

RS102 & Thesis: Ten Things to Know

Degrees requiring RS102 or Thesis: ThM & STM

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1. What is the purpose of RS102?

RS102 is a capstone writing project for your program. Writing this paper is an opportunity to explore a research topic you have developed a passion for, before or during your seminary education. This paper is also an evaluative tool designed to measure your ability to accurately and effectively argue a research topic at the graduate level.

2. When should I take RS102?

Plan to take RS102 in your final semester or after satisfactorily completing 90 hours in the ThM. If you take RS101 in your first semester (as we advise), RS101 & RS102 serve as “book-end” courses in your program.

3. What kind of work will I be responsible for when I take RS102?

The only graded assignment for RS102 is a 20-25 page, argumentative research paper. There is no required reading outside of research material for your paper topic, no quizzes or exams, no lectures, and no required class attendance—just the paper.

4. What should I write my RS102 paper on?

In short, it depends on your emphasis. Students are encouraged to discuss their final research paper with their emphasis faculty advisor and other faculty connected with their emphasis.

A few questions to consider as you select a topic in your emphasis: (see template on final page)

- Which class(es) did you most enjoy? (Review the required and recommended books for further inquiry)
- What books (chapters, paragraphs, or authors) have most shaped your thinking and spiritual formation?
- What ministry skills do you want to enhance through further research?

5. When should I start thinking about my RS102 topic?

The earlier the better! RS101 teaches you *how* to research and RS102 or a Thesis gives you a chance to *apply* your research skills on a particular topic. Once you have an idea of which

discipline/topic you intend to explore, you may want to choose elective courses to help you identify and narrow down your topic.

6. Is it true that I need to select and secure a faculty member to read/grade my RS102 paper?

Yes, you are personally responsible to select and secure a faculty reader for your paper. You should select a faculty reader whose interest and research relate to your topic. You will consult your reader for guidance throughout the research process and will want an expert in your field of study. (View the current list of professors [here](#).)

7. When should I go about securing a faculty reader?

It is recommended that you make arrangements to secure a faculty reader the semester *before* or *early* (first two to three weeks) in the semester you are registered for RS 102. If students are pursuing a Thesis, it is recommended to begin conversations with faculty a few months before you register for the Thesis. Faculty members are limited in the number of papers they can read. For this reason, you should also have a second faculty reader (RS 102) in mind, in the event that the first is unavailable.

Students are encouraged to meet with their faculty reader at least once during the process (if not more) to gain feedback on their paper and gain further direction. For the Thesis, the frequency and expectations for meetings will be discussed with the department and faculty overseeing their paper. Please note: faculty availability may be more limited in the summer semester.

8. What is the difference between a Thesis and RS102?

ThM and STM students can select either RS102 or a Thesis to complete their degree. Below are some key distinctions between the two options:

RS102 – is one semester and students work with one faculty reader. Students are encouraged to meet with their faculty member at least once during the semester to discuss their paper and gain feedback before submitting the final draft.

Thesis – is a one-year process with two faculty readers. Students can register for the Thesis for two-hours or three-hours. If students intend to do the three-hour thesis, then the extra hour will take the place of one-hour of electives in their emphasis or open electives (if available). For some students, this means they will graduate with additional hours in their degree. Students should plan their elective hours closely with their academic advisor if they intend to write a thesis. (The [Student Handbook](#) provides more info about the Thesis in section 1.24)

9. What does the Thesis process look like?

Students can register for a two-hour or three-hour thesis. A two-hour thesis should not exceed 12,000 words, including footnotes but excluding bibliography. A three-hour thesis should not exceed 17,000 words, including footnotes but excluding bibliography. Students will agree upon the deadlines for the thesis during the registration process (see below). The recommended timeline below allows the faculty approximately five weeks to review each draft.

	Spring Registration	Summer Registration	Fall Registration
Subject Approval Form	November 1	February 1	April 1
Syllabus	March 15	August 15	September 15
First Two Chapters	June 15	November 1	February 1
First Draft	September 15	January 15	May 15
Final Draft	November 15	April 1	July 15
Final Approved Thesis	Due when graduating student course work is due for your semester of completion.		

10. How do I register for a Thesis?

Students can register for the thesis using the [Thesis Subject Approval/Registration](#) form. If students select a three-hour thesis, this additional hour will use an elective in their emphasis or open electives (if available). If students plan to do a three-hour thesis, they should work closely with their academic advisor to avoid taking additional hours in their degree.

Additional Resources:

[DTS Library Writing Resources](#) – This page includes the DTS Turabian supplement, Word document templates, and other formatting related matters.

