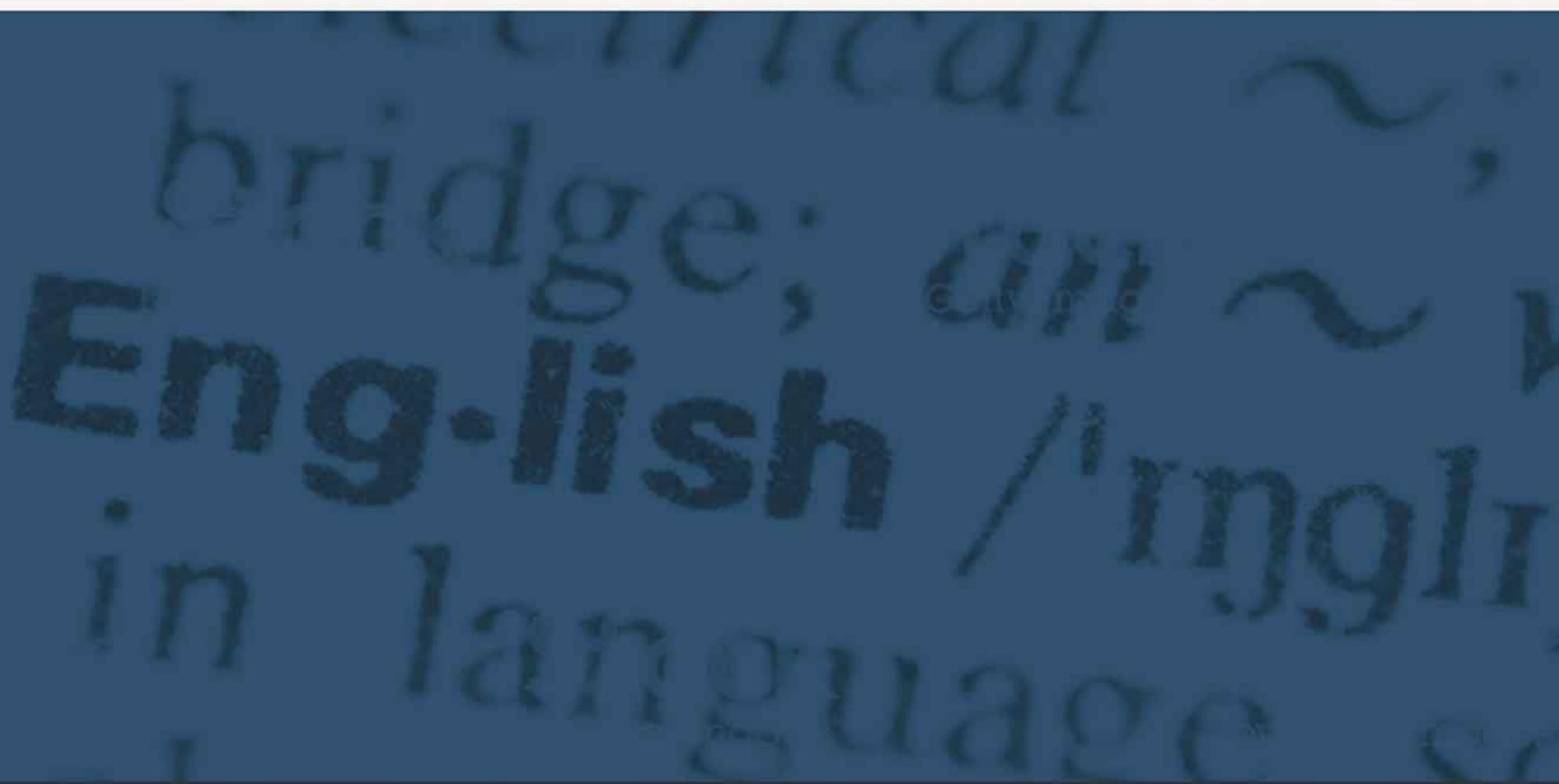


AN ADVANCED ESL TEXT
FOR STUDENTS OF THEOLOGY

THEOLOGICAL ENGLISH



PIERCE TAYLOR HIBBS *with* MEGAN REILEY

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P U B L I S H I N G
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

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For all of the international students at
Westminster Theological Seminary,
past, present, and future.

