



GRACE COMMUNION
SEMINARY

Student Handbook

2026-2027



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I. Study Suggestions

Different students learn in different ways, but we offer here a few suggestions on how to study for your courses.

A. Course study materials

In each course, the syllabus tells you the books you will need, the requirements of the course, and what the schedule will probably be. All short syllabi can be accessed from “course descriptions,” which are linked from <https://www.gcs.edu/academics/list-of-courses/>.

Most courses require certain textbooks, some online discussions, perhaps a written book review or reaction paper; most course have either a final exam or a research paper. Some anxiety is normal for students taking exams, but please be assured that the exam is designed to document what you know, not to point out your failures.

Most courses give you reading suggestions for each week. If your course does not, create your own schedule, reading perhaps 80-100 pages each week, to ensure that you are keeping pace with the work needed. Try to read ahead, because during some weeks you will need to spend more time on your papers.

B. Make a study schedule

In order to offer three semester units of credit, each course must involve at least 135 hours of student work, so that means 12 or more hours of reading, research, writing, or website work each week. You will have to be disciplined in your use of time – make a schedule and stick to it. Since there is no specific meeting time, some students find it tempting to put things off – “I can do it later.” If you do this, it does not take long for a large backlog of work to accumulate, and that is discouraging.

It is important to keep on schedule – and even to work ahead, to make allowance for other unforeseen needs. Most of our students are involved in some sort of ministry, and emergencies are common in this line of work. If anyone in the congregation has a crisis, that crisis is shared with the pastor. Pastors thereby have more crises than anyone else, and part of good planning is to make allowance for such possibilities.

For many pastors, Monday is a day to relax after the weekend's work. We encourage you to relax by reading – go to the website, download and print the lessons and materials posted that week, review the assignments for the upcoming week or two, and get started! Establish a habit of reading at least 10 or so pages each day.

Melissa Browning writes, “Very few people are good at reading large amounts at one time, particularly when the reading is dense. For this reason, it is normally better to schedule a little time each day rather than trying to read everything for class in one sitting.”¹

C. Take notes

In most of our courses, the lectures are an important part of the course. So read the lectures when you are most alert.² Highlight or underline important points. Circle unfamiliar words, and look up the meanings. If the lectures refer to scriptures, look them up. Write comments in the margins.

At the end of each lesson or section, write a brief summary of what it taught you. That will help you review the material in the future. (The final course in each degree program requires a summative exam, so you may want to review the course a few years after you have taken it.)

In your textbooks, underline or highlight important information.³ Put question marks, exclamation marks, or comments in the margin. Those can also help you review – and to find material when you write forum

¹ Melissa Browning, “Reading Basically,” pages 15-29 in Eric Barreto, ed., *Reading Theologically* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 27.

² Some classes have audio lectures. Listening while driving is not a good study method. Rather, listen when you can take notes. Later, as a review, you can listen while driving.

³ In most cases, e-books are available for textbooks. Studies have shown that most students interact with material, and retain it better, from printed books. You may use e-books if you wish (it's the most practical option in some cases), but be sure to *study* what you read. E-book readers offer convenience, but also many distractions. In Kindle, you may highlight parts of the text, and in “my notebook,” export all the highlights (up to a percentage set by the publisher) to a different file. Then you can copy and paste a few quotes to your paper. Two short quotes are usually better than one long one.

comments or research papers. Have you ever thought, “Where did I read that?” If you have marked your books, you’ll be able to find it much easier.

D. How to format a paper

GCS classes are offered at the graduate level. We expect that our students submit papers according to the generally accepted customs of academic work.⁴ However, some of our students have not been in college for decades, so may need a few reminders. To help you in that, see “How to Format an Academic Paper,” posted at <https://learn.gcs.edu/mod/book/view.php?id=5854>.

E. How to write a book review

Several of our courses require you to write a book review. The purpose of this assignment is two-fold: 1) to ensure that you will read the book, which means that you will learn some of its contents, and 2) to get you to interact with the book, which increases the amount you learn and remember.

In general, we do not want a repetition of information about the author and the table of contents of the book. Rather, we want you to show that you have *thought* about the book – to describe some of its helpful points, and to observe any weaknesses. Find some areas in which it offered information that helped you in your ministry, and explain how it is helpful. Find other areas of the book with which you disagree, or perhaps are not convinced.

F. How to write a reaction paper

Some courses assign reaction papers, or response papers. These are similar to book reviews, but they focus more on your personal reaction or response to what you have read. If your instructor specifies what is desired, then follow those instructions.

⁴ Students in other nations are welcome to use A4 size paper if that is what is standard in that nation, and to use British spellings and styles.

G. How to contribute to a discussion forum

Most GCS classes require participation in an online discussion. This is one of the learning opportunities in any classroom. In a traditional classroom, students ask questions, get responses, talk about how the topic applies to their situations, etc. This interaction with the material helps students learn more than they would from simply reading a textbook, and students learn from what other students are saying.

Online classes can give students a similar experience – but they have to be structured a little differently, since our students are not logged in at the same time and we live in different time zones. We do not have the advantage of a spontaneous discussion, but we have the advantage that our discussions can be a little better researched, and better thought-out.

