

Theological Research & Writing

06PT6115 – Fall 2026

Reformed Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.

Tuesdays, 6:00 – 7:00 p.m.

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Course Description

This is a one-hour course on theological research and writing, intended to help students develop communication skills that will be useful both in ministry and in further education. This course will focus on the process of writing a graduate-level essay, with special attention given to research methods, developing a strong thesis, avoiding plagiarism, and editing strategies.

Course Goals

- Students will be able to use library resources and services effectively.
- Students will be able to compose papers appropriate to the courses they are taking.
- Students will be able to develop an effective thesis statement.
- Students will be able to defend their thesis with a clear and cogent argument.
- Students will be able to recognize what plagiarism is and avoid it in their writing through proper source usage and citation.
- Students will be able to compile and manage bibliographies.
- Students will be able to edit and revise their work for grammar, structure, content, and style.

Required Texts

Kibbe, Michael. *From Topic to Thesis: A Guide to Theological Research*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016.

Pinker, Steven. *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21st Century*. New York: Penguin Books, 2014. Pages 57-76. (Available on Canvas)

Strunk, William, and E.B. White. *The Elements of Style*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000.

Turabian, Kate, et. al. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 9th ed. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2018.

Course Assignments

- *Reading Report* (10%) At the conclusion of the course, you will submit a reading report on Canvas with the percentage completed of all assigned readings. **(Due 12/17)**
- *Attendance and Participation* (10%) Regular attendance and participation in class are expected. If you will be unable to attend a class session, please notify the professor (preferably in advance). Absences without communication will result in a reduction of the student's participation grade.

- *Research and preliminary work (20%)*
 - *Initial Topic*– You will submit the topic choice for your final paper. **(Due 9/29)**
 - *Paper Outline* – You will create and submit a working outline for your paper, including your tentative thesis statement. This should be at minimum a 3-level outline and should include references to your research. Further details for this assignment will be discussed in class. **(Due 10/27)**
 - *Paragraph Sample* – You will submit a sample body paragraph for review. This paragraph should have a strong topic sentence and at least one quote with an appropriately formatted citation for review. Your quote should be appropriately introduced and should be followed by your explanation of its support for your topic sentence and the argument of the paragraph. **(Due 11/10)**
- *Paper Draft (20%)* – While this is not intended to be a final, finished product, this draft should include the basic components of your paper. The first draft of the paper should include, at minimum, your thesis statement, at least 4-5 body paragraphs, and your working bibliography, formatted according to Turabian, which should include at least 8 sources, two of which must be from academic journals. Further details for this assignment will be discussed in class. **(Due 12/1)**
- *Final Paper (40%)* – This final paper is the major focus of the course. The final draft of your paper should be formatted according to Chicago/Turabian style. The paper should be 10-15 pages (double-spaced), have a strong thesis statement which is supported throughout the paper, and should cite at least 8 sources, two of which must be from academic journals. These sources should all be listed in a bibliography at the end of your paper, formatted according to Chicago/Turabian style guidelines. The final paper should reflect changes and edits from your initial draft based on the instructor's comments. **(Due 12/17)**

The following scale will be used to determine your final grade: A (97-100), A- (94-96), B+ (91-93), B (88-90), B- (86-87), C+ (83-85), C (80-82), C- (78-79), D+ (75-77), D (72-74), D- (70-71), F (below 70).

Late Work Policy

Late work will be accepted, provided there is advance communication from the student to the professor and an agreement is reached for a new deadline for the assignment. In the event that the student does not communicate regarding the late work, the total grade for late assignments will be reduced by 10% each day past the due date.

AI Policy

The use of AI tools is not permitted for this class. While there are many good applications for AI technologies in the realm of research, the purpose of this class is to develop the basic research and writing capabilities of the student such that he or she possesses the skills necessary to complete this work without the use of AI and in future may use AI tools with discernment and wisdom. Using AI before one has a thorough understanding of basic research and writing skills can lead to a misuse of such technologies and a lack of discernment for their application in the writing process.

Course Outline

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Suggested Reading Schedule</i>	<i>Assignments</i>
9/8	Syllabus/Introduction	Kibbe pp. 11-44	
9/15	Choosing a Topic	Kibbe pp. 45-54	
9/22	Research	Kibbe pp. 55-64	
9/29	Research, cont.	Turabian pp. 25-50	Topic selection due
10/6	Crafting a Thesis	Kibbe pp.77- 91	
10/13	READING WEEK		
10/20	Outlining	Turabian pp. 51-74	
10/27	Sentence & Paragraph Structure	Strunk & White 15-38	Paper outline due
11/3	Writing a Draft	Pinker pp. 57-76	
11/10	Bibliography & Citations	Turabian 149-168	Sample paragraph due
11/17	No class – ETS/SBL		
11/24	Grammar & Usage	Strunk & White pp. 1-14; Turabian pp. 305-318	
12/1	Plagiarism	Turabian pp. 75-85; 139-148; 358-369	Rough draft due
12/8	Editing & Style	Strunk & White pp.66-85	
12/15	<i>Exam Week - No Class</i>	Turabian pp. 102-123	Reading report & final paper due 12/17

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Theological Research and Writing

Professor: Stephanie DiMaria

Campus: Washington, D.C.

Date: Fall 2026

MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.

**As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.*

		Rubric > Strong > Moderate > Minimal > None	Mini-Justification
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.	Strong	1. Lectures and discussion on research which builds to clear and effective writing. 2. Lectures and discussion focus upon developing oral and written communication skills.
Scripture	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Minimal	1. Students may choose to write an exegesis paper for their main project. 2. Research for writing about scripture will be discussed in class.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Minimal	1. Students may choose to write a systematic or historical theology paper for their main project
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	None	
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Minimal	1. Students learn how studying and writing theology will affect their future vocation and ministry regardless of what shape that may take.
Winsomely Reformed	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Minimal	1. Students are taught principles of writing theology boldly and in a spirit of graciousness and love.
Preach	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Moderate	1. Students are taught how to clearly communicate a line of thought to an audience, an essential component to effective preaching.
Worship	Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.	None	
Shepherd	Ability to shepherd the local congregation: aiding in spiritual maturity; promoting use of gifts and callings; and encouraging a concern for non-Christians, both in America and worldwide.	None	
Church/World	Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	None	