic search for (2)
  adequate information to reach (3) objective
  knowledge of a (4) specific topic” (I. F.
  Azofeifa).
  – Systematic search – logical approach.
  – Adequate information – reliable, documented.
  – Objective knowledge – not confirmation of
    your biases.
  – Specific topic – clearly defined problem.
What is Research?

• Poor research…
  – Just gathers and reproduces data.
  – Compiles quotations.
  – Rewrites other people’s words and ideas.
  – Deals in generalities.
  – Presents one’s unsupported opinion.
  – Is an apology for one’s own position.
  – Attacks the positions and character of others.
  – Ignores inconvenient evidence.
  – Asks no questions and finds no answers.
  – Is boring to do and boring to read.

What is Research?

• Good research…
  – Focuses on a good research question.
  – Examines all relevant information.
  – Draws logical, well supported conclusions.
  – Seeks to persuade through sound arguments.
  – Is concrete and specific.
  – Acknowledges one’s presuppositions.
  – Shows that the author has assimilated the sources.
  – Includes significant personal thought.
  – Has significance to the researcher and the reader.
  – Is valuable to do and to read.

What is Research?

• What is research good for?
  – Thorough grounding in a subject
  – Problem solving skills
  – Skills of observation, analysis, synthesis, evaluation
  – Critical thinking skills
  – Good writing skills
  – The joy of discovery
  – The satisfaction of solving a puzzle
  – The opportunity to contribute to human knowledge
  – The edification of the church
  – Developing character (!)

What is Research?

• “Research done by others determines most of what any of us believes. . . . Only when we know that we can trust the research of others can we free ourselves from those who by controlling our beliefs would control our lives.”
  – (Wayne Booth, et al., The Craft of Research 7)

What is Research?

• General principles
  – Be committed to excellence.
  – Plan your research as a strategy.
  – Develop lateral thinking.
  – Write throughout the process.
    • Writing helps you remember.
    • Writing clarifies your thinking.
    • Writing helps you analyze your sources.
    • Writing gives you perspective on your own ideas.

Research and Our Faith

• How does research relate to our faith?
Research and Our Faith

• How does research relate to our faith?
  – We may do research on Christian topics.
  – We can bring a Christian perspective to secular topics.
  – Research is a search for truth.
  – All truth is God’s truth.
  – Research is one way of loving God with our minds (Matt. 22:37).

Research and Our Faith

• How would a Christian worldview affect how you do research?
  – Christians and non-Christians may agree on facts but differ on meaning/significance.
  – George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*
  – Foundational beliefs affect the “big picture.”
  – The more our research gets into questions of meaning, the more our faith plays a part.

Research and Our Faith

• “Christianity sacralizes—makes sacred—the intellectual life. It gives the questions we struggle with in our work and in our lives a larger significance.”
  – Robert Wuthnow

Research and Our Faith

• Research from a Christian perspective…
  – Can critique other foundational beliefs.
  – Can expose “myth of liberal neutrality.”
  – Will consider the spiritual dimension.
  – Will expect to touch the transcendent through the finite.
  – Should lead to humility.
  – George Marsden

Research and Our Faith

• Some criticism of “Christian scholarship”:
  – Claims divine sanction for your own views?
  – Claims automatic superiority to other work?
  – Marsden: Adopt “methodological secularization” but not “methodological atheism.”

Research and Our Faith

• What does it mean to do research as a Christian?
  – Within the framework of our faith.
  – With a foundation of biblical truth, as stewards.
  – Out of our own traditions.
  – Bringing our best efforts to the task.
  – With reliance on the Spirit.
  – With intellectual honesty.
  – With ethical sensitivity.
  – With humility.
  – As an act of worship.
The Research Process

- Badke’s process (6)
  - Begin with a good question.
  - Collect data.
  - Synthesize the data in light of the question to produce information.
  - Develop conclusions and recommendations.

Research Process: A Topic

- See handout, “The Process of Research.”
- Finding a topic
  - What is your experience?
  - Start with an area of interest.
  - Find a topic within the area of interest.
    - Check textbooks, indexes in the area.
    - Interview experts.
    - Check subject headings in your library.
    - Find areas in which your library has good holdings.

Research Process: A Question

- Gain a working knowledge of the topic through reference sources.
- Use your working knowledge to develop a research question.
- Research question = sometimes called a research problem or issue.
  - One research question per research project.
  - Put it in question form.
  - NOT a yes-or-no question but open-ended.

Research Process: A Thesis

- Your research will take you from your research question to a thesis statement.
- Brainstorm exploratory questions to open up areas for research.
- Research widely, analyzing and reflecting as you read.

Research Process: A Thesis

- Develop essential questions that must be answered to answer your research question.
- Use them to focus your research.
- Come to conclusions from your research.
- Formulate your findings in a thesis statement.
- Outline your essential research in light of your thesis statement.

Doing a Thesis at ATS

- See handout, “Instructions for the M.A. Thesis.”
- Look at theses in library.
- Completing this course and getting your proposal accepted are two different things!
- Follow my instructions and you’ll be fine.
Thinking Like a Reader

• See handout, “Connecting With Your Reader.”
  – Research writing is like a conversation.
  – Your readers will judge you by how accurately you judge them.
  – Think about your reader from the beginning of your project.

Thinking Like a Reader

• All readers share certain interests.
• Who is your community of readers?
• What do they expect you to do for them?
• How much do they know?

Thinking Like a Reader

• Do they already understand your problem/question?
• How will they respond to your solution/answer?
• What attitude will they take to your research and conclusions?