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Introduction

About the Textbook

In one sense, this textbook is not so special. While it is the product of years of teaching and research in the context of an intensive English program (IEP),¹ it simply attempts to implement the current practices of language learning pedagogy and to use theology as a context for teaching key language skills. The goal of this book, like other EAP (English for Academic Purposes) or ESP (English for Specific Purposes) textbooks,² is to teach English effectively and efficiently within a particular setting and for particular students.

However, in another sense, this textbook is quite special for several reasons. First, it is distinctly rooted in the Reformed theological tradition. Thus, the theology you will learn from this text as you improve your English is not a vague or generic form of Christian theology. It aligns with Reformed orthodoxy, as specifically expressed in the Westminster heritage.

Second, this text is written with a few special areas of focus for non-native speakers of English who are interested in theology. Perhaps the most noteworthy areas are an extended focus on advanced grammar for theological purposes and an introduction to, as well as practice within, specific theological genres: apologetics, biblical studies, church history, systematic theology, and practical theology. By practicing grammatical accuracy and precision, students are better equipped to communicate the truth of Scripture to a world desperately in need of the gospel. By

studying traits and features of English within the above-mentioned genres, students are more prepared to read, write, listen, and speak theology effectively. Thus, this textbook uniquely serves students by helping them to grow in their expression *and* reception of theological English.

Third, in the “Tasks” in this textbook, we focus on helping students to use theological English to communicate gospel truths.³ The tasks are meant to give students the opportunity to use the English skills they have acquired in ways that more easily transfer to real-life situations. Real-life situations for theology students, however, are unique. They might require writing an email to a head pastor or a congregant, discussing the gospel with a non-believer, or leading a weekly Bible study. The tasks in this book are thus meant to give theology students practice in the everyday tasks that they will encounter in ministry or teaching settings.

Fourth, the authors of this text have made a conscious decision to build upon principles of language that are informed by Scripture. In other words, we have certain assumptions about what language is and how it functions, and these assumptions affect the way in which we present English. All of these assumptions can be traced back to Scripture directly or indirectly, especially our assumptions that language is Trinitarian. Language can be and has been used to express the truth clearly and powerfully throughout history. The former assumption warrants some explanation.

1. For details on the Mastering Theological English (MTE) program, see <https://www.wts.edu/programs>.

2. For example, Ken Paterson and Roberta Wedge’s *Oxford Grammar for EAP: English Grammar and Practice for Academic Purposes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), or the particularly rich resource by Cheri L. Pierson, Lonna J. Dickerson, and Florence R. Scott, *Exploring Theological English: Reading, Vocabulary, and Grammar for ESL/EFL* (Carlisle, Great Britain: Piquant, 2010).

3. In this sense, we are following current practices of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) and TBLT (Task Based Language Teaching), which are articulated in various ESL pedagogical texts.

Trinitarian Roots of Language

Language is Trinitarian in two senses.⁴ First, in a broader sense, we believe that language originates with the Trinitarian, self-communing God of the Bible. From all eternity, the persons of the Godhead have “spoken” to each other in the sense that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit eternally express love and glory toward one another. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he does (John 5:20). The Son loves the Father by obeying his commands perfectly, just as he instructs his followers to do (John 14:15, 21, 23). And the Holy Spirit is the bond of personal love between the Father and the Son. In fact, “The Love-life whereby these Three mutually love each other is the Eternal Being Himself. . . . The entire Scripture teaches that nothing is more precious and glorious than the Love of the Father for the Son, and of the Son for the Father, and of the Holy Spirit for both.”⁵ The same is the case with glory. In John 17:5, Jesus says, “Glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.” In the preceding chapter, he proclaimed that the Spirit also glorifies him (John 16:14). Yet, Jesus longs for the Father to glorify him so that he can glorify the Father (John 17:1). And the reason the Son is glorified is that he gives life to all men who are dead in sins and trespasses (Rom. 6:11). While our life is in

