



BISR9302 Supervised Reading Colloquium: New Testament Genre

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
Biblical Studies Division

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Mission Statement

The mission of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary is to equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandments through the local church and its ministries.

Course Purpose, Core Value Focus, and Curriculum Competencies

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary has five core values: Doctrinal Integrity, Spiritual Vitality, Mission Focus, Characteristic Excellence, and Servant Leadership. This course addresses Doctrinal Integrity in that helps prepare the student to grow in the interpretation and application of the Word of God. Characteristic Excellence is also addressed in that the student should exhibit excellence in the ability to interpret Scripture. This course primarily addresses the competency of Biblical Exposition by preparing the student to interpret and communicate the Bible accurately. The core value for this year is Spiritual Vitality.

Course Description

The Ph.D. reading colloquiums in New Testament consists of discussion periods covering various readings in the field of New Testament. This colloquium centers on readings in New Testament introductions and genre studies. The colloquium will meet once a month during the semester for discussion periods. The meetings will include the discussion of the required reading selections.

Required Textbooks:

Gospel

DeSilva, David. *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Pennington, Jonathan T. *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2012.

Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Vol. 2, Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1994.

Acts and Letters (James, Peter, John, & Jude)

Davids, Peter H. *A Theology of James, Peter and Jude*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament, ed. Andreas I. Kostenberger, gen ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

Keener, Craig S. *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 1:1-2:47*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2012.

Nienhuis, David R. and Wall, Robert W. *Reading the Epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude as Scripture: The Shaping and Shape of A Canonical Collection*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013.

Genre of Letters (Paul)

Dunn, James D. G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998.

Westerholm, Stephen. *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2003.

Wright, N. T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*.

Yinger, Kent L. *The New Perspective on Paul: An Introduction*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011.

Apocalyptic

Collins, John J. *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.

Kaiser, Walter, and Darrell Bock and Peter Enns. *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2008.

Stevens, Gerald L. *Revelation: The Past and Future of John's Apocalypse*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Press, 2014.

Witherington, Ben. *Revelation*. The New Cambridge Biblical Commentary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Course Requirements:

The student will:

1. Read All Required Texts and Prepare Book Reviews for Each Session.

Read and review the required texts as stipulated in the schedule below.

The Book Review will be 4-5 pages single-spaced and consist of the following:

- Bibliographic data about the author
- The thesis/purpose of the book
- A summary of the development of the thesis
- A critique of the book citing strengths and weaknesses
- A synopsis of 3 reviews of the book from scholarly journals.

2. Participate actively in the discussion of the readings.

Each student will participate in the discussion of selected texts for each session.

3. Attend every meeting.

Because of the nature of the course, no absences are allowed. If emergency situations dictate an absence, the student will schedule a make-up session with the professor. Work is still due the day scheduled even if the student is absent. Any student missing more than one meeting must repeat the colloquium.

Course Schedule

The time for all class meetings are listed in the Research Doctoral class schedule.

Session 1: Gospel

- Read DeSilva for background information: Sections 1-7; 9
- Prepare a Book Review of:

Pennington, Jonathan T. *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2012.

Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Vol. 2, Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1994.

Session 2: History and Letters (James, Peter, Jude, and John)

- Read DeSilva for background information: Section 8, 10, 21-23
- Prepare a Book Review of:

Dauids, Peter H. *A Theology of James, Peter and Jude*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament, ed. Andreas I. Kostenberger, gen ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

Keener, Craig S. *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 1:1-2:47*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2012. (Introductory section only)

Nienhuis, David R. and Wall, Robert W. *Reading the Epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude as Scripture: The Shaping and Shape of A Canonical Collection*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013.

Session 3: Letters (Paul)

- Read DeSilva for background information: Sections 11-20;
- Read Yinger prior to preparation of the following reviews:
- Prepare a Book Review of:

Dunn, James D. G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998.

Westerholm, Stephen. *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2003.

Wright, N. T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*.

Session 4: Apocalyptic

- Read DeSilva for background information: Section 24
- Prepare a Book Review of:

Collins, John J. *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.

Kaiser, Walter, and Darrell Bock and Peter Enns. *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2008.

