

Exercise 5. Tools: Using the ATLA Database Submitting a Research Proposal (homework)

Defining a Research Proposal

It is time to decide what you would like to study for your in-depth exegetical project this quarter. That can be an overwhelming decision, since you can select any passage, theme or issue in any New Testament book! You're in luck if you chose your topic last week for Exercise 4; you're almost done with this assignment.

Here are some tips to help you narrow down your topic:

- Think about the topic statement as a question you want to answer.
- Think back over the readings and class discussion so far; has any question really grabbed your attention? Look over "An Introduction to Critical Methods" (pp. 48-50) to stimulate ideas about the types of questions you might ask. Or consider a question that has come up in your own life or ministry that you have about the New Testament.
- If you're still struggling, look over some bibliographies – in Brown, *NTA*, our online course bibliography, the tables of contents or indices of the major journals (*Journal of Biblical Literature*, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*) – to see if something piques your interest.
- Narrow that question or issue down so that you can focus on ONE passage (or a few related short passages) in ONE NT book. That may sound overly narrow right now, but academic articles usually focus on particular passages, and for the depth required on this assignment, narrow is better than broad.

Once you've settled on a topic, explore *NTA* and the ATLA Database with your search terms and research focus in mind. Identify six recent peer-reviewed articles in academic journals and academic books for your bibliography. This will form your initial working bibliography.

How to Use the ATLA Database

The ATLA Religion Database is the most comprehensive database for finding articles, essays and books in professional and popular venues in religious studies and theology. It's so comprehensive that it actually includes *New Testament Abstracts*! It allows you to search for publications related to your biblical passage or topic with ease, from a computer anywhere on or off campus.

You're going to find it very easy to use ATLA, since it's published by the same company that publishes the *NTA* database. The interface is almost identical.

To access the ATLA database, go to the library Web site (www.scu.edu/library). Under the "University Library" logo, find the central navigation section "Databases." The databases are accessible in two ways: by subject groupings or alphabetically.

- If you want to search by subject area, click on the "Browse by Subject" window to see the full list of disciplines, then scroll down and select "Religious Studies," and click on the two red arrows to the right of the window. This will open up a list of databases we have in Religious Studies, including the "ATLA Religion Database + ATLAS" and the helpful "Catholic Periodical and Literature Index Online." The ATLA is the better place to start, though, because it's more comprehensive.
- If you know the name of your database (ATLA Religion Database + ATLAS), you can use the alphabetical list by simply clicking on "A" and scrolling down to the title.

Whichever way you get there, click on the "ATLA Religion Database + ATLAS." If you're on campus, the database will open immediately. If you're off-campus, you will be prompted to enter your name and the long number on the back of your Access card (the one that starts 25098...) so as to authorize access. Here is the window you'll see:

The search windows (#1) allow you to put in your search terms and then select a field (#2) directing your search further (e.g., author, title, keyword). At the initial stage of research, it sometimes helps to just leave the field in its default setting ("Select a Field (optional)"), because you don't always know exactly where your search terms might show up, nor do you know what subject categories this particular database uses to catalogue entries. Whatever search terms you use, be prepared to try some synonyms and alternatives if your first search doesn't yield much. Or, if your search returns too many records, you might want to add a second or third search term to narrow your search. Another trick is to collect more hits by using the asterisk key; for example, *feminis** will yield records with both "feminist" and "feminism" in the record.

Numbers 3-6 on the search window above indicate other ways you can narrow your search.

- Click "Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals" (#3) so that all your results are of the proper professional quality.
- In "Publication Type" (#4), hold down the shift key while clicking "Article," "Book," and "Essay" in order to limit your search just to these types of records (at this stage, you don't want abstracts or book reviews of books, but the articles and books themselves).
- Type 1995 in the "Year Published from" window and the current year in the "to" window (#5) in order to pull up more recent entries. If those recent entries are professional, *they* should reference any important earlier works for you.
- At the Language window (#6), scroll down to English (unless you're fluent in another language as well) to limit your results to those you can read.

Now you're ready to search! Just hit the Search button (#7), and the database will find records that match your search parameters. And if that first search doesn't pan out, don't despair; just keep playing around with your pericope, your New Testament book name, your search terms, and your method of criticism, until some results emerge.