Christ, this life is none other than “the Spirit of life” (Rom. 8:2, 6), who is the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9). Therefore, we can say that the Spirit shares in the glory of the Son as life-giver.⁶

The divine, perpetual exchange of love and glory is the highest form of communication—the highest form of speech, of language. In short, because “there is—and has been from all eternity—talk, sharing and communication in the innermost life of God,”⁷ we need to affirm that language, strictly speaking, is not a human invention; it is a divine gift.⁸

Second, language is Trinitarian in a more specific sense. Language comprises three interlocking subsystems: grammar, phonology, and reference.⁹ Many students are familiar with **grammar**, but **phonology** (how words and sentences are spoken) and **reference** (the relationship between words and what they stand for) are also critical. These subsystems are equally important and intersect in a manner analogous to the way in which the persons of the Godhead interlock or “coinhere” with one another.¹⁰ We can associate each of these subsystems in language with a person of the Trinity:

Human purposes using the referential subsystem imitate God’s purposes, and more specifically the purposes of God the Father. Human speaking with sound imitates God’s utterances, which he utters

4. In our assumptions about the Trinitarian nature of language, we are indebted to the work of Vern S. Poythress, especially his *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009). But the Trinitarian nature of language has also been recognized by several theologians throughout church history. Another contemporary theologian who draws attention to this is Kevin J. Vanhoozer as seen in his *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 455–57. I (Pierce) have also written about this in other places: Pierce Taylor Hibbs, “Closing the Gaps: Perichoresis and the Nature of Language,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 78 (2016): 299–322; “Words for Communion,” *Modern Reformation* 25, no. 4 (August 2016): 5–8.

5. Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henry De Vries (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 1995), 542.

6. For details, see Hibbs, “Closing the Gaps: Perichoresis and the Nature of Language.”

7. Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology: Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in Light of the Church*, vol. 1, *The God Who Is: The Holy Trinity* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2008), 487.

8. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 9. See also John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 48.

9. The three interlocking subsystems as being reflective of the Trinity goes back to the language theory of Kenneth L. Pike, of whom Poythress was a student. See Kenneth L. Pike, *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to Tagmemics* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 13–15; and Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 259–69. See also Pierce Taylor Hibbs, “Where Person Meets Word Part 1: Personalism in the Language Theory of Kenneth L. Pike,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 77, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 355–77; “Where Person Meets Word Part 2: The Convergence of Personalism and Scripture in the Language Theory of Kenneth L. Pike,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 78, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 117–34.

10. The “interlocking” of divine persons is called *perichoresis* or “coinherence” by theologians. For a few ancient and contemporary expressions of this concept, see Augustine, *De Trinitate* 6.10; John of Damascus, *Writings*, The Fathers of the Church 37, trans. Frederic H. Chase (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 182–85; John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 479–81; and Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 365–66.

through the power and “breath” of the Holy Spirit. Human speaking uses a language system, in imitation of God who uses the systematic wisdom of God the Son.¹¹

So, what we say (referential content) and the manner in which we say it (grammar and phonology) are equally important.

Now, what does any of this mean to the theology student who simply wants to improve his or her English? It means that we would encourage you throughout this textbook to consider the ways in which grammar and phonology affect your message with regard to clarity, emphasis, and tone. At various places throughout the text, we will draw your attention to the way in which the interaction of these three



subsystems of language affects a particular author’s sentence. Whenever you see the symbol on the right (G = grammar; P = phonology; R = reference), that means we are directing you to this Trinitarian feature of language.

In light of this, do not cast aside grammar as relatively unimportant to getting your message across, as if to say to your readers, “They’ll understand what I mean anyway.” You cannot afford to neglect the development of the broad and deep knowledge of words, nor can you assume that if your grammar is accurate and your vocabulary adequate, then you can communicate clearly in speech. You need to improve in all three areas. Keeping this in mind has the potential to help you make more robust improvements in your understanding and use of English.

