

Using Research to Strengthen Your Writing
Write His Answer 2024
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**Some material taken from CT's Fact Checking Guide, 2022*

Why Research?

- **Biblical perspective.** Much of Scripture is historical record or letters. The writers of Scripture were recording and documenting their experience. Some of it just may have been their memory, but if you look closely, the writers also used interviews and oral history, as well as citing other Scriptures, to bolster their writing. (Luke, Paul, etc)
- Gaining **trust** with our audience – unless we have spent a long time in a field with personal experience (which some of our books and articles will be about our personal experience), often we need to convince our readers that we've done our homework and they should listen to us. As Christians, our speech must be seasoned by salt (Matt. 5:13), and everything must be tested according to Scripture (1 John 4:1).
- Striving for **excellence.** We fact check our claims so that we avoid error, avoid foolishness, and avoid sloppy work. Some of my writers are so focused on writing with excellence regarding word choice and commas, which is one type of excellence, but we also need to zoom out on the very claims we are making and our argumentation.
 - *We strive to be trustworthy communicators to our readers. We also strive to treat our sources—writers of books and articles, those we interview, and the Bible itself—with the same courtesy and fairness that we would wish to be shown. These inward and outward expressions of care are key to not only our professionalism, but also to our calling to become more like Christ. – CT Fact Checking Guide*
- **Humility** – we don't have all the answers, we lean on writers and field experts
- **Anticipate objections.** What clarifications and nuances will your readers be looking for? Whenever possible, use modifiers like *some, many, often, or sometimes* that temper your claims and avoid the appearance of argument overreach.

What Kind of Research?

- Original research
 - Interviews (e.g. calling people, or attending a church you're talking about, or talking to someone in your church about their experience in small group)
 - Data: analyzing yourself rather than relying on someone's interpretation
 - Self-citing
- Aggregated research
 - Google! Looking at URLs and non-sketchy websites. Why is this person / site qualified.
 - Primary sources
 - Books (I like looking at biographies/works cited/further reading pages)
- Biblical Research
 - Watch your theological claims, as well, and your biblical exegesis. Check against commentaries.

- Embed the biblical study into your writing. Adding a few *ad hoc* Bible verses isn't complete research.
- Get excited!
 - What's your book/article topic? Do you know who your competitors are? Has this book or article already been written? Why is yours needed or unique?
 - Think about getting a "mini Master's" on the topic. Be the expert.
 - More broadly, your writing should reflect a familiarity with your subject matter. It's easy to find an expert or study to back any argument, but such a source should be communicated in the context of agreeing or dissenting voices.

How To Research or Fact Check

- Start with research and end with research
- My process: have a thesis, usually an idea that hasn't originated with me but I want to explore. Sometimes an idea that has originated with me. Then, I look around to see if anyone else has written about this topic. If this is a devotional, I study the Scripture first, then cross-references/commentaries, etc.

Fact Checking:

- Find original source
- Check for yourself
- Google Books search
- "There's always a database"
- Seek secondary verification for details about a personal source whenever possible. Always give the first and last name (no hypothetical figures representative of a study), obtain a source's birth date if you include their age, and ensure all quotes are recorded exactly as said. Discuss any requests for anonymity with your editor.
- Quotes not obtained personally must be both copied accurately and attributed to the correct person or source—ideally by finding the original use of the quote. Do not assume a statement is correct or correctly attributed because it's used in a prominent book. (One good resource is Quote Investigator.)
- Double-check every Scripture quotation and provide in parentheses the references and—when not quoting from the 2011 NIV—the translation's abbreviation. Scholars quoting their personal translation is acceptable if specified. Lowercase letters indicating portions of verses are not necessary. Also, a glitch prevents us from linking to Bible Gateway.
- Double-check all numbers in a story, especially percentages, statistics, and your own calculations.

Other Tips:

- **Read the publication.** If pitching an article, read the publication first. A lot. The best articles come from writers who study our work and emulate it.
- **Can you verify?** Broad factual statements ("Christianity is in decline in America"; "People want their pastors to talk about current events"), as well as specific details, must hold up to scrutiny or else be clarified with more nuance or precision.

Q&A