Your results will appear in a window that looks like this:

The screenshot shows the EBSCOhost search interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like 'New Search', 'Publications', 'Scriptures', and 'Indexes'. Below this, a search bar contains the query 'syro-phoenician or canaanite and feminis*'. The results section shows 'All Results: 11-20 of 29'. Two records are visible: record 11, 'De-colonizing ourselves as readers: the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman as a text' by Kinukawa, Hisako, and record 12, 'Transforming encounter in the borderlands: a study of Matthew 15:21-28' by Schipani, Daniel S. Both are essays in books. The right sidebar offers filters for 'Limit your results' including 'Linked Full Text', 'Abstract Available', and 'Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals'.

At the top of the central results frame, you can see how many results your search returned (in this case, 29 records). Here are records 11 and 12. Both of these happen to be essays in books; you can tell that because the "Source" is a book title, with publication information and pages. If this were a journal article, you would have a journal title, volume number, year and pages instead. Since you'll probably be scanning a few pages like this (each page contains ten records at a time), the best way to proceed is to scan the list looking for articles that sound interesting and use the critical method you've chosen (feminist criticism, in this case). For each such record, click the "Add to folder" link at the bottom of the record. This will keep a running list of your selected articles as you work through these results. When you've scanned your list, click on the word "Folder" in the blue menu bar at the top of the page to see all the records you've selected. From that page, you can print your results, save them to a flash drive, or email them to yourself.

One note: While these records have more than the required information you'll need to prepare the bibliographic entries for your Research Proposal, the ATLA format of the information does not match the style I would like you to use. Here is how I want you to present each type of entry:

Book	Magonet, Jonathan. <i>Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah</i> . Sheffield: Almond, 1983.
Essay in an Edited Volume (<i>cite by essay author/title, not book editor/title</i>)	Klassen, William. "Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity: The State of the Question." In <i>Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity, vol. 1, Paul and the Gospels</i> (ed. Peter Richardson; Studies in Christianity and Judaism 2; Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986) 1-19.
Essay in Book by a single author	Montgomery, Maxine Lavon. "Charles Chesnutt, The Marrow of Tradition." In <i>The Apocalypse in African-American Fiction</i> (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996) 15-27.
Subsequent Essay in same book	-----, "Toni Morrison, Sula." In <i>The Apocalypse in African-American Fiction</i> , 74-87.
Journal Article	Garrett, Susan R. "Exodus from Bondage: Luke 9:31 and Acts 12:1-24." <i>CBQ</i> 52 (1990) 656-80.

Notice that you do not need to include the database record (a very long url). That would be like writing on your bibliography exactly where you found every source. Since the reader of your paper might not have access to our library, they'd have to find the sources another way. So just give them the basics.

Directions for Your Research Proposal

The assignment you submit should be one page, with a 1-3 sentence statement of your topic or question (including passage and method), followed by the bibliography of eight titles (six from your NTA and ATLA searches, one book on your chosen method, and one commentary on your biblical book). All bibliographic entries should be alphabetized by authors' last names. Note that the topic statement is NOT a thesis statement; a thesis would be the answer to your question, but at the topic statement stage, you only have to formulate your question (not your answer). The format of the paper, and of the bibliography entries, should correspond to the online Style Sheet. You'll also find a sample of the assignment posted on the course website at the Assignments tab.

To find resources on your method, use the bibliographies provided with the introductory exercises in this Workbook, or the bibliographies available for each exegetical method at the course website Exegesis tab.

To find a good commentary on your NT book, go to the Library Web page (www.scu.edu/library), locate the "OSCAR – Library Catalog" box under the University Library icon on the left, select "Advanced Search" from the drop-down window, and, in the box below, type the name of your New Testament book and either the word "commentary" or the name of the commentary series you're looking for (e.g., "Hermeneia" or "Anchor Bible Commentary").

The Next Step: Getting Your Research Materials

Now that you've identified some promising articles, essays and books, you're going to want to find them in our library. You might have discovered that some of the articles in the ATLA Database have links to full-text versions of the article online. You can click on that link and read the article right on your computer screen, or save it to a flash drive or computer. But you'll probably not be able to access all your resources that easily. And while this week's assignment doesn't require you to actually get your sources, you might want some advice on how to do that when you're ready. The next page walks you through that process.