The Approach and Layout of the Textbook

The layout of this text is explained in more detail in Lesson 1. Each lesson includes a list of “Lesson Goals.” There is usually a goal in each of the following areas:

- Theology
- Reading

- Vocabulary
- Grammar

This text offers passive vocabulary development through exposure to a range of theological readings of different eras, with key terms glossed in the margins. Explicit vocabulary learning is encouraged through the collocation exercises in each lesson. This serves the larger end of developing grammar and reading skills in the context of theology.

Each lesson begins with an introduction and a few discussion questions. Then comes instruction on reading skills (one skill is taught per unit) before a passage of theology. Students then answer main idea and detail questions. These questions are often followed by an “Understanding the Reading” activity, a vocabulary exercise using collocations from the reading, and grammar exercises.

Twice in each unit, there are real-life tasks that will give you the opportunity to practice what you have learned in a concrete situation. Pay special attention to these tasks since they indicate how well you have understood and can apply what you are learning. If you are comfortable completing these tasks by the end of the textbook, that means you are in a better position to transfer what you have learned about theological English to your actual use of English in a theological setting.

Lastly, readers should know that this textbook is made for a classroom setting, and that is primarily how we use it. Some of the activities and exercises thus require group or pair-work. If you decide to use this text to study independently, note that the exercises requiring this work can be adapted for an individual student. Nevertheless, it is always good to learn language in community!

We hope that this textbook is of great help to you in your acquisition of theological English, and that our work serves as a small testimony to the greatness of the Trinitarian God who is redeeming all things in the person of his Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.

11. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 267.

UNIT 1

**WHO ARE WE?
(APOLOGETICS)**

1

Theological English

“We can appreciate language more deeply, and use it more wisely, if we come to know God and understand the relation of God to the language we use.”

—Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*

What Is Theological English (TE)?

Why put the adjective “theological” before the noun “English”? Isn’t English just English? What is distinct about theological English (TE), and why treat it differently from academic English? It is important to address these questions in advance so that we have a sense of where we are headed.

The simple answer to the first question is that English takes on distinct qualities and features depending on the context in which it is used. These qualities and features are not limited to different vocabulary; they also include sentence structures, patterns of organization, assumptions about clarity and effectiveness, etc. For example, in a mechanic’s shop, you might hear the sentence, “You gotta’ use a wrench.” But in a theological text, you would probably never read, “You gotta’ use Scripture.” Why not?

First of all, there is a big difference between spoken and written English. Spoken English is more informal and conversational, while written English is more formal. On the one hand, the mechanic can communicate clearly with a co-worker using language that, when taken out of context, seems vague or even inadequate. The theological writer, on the other hand, needs to explain precisely what he or she means by “use” (e.g., exegete, meditate on, apply,

analyze). The organization of the theological writer’s explanation would also differ from that of the mechanic if the latter were to explain what he meant by “use.” The sentence structures, as well, would differ. Short, single-clause sentences might suffice for a mechanic in this situation, but more complex structures and clauses are often needed to communicate a theological concept clearly and effectively.

This leads us to an answer regarding the second and third questions: What is distinct about TE, and why treat it differently from academic English? If you are reading this book, you are interested not in mechanics or in academics more broadly, but in *theology*, and so you need to be aware of the features, qualities, assumptions, practices, and expectations that come with the English language in this discipline, as seen in the various genres it encompasses. These features and qualities make TE *distinct* from English as used in other contexts. If you are not aware of these features and qualities or are uncomfortable using English in a theological setting, you will likely miss out on the rich truths communicated to you in theological writings and lectures, and you might be restricted in how effectively you communicate these truths to others in your own writing and teaching. That, in short, is why TE needs to be treated separately from academic English in general.¹

1. Another answer to this “why” question is that a Christian does everything *as a Christian*. “Because all of God’s human creatures are covenantally qualified creatures . . . what we are, do, and become takes place *coram deo*; it takes place in the presence of, and in the con-

But we still have not said what TE really is, specifically. Broadly speaking, we might say that **theological English** is English used to communicate biblical and theological truths carefully, precisely, and effectively within theological genres.² This approach to English in theological contexts should, of course, spill into your use of language in everyday life, but we will keep this definition in mind as we move forward in learning TE.