Stevens, Gerald L. *Revelation: The Past and Future of John's Apocalypse*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Press, 2014.

Witherington, Ben. *Revelation*. The New Cambridge Biblical Commentary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. (Introduction section only)

Writing Book Reviews¹

This handout offers a process and suggests some strategies for writing book reviews. The most important element of a review is that it is a commentary, not merely a summary. It allows you to enter into dialogue and discussion with the work's creator and with other audiences. You can offer agreement or disagreement and identify where you find the work exemplary or deficient in its knowledge, judgments, or organization. You should clearly state your opinion of the work in question, and that statement will probably resemble other types of academic writing, with a thesis statement, supporting body paragraphs, and a conclusion. See our [handout on argument](#).

Typically, reviews are brief. In newspapers and academic journals, they rarely exceed 1000 words, although you may encounter lengthier assignments and extended commentaries. In either case, reviews need to be succinct. While they vary in tone, subject, and style, they **share some common features**:

¹ Source for this handout: University of North Carolina Writing Center: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/files/2012/09/Book-Reviews-The-Writing-Center.pdf>

- First, a review gives the reader a concise summary of the content. This includes a relevant description of the topic as well as its overall perspective, argument, or purpose.
- Second, and more importantly, a review offers a critical assessment of the content. This involves your reactions to the work under review: what strikes you as noteworthy, whether or not it was effective or persuasive, and how it enhanced your understanding of the issues at hand.
- Finally, in addition to analyzing the work, a review often suggests whether or not the audience would appreciate it.

Develop an Assessment *Before* You Write

There is no definitive method to writing a review, although some critical thinking about the work at hand is necessary before you actually begin writing. Thus, writing a review is a two-step process: developing an argument about the work under consideration, and making that argument as you write an organized and well-supported draft. See our [handout on argument](#). What follows is a **series of questions to focus your thinking** as you dig into the work at hand. While the questions specifically consider book reviews, you can easily transpose them to an analysis of performances, exhibitions, and other review subjects. Don't feel obligated to address each of the questions; some will be more relevant than others to the book in question.

- What is the thesis—or main argument—of the book? If the author wanted you to get one idea from the book, what would it be? How does it compare or contrast to the world you know? What has the book accomplished?
- What exactly is the subject or topic of the book? Does the author cover the subject adequately? Does the author cover all aspects of the subject in a balanced fashion? What is the approach to the subject (topical, analytical, chronological, descriptive)?
- How does the author support her argument? What evidence does she use to prove her point? Do you find that evidence convincing? Why or why not? Does any of the author's information (or conclusions) conflict with other books you've read, courses you've taken or just previous assumptions you had of the subject?
- How does the author structure her argument? What are the parts that make up the whole? Does the argument make sense? Does it persuade you? Why or why not?
- How has this book helped you understand the subject? Would you recommend the book to your reader? Beyond the internal workings of the book, you may

also **consider some information about the author and the circumstances of the text's production:**

- Who is the author? Nationality, political persuasion, training, intellectual interests, personal history, and historical context may provide crucial details about how a work takes shape. Does it matter, for example, that the biographer was the subject's best friend? What difference would it make if the author participated in the events she writes about? Include a short paragraph on the background of the author.
- What is the book's genre? Out of what field does it emerge? Does it conform to or depart from the conventions of its genre? These questions can provide a historical or literary standard on which to base your evaluations. If you are reviewing the first book ever written on the subject, it will be important for your readers to know. Keep in mind, though, that naming "firsts"—alongside naming "bests" and "onlys"—can be a risky business unless you're absolutely certain.

Writing the Book Review

Once you have made your observations and assessments of the work under review, carefully survey your notes and attempt to unify your impressions into a statement that will describe the purpose or thesis of your review. Check out our [handout on thesis statements](#). Then, outline the arguments that support your thesis. Your arguments should develop the thesis in a logical manner. That logic, unlike more standard academic writing, may initially emphasize the author's argument while you develop your own in the course of the review. The relative emphasis depends on the nature of the review: if readers may be more interested in the work itself, you may want to make the work and the author more prominent; if you want the review to be about your perspective and opinions, then you may structure the review to privilege your observations over (but never separate from) those of the work under review. What follows is just one of many ways to organize a review.