Birkenstein, Cathy and Gerald Graff. *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. Fourth Edition. New York: Norton & Company, 2017. (Required for RS 101)

Kibbe, Michael. *From Topic to Thesis: A Guide to Theological Research*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016. (Required for RS 101)

“Research Writing” (Chapter 17) in *Your Guide to Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology* by Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 9th ed. Revised by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colcomb, and Joseph M. Williams. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018. (or current edition)

University Based Online Writing Labs

- Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL) - <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl>
- Excelsior University Online Writing Lab (OWL) - <http://owl.excelsior.edu>
- Punctuation and Grammar Errors from University of Wisconsin Online Writing Lab (OWL) - <http://www.uwc.edu/students/academic-support/owl/punctuation-and-grammar-errors>

Online Turabian Citation Creators (Always double-check with DTS supplement guide on citations!)

- Citation Machine - <http://www.citationmachine.net>
- Citation Software:
 - [Zotero](#) – Free platform and step-by-step guide provided in *From Topic to Thesis* “Appendix E” and on the DTS website: <https://library.dts.edu/Pages/RM/Write/zotero.pdf>
 - [EndNote](#) – Robust citation software but requires students to purchase the software. There is a student discount available. This may be a good investment for long-term research in ministry or doctoral studies but ask other students or professors their experience.

Guidance on Writing from Struck and White *Elements of Style*

- Struck and White’s classic work, *Elements of Style* is available online - <http://www.bartleby.com/141>

Top 10 Tips for Writing Your Final Project

By Dr. Sandra Glahn (video available here)

1. *Figure out what you're saying and say it clearly.* Your subject relates to the best news in the world. So you of all people have something worth saying. Is your proposition clearly stated? Can you back it up? Strive for clarity. If you're having trouble coming up with a topic, "cluster" related ideas.
2. *Outline.* In academic work, your structure needs to show. Do you reveal your outline through your central propositions, your headings, your subheadings, and your overall organization?
3. *Craft strong transitions.* Between sections, you might write, "While X establishes the ABC view, Y suggests otherwise." Between paragraphs, you might need only a word such as "However," "Similarly," or "Nevertheless." Within paragraphs, short words or phrases also work: *Conversely*, K says.... *And* L agrees.... *But* some think otherwise.... An outstanding reference that offers good phrases for doing this is the thin but expensive book *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*.
4. *Know that most of writing is rewriting.* So go ahead and write a super-crummy first draft. Then go back and clean it up. And clean it up more. And then clean it more.
5. *Rely on active voice.* Most academic works use too much passive voice, because doing so has the advantage of eliminating the first-person subject. And usually you want to "write yourself out of the story" in academic writing. But avoid overuse, or your writing will, as they say, cure insomnia.
6. *Check your spelling.* Verify the names of scholars quoted, books cited, and organizations.
7. *Check your grammar.* The most common grammar error in the English language is mismatching singulars and plurals (i.e., agreement): "If someone smiles, they are probably happy" is wrong. Someone is not a "they."
8. *Check your punctuation.* Make sure to follow Turabian as well as the DTS style guide, because punctuation can vary from guide to guide.
9. *Follow every quote with a summary or explanation.* Never end a paragraph with someone else's quote. Before moving on, provide a summary or transition statement. This is *your* argument.
10. *"Do unto others...."* Loving others well means giving credit where credit is due, recognizing how offended you'd feel if someone tried to pass off your research as his or her own. It's dishonest to plagiarize, but it's also completely unloving. Additionally, if you must quote an opinion with which you disagree, represent the author fairly and keep the tone respectful. Ask yourself, "If I were to meet this person for lunch tomorrow, would he or she think I had been just?"

Part of following the Golden Rule and reaching the widest-possible audience can be using gender-inclusive language. The following statement comes from the syllabus of Dr. Barry Jones in DTS's Pastoral Ministries Department: "All written submissions should strive to use gender-inclusive language. While this has become standard academic practice, this request is not merely an attempt at 'political correctness.' As a gospel-shaped, gospel-centered community of learning, we have compelling reasons to think, write, and speak in such a way as to insure that none are either intentionally or inadvertently excluded by our use of language. Consider using 'humans,' 'persons,' 'humanity,' or 'humankind'" rather than 'man' or 'men' when referring to human beings in general. Consider alternating between the use of 'he' and 'she' as generic pronouns or substituting the use of the plural ('they,' 'them,' 'their') when appropriate.

You have something worth saying—words of life and healing. So strive to communicate your message well.

Dr. Sandra Glahn walks students through the Writing Process in the following videos:

1. [Schedule](#) (7 minutes)
2. [Brainstorm](#) (5 minutes)
3. [Outline & Transitions](#) (4 minutes)
4. [Review & Polish](#) (21 minutes)
5. [Writing Ethically/Q&A](#) (11 minutes)

View the whole presentation from beginning to end [here](#). (49 minutes)

Template to Narrow Topic and Consider Selecting Faculty Member:

(Unofficial Professor Request Form for RS 102)

What is the specific research topic you intend to study?

Why is this topic of special interest to you?

What is your *preliminary* outline (major points) or thesis?

What are 5-10 sources you have briefly reviewed in preparation for this research?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Who are 2-3 professors you believe possess advanced knowledge in this research area?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.