An Example of Theological English

Now that we know that TE incorporates certain features and qualities that help us express theological truths carefully, precisely, and effectively, we can introduce an example. What are some of the differences you notice among the following sentences?

Notice how the meaning changes in each sentence, moving from conversational to abstract to more precise. In fact, there is quite a bit of theology packed into the third sentence, and it is still a relatively simple sentence. Consider just how complex theological sentences can be. For instance, Carl Trueman writes,

God loves people.
God is love.
God is covenantally faithful.

“God’s relationship with Adam is expressed via the medium of language.”³ Then, he follows that relatively simple sentence with these two sentences:

[Language] is how God defines the nature and limits of the relationship, and, after the Fall, it is how God confronts Adam and Eve with their sin. The same pattern is repeated throughout the whole Bible in both testaments: whether it is command or promise, the two basic aspects of the divine-human relationship, God speaks using words to define his relationship with men and women, to limit it, to move it forward: he speaks to Noah, to Abraham, to Samuel, to David and so on.⁴

You may not be fully able to comprehend sentences at this level of complexity yet, let alone write them, but this textbook is designed to help you read this kind of English and, when necessary, to write it or speak it.

How Are We Going to Study TE?

What follows is an outline of how we are going to study TE.

TE Units and Questions. Each “Unit” of this textbook focuses on a particular theological “Question,”

Unit	Theological Question	Genre
Unit 1	Who are we?	Apologetics
Unit 2	What is truth?	Apologetics
Unit 3	What is wrong?	Apologetics
Unit 4	How is it made right?	Biblical Studies

text of, responsibility to God himself.” K. Scott Oliphint, “Covenant Faith,” in *Justified in Christ: God’s Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 153. In other words, you understand and use language based on your beliefs in the God who has revealed himself in Scripture—a God who has communicated his truth in language throughout history, and who has done so with care, precision, and utter effectiveness (cf. Isa. 55:11). It is before *this* God that you are undertaking the task of learning theological English.

2. The writing exercises and tasks in this textbook are meant to help you write clearly, cogently, and profoundly. See John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 369–74.

3. Carl R. Trueman, “The Undoing of the Reformation?,” in *The Wages of Spin: Critical Writings on Historic & Contemporary Evangelicalism* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2004), 46.

4. *Ibid.*

Unit	Theological Question	Genre
Unit 5	Who is Jesus?	Biblical Studies
Unit 6	Do we still need the Old Testament?	Biblical Studies
Unit 7	Where have we been?	Church History
Unit 8	How are we saved?	Systematic Theology
Unit 9	Where does the church fit?	Systematic Theology
Unit 10	How then shall we live?	Practical Theology

and these questions fit into theological genres. We will study traits of these genres throughout the book so that you will be better equipped to read and write in each area.

Each unit contains three “Lessons” and two “Tasks” pertaining to the theological question for that unit. The “Lessons” draw on popular and important

readings from the Reformed theological tradition. As you work through them, you should acquire reading skills, identify and practice using grammatical structures, learn context-specific vocabulary, recognize genre-specific rhetorical patterns, and develop other advanced writing skills. A summary of the reading and grammar skills you will learn is provided below.

Reading Skills

Unit	Lesson	Skill
1	2	Identifying the topic and main idea
2	5	Understanding vocabulary in context
3	9	Tracing the line of an argument
4	10	Identifying pronoun referents
5	14	Making inferences
6	18	Recognizing the author’s purpose
7	20	Understanding stance
8	24	Summarizing
9	27	Outlining
10	29	Understanding logical arguments

Grammar Skills

Lesson	Grammatical Topic
1	NONE
The Structure of Complex Sentences in Theological English	
2	<i>There is/there are</i>
3	Adjective forms
4	Passive voice
5	Comparative structures
6	Relative clauses and appositives
7	Multiple tenses within a paragraph
8	Articles
Precise Word Form	
9	Pronouns
10	Suffixes
11	Word families
The Author's Perspective and the Verb Phrase	
12	Modal verbs
13	Principled use of verb tense
14	Prepositions following verbs
Adding Information and Expressing Relations	
15	Complete subjects
16	Infinitives
17	Adverbs
18	Noun clauses
19	Noun phrases
20	Describing and modifying nouns
21	Adjective forms