A. Introduction

Since most reviews are brief, many writers begin with a catchy quip or anecdote that succinctly delivers their argument. But you can introduce your review differently depending on the argument and audience. The Writing Center's [handout on introductions](#) can help you find an approach that works. In general, **you should include:**

- The name of the author and the book title and the main theme.

- Relevant details about who the author is and where he/she stands in the genre or field of inquiry. You could also link the title to the subject to show how the title explains the subject matter.
- The context of the book and/or your review. Placing your review in a framework that makes sense to your audience alerts readers to your “take” on the book. Perhaps you want to situate a book about the Cuban revolution in the context of Cold War rivalries between the United States and the Soviet Union. Another reviewer might want to consider the book in the framework of Latin American social movements. Your choice of context informs your argument.
- The thesis of the book. If you are reviewing fiction, this may be difficult since novels, plays, and short stories rarely have explicit arguments. But identifying the book’s particular novelty, angle, or originality allows you to show what specific contribution the piece is trying to make.
- Your thesis about the book.

B. Summary of content

- This should be brief, as analysis takes priority. In the course of making your assessment, you’ll hopefully be backing up your assertions with concrete evidence from the book, so some summary will be dispersed throughout other parts of the review.
- The necessary amount of summary also depends on your audience. Graduate students, beware! If you are writing book reviews for colleagues—to prepare for comprehensive exams, for example—you may want to devote more attention to summarizing the book’s contents. If, on the other hand, your audience has already read the book—such as a class assignment on the same work—you may have more liberty to explore more subtle points and to emphasize your own argument. See our [handout on summary](#) for more tips.

C. Analysis and evaluation of the book

- Your analysis and evaluation should be organized into paragraphs that deal with single aspects of your argument. This arrangement can be challenging when your purpose is to consider the book as a whole, but it can help you differentiate elements of your criticism and pair assertions with evidence more clearly.

- You do not necessarily need to work chronologically through the book as you discuss it. Given the argument you want to make, you can organize your paragraphs more usefully by themes, methods, or other elements of the book.
- If you find it useful to include comparisons to other books, keep them brief so that the book under review remains in the spotlight.
- Avoid excessive quotation and give a specific page reference in parentheses when you do quote. Remember that you can state many of the author's points in your own words.

D. Conclusion

- Sum up or restate your thesis or make the final judgment regarding the book. You should not introduce new evidence for your argument in the conclusion. You can, however, introduce new ideas that go beyond the book if they extend the logic of your own thesis.
- This paragraph needs to balance the book's strengths and weaknesses in order to unify your evaluation. Did the body of your review have three negative paragraphs and one favorable one? What do they all add up to? The Writing Center's [handout on conclusions](#) can help you make a final assessment.

Finally, a few general considerations:

- Review the book in front of you, not the book you wish the author had written. You can and should point out shortcomings or failures, but don't criticize the book for not being something it was never intended to be.
- With any luck, the author of the book worked hard to find the right words to express her ideas. You should attempt to do the same. Precise language allows you to control the tone of your review.
- Never hesitate to challenge an assumption, approach, or argument. Be sure, however, to cite specific examples to back up your assertions carefully.
- Try to present a balanced argument about the value of the book for its audience. You're entitled—and sometimes obligated—to voice strong agreement or disagreement. But keep in mind that a bad book takes as long to write as a good one, and every author deserves fair treatment. Harsh judgments are difficult to prove and can give readers the sense that you were unfair in your assessment.

Further Reading on Writing Book Reviews:

A great place to learn about book reviews is to look at examples. *The New York Times Sunday Book Review* and *The New York Review of Books* can show you how professional

writers review books. See also: Drewry, John. *Writing Book Reviews*. Boston: The Writer, 1974. *Literary Reviewing*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987. Teitelbaum, Harry. *How to Write Book Reports*. 3rd ed. New York: Macmillan, 1998. Walford, A.J., ed. *Reviews and Reviewing: A Guide*. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1986.

Source for this Book Review handout: University of North Carolina Writing Center: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/files/2012/09/Book-Reviews-The-Writing-Center.pdf>

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