Lesson	Grammatical Topic
22	Preposition Patterns
23	Definite and indefinite articles
Editing for Structure and Word Choice	
24	Participles
25	<i>That</i> clauses
26	Matching subject and predicate
27	Verb/noun + preposition patterns
28	Forming questions
29	Multi-clause sentences (embedded clauses)
30	Effective use of adjectives

Lessons. Each “Lesson” begins with an introduction and discussion questions or Scripture readings to help you begin thinking about the theological topic. While the discussion questions work best in a classroom setting, you can certainly reflect on them if you are studying independently. After the discussion questions, you may have some instruction in reading skills that will help you to work through the theological text that follows. Once you have read that text, there will be a post-reading question, main idea and detail questions, vocabulary activities, and a grammar focus.

Tasks. Twice in each unit you will be asked to carry out a theological task in which you will put to use what you have learned in terms of theological content as well as English vocabulary, grammar, and rhetoric. Each task is a real-life activity, designed to help you authentically use the skills and language features you are learning.

Genre Studies. We will also go through “Genre Studies” for each of the theological genres: apologetics, biblical studies, church history, systematic theology, and practical theology. The purpose of these genre studies is to alert you to specific features within a genre. Recognizing these features in your readings as well as practicing them in your writing will help

you more effectively receive and communicate meaning within each genre.

Scripture and Language: Getting Started

We begin our study of TE where we begin our study of everything else: God’s Word. Because the instruction in this textbook is based on biblical truths about language, it would be a good idea to begin thinking about these truths yourself.

Either on your own or with a partner, use a Bible to form a short list of verses that relate to language. If you are not sure where to start, you can search for the key words “words,” “told,” “said,” “listen,” and “hear.” Once you have formed your list and read over the verses, come up with two or three biblical principles regarding language (e.g., how we should use it, why it is important, etc.). State each principle in a complete sentence below. On the following page, there are some Reformed biblical principles for understanding and using language.

Biblical Principles for Understanding and Using Language

At the top of the next page are some biblical principles for understanding and using language. How do your principles relate to those listed below?

Biblical Passages	Principle	Explanation
Gen. 1:26; Matt. 6:9-13; Mark 14:36; Luke 12:12; John 1:1-2; 5:30; 12:49-50; 17:5; Rom. 8:26; and many others!	<i>God speaks both to himself in three persons and to us, so language is Trinitarian and part of the imago Dei.</i>	Throughout Scripture, we encounter a God who speaks. ⁵ He speaks to himself, but he also speaks to us, personally, in Scripture. ⁶ God has spoken, speaks, and will continue to speak to us through his Word, and because we are made in his image, we speak.
Pss. 15:2; 33:4; 43:3; 119:160; Prov. 30:5; Zech. 8:16; Matt. 22:16; John 8:45; 14:6 (in light of 1:1); 17:17; Jas. 1:18	<i>Language is apologetic.</i>	Because language is a means of conveying God's truth, we use it in a way that assumes what God has done in history. Non-Christians might care little for the truth, but we care a great deal about it. Our use of words (in speaking and writing) can be an apology, or a defense, of God's existence. How you understand and use words is a testament to your faith in our speaking God. People will notice.
John 3:33-36; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3	<i>Meaning and purpose in language are rooted in the Trinity.⁷</i>	"As the Word expresses the Father, so a sentence that God utters expresses the truth that the sentence formulates." ⁸ Analogically, humans express meaningful thoughts in language. Yet, language is meaningful not just because a person can clearly communicate ideas or experiences to someone else, but because all ideas and experiences only have meaning in God's covenantal plan for humanity. ⁹ Everything we say or write has meaning because it is either advancing God's purposes or vainly attempting to thwart them.

Preview of Paragraph Unity, Coherence, and Development (UCD)

Later in this textbook, you will learn about paragraph *unity*, *coherence*, and *development*. Every paragraph, in other words, is about one thing, discusses

that one thing with logically related sentences, and develops the discussion with different rhetorical tools (logical reasoning, exemplification, description, narration, compare and contrast, analysis, etc.). Paragraph **unity** is often marked with a **topic sentence**, and

5. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1975), 109; Vern S. Poythress, "God and Language," in *Did God Really Say? Affirming the Truthfulness and Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. David B. Garner (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012), 93. "The New Testament indicates that the persons of the Trinity speak to one another. This speaking on the part of God is significant for our thinking about language. Not only is God a member of a language community that includes human beings, but the persons of the Trinity function as members of a language community among themselves. Language does not have as its sole purpose human-human communication, or even divine-human communication, but also divine-divine communication." Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 18.

6. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 3.

7. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 251-58.

8. *Ibid.*, 253.

9. "Every fact and experience is what it is by virtue of the covenantal, all-controlling plan and purpose of God." K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 53.

this sentence usually occurs toward the beginning of the paragraph. Paragraph **coherence** is expressed by the *order of the sentences* and the *signaled relationships* between them. Paragraph **development** may be more difficult to identify at first, but you can understand how an author is developing his or her ideas by asking, “What is the author doing in order to convince me of the truth or relevance of the topic sentence?” For instance, is the author using logical reasoning (which may be signaled with words or phrases such as “thus,” “therefore,” “so,” “and so”)? Is the author offering examples?

In order to help you do the following task, observe how these concepts appear in the example below. As you read the paragraph, note how the unity, coherence, and development of the paragraph clearly and effectively communicate the author’s idea.

“PU” = paragraph unity; “PC” = paragraph coherence; and “PD” = paragraph development

PU: Topic Sentence

→ Different worldviews lead to different conceptions of freedom. If there were no God, freedom might mean freedom to create our own purposes. It might mean freedom from all constraint, which implies, in the end, freedom from the constraints of personal relationships. The ideal freedom would be to live in isolation. **On the other hand**, if God exists and is personal, freedom means not isolation but joy in appreciating both other human beings and God the infinite person. God’s moral order is designed by God to guide us into personal fellowship and satisfaction. It is for our good. It is for our freedom, we might say, in the true sense of “freedom.” The person who goes astray from God’s wise guidance burdens himself with sorrows and frustrations. In fact, he ends up being a slave to his own desires.¹⁰

PC: Use of pronouns (“it”) helps bind sentences together.

PC: **Bolded** phrase signals a change in direction.

PU: Repetition of a key word (“freedom”) improves unity.

PD: Logical Development

PD: Continuing Logical Development

The Importance of Words (AP Task 1)

Imagine that you are an associate pastor at a church with approximately 200 members. Recently, your congregation has been encountering problems with gossip and slander. Some members of the church have been deeply hurt, and a few have even left the congregation. Your senior pastor asks you to prepare a Bible study on our use of words. He wants you to focus on the book of Proverbs and asks that you contact him through email with one idea about what Proverbs says concerning our use and abuse of words.

Below we have provided a few verses from Proverbs that you can focus on for this task. Read the verses with a partner and discuss what each one seems to be communicating. Then think of how what the author says here is fulfilled by Christ. Working with your partner, come up with one principle about our use or abuse of language based on these verses and the work of Christ. Then **write a one-paragraph email to your pastor introducing one idea for this Bible study.** Your email should be no more than 300 words. Before writing your email, please read the instructions on “Composing an Email.”

Passages from Proverbs

10:21	“The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense.”
10:31–32	“The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverse.”
16:24	“Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.”

10. Vern S. Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 24.

Composing an Email

An email message, while often informal and conversational, should still be appropriate and respectful, especially if it is addressed to your senior pastor. In

light of this, your email should not be an academic essay, but neither should it address your pastor with “Hey.” Follow the basic structure of offering a salutation, message, concluding remark, and a signature.

Salutation	Pastor Kim,
Message	I’m writing to let you know that I have been gathering some thoughts for the Bible study on _____.
Conclusion	Please let me know what your thoughts are on _____. Thank you for your time.
Signature	Sincerely,