We'll discuss the computer details later. Here we'll comment on how to write a good comment.

A good contribution to an online discussion...

1. is on time – generally by the end of Thursday. That gives other students time to read and interact with your comment.
2. is relevant to the topic.
3. shows not just opinions, not just facts, but opinions or conclusions based on facts. It shows good logic.
4. shows some connection of the discussion with the world outside of the forum – lectures, textbooks, or life experience.
5. shows good grammar, and readers can clearly understand what you are saying.
6. stimulates further discussion, either through questions or with ideas that provoke other students to make comments.

A *discussion* requires that students respond to what other students have posted. A good response...

1. is on time – by the end of Sunday

2. is in the right place (that is, it is posted as a “reply” instead of being posted as a new topic).
3. adds something to the conversation, building on the initial ideas, showing thought, not just a quick reaction.
4. shows connection with the world outside the forum – in lectures, textbooks, experience, other GCS classes, etc.

Comments should not be *long*. Two medium-length comments are better than one long comment. Think of a classroom: students generally do not want to listen to some other student go on and on for five or ten minutes. Research in online classes at other schools shows that long submissions are less likely to be read, and less likely to be commented on. One paragraph of about ten lines is sometimes enough, but topics in some of our courses require lengthier comments.

H. GCS library

Some of our courses require research outside of the assigned textbooks. These may be commentaries, articles in professional journals, or encyclopedias devoted to theology, ministry, or biblical studies. Students have several options to conduct this research. One option is our library.

1. A catalog of our books is posted in the student resources section of our website,
<https://www.learn.gcs.edu/mod/resource/view.php?id=5025>.
2. To request a book, send an email to registrar@gcs.edu.
3. For students in the U.S.A., books will be sent via U.S. Postal Service Media Mail (book rate). Most books take seven to ten days to arrive.
4. The loan period is four weeks, which includes the initial shipping time. The return postmark should be within four weeks after the initial postmark. If no other student is requesting the book, a book may be renewed for an additional four weeks. Send any request for renewal to registrar@gcs.edu.

5. Return postage is at the student's expense. U.S. Postal Service Media Mail is usually the most economical. Send the book to Grace Communion Seminary, 3120 Whitehall Park Drive, Charlotte, NC 28273.
6. International shipping and U.S. priority mail can be arranged at the student's expense.
7. Books returned late will be assessed at 25 cents per day.
8. Books that are lost in the mail, either on the initial shipment or on the return, will have to be replaced. Students will be charged for the cost of purchasing a replacement book, plus a \$10 replacement fee. Library fees and fines must be paid before a student can be issued a transcript or diploma. If the book is worth more than \$50, we recommend that it be insured.

I. Additional research options

In the information age, we have a multitude of sources. What we want is usually “out there” somewhere, but we don't know where.

If you live near a theological library, find out if they allow visitors to use their library. Many theological libraries allow pastors to check books out. Even if you can't check out any books, you will probably be allowed to use the library, make photocopies, etc. Browse around the library to see what they have—it might be a good resource for you to use in future GCS classes or in your ministry.

But what can you do if you don't have time to drive to a theological library? What you need may be on the internet. There is an ever-expanding wealth of scholarly materials available on the internet, as well as a lot of rubbish. The internet rarely has the level of research you would need for a doctorate, but it is sometimes sufficient for master's level classes.

We have some instructions that can help you. Go to the student resources page on our website: <http://learn.gcs.edu/course/view.php?id=23>. That page contains several student resources, one of which is “[Research Resources Available Off Campus.](#)” Click on that, and you'll see a document explaining some of the options.

Let's suppose you want to do some research on Mark 8. You could do a Google search for "Mark 8:31" and get millions of possibly relevant pages. You can't read millions of pages—you probably don't even want to read five pages of search results to see if they have what you are looking for. Some of these may be good, but many are unsubstantiated opinion, and some are irrelevant.

How can you estimate the quality of these resources? You want authors who have credentials in the field, showing that at least somebody else thinks they know something about the topic. You probably don't want to investigate the qualifications of the authors of 20 pages. Often you can't find anything, because most authors on the internet don't have *any* credentials; they have no verifiable expertise in the subject.

You want resources that are written by people who know something about the topic—resources that are so useful that people are willing to pay for them, that companies are willing to invest some money in making sure that the product is reliable. You need books. Some of those million pages on the internet are high-quality resources written by experts. But it is difficult to find the golden needles hidden in the pile of rubbish. The faster way to search for high-quality resources is to narrow your internet search to books.

You can do good research in a bookstore. You can walk into the store, pull a book off a shelf, sit in a comfortable chair and read a long time, without having to buy anything. In lieu of a photocopier, like a library would have, you can photograph some of the pages.

On the internet, you can enter the Amazon website, pull a book off the "shelf" and read parts of it, too, without having to buy it. The bookseller hopes that you will like the book so much that you buy it, but you don't have to buy it. You can do research in high-quality books without having to buy them. On the internet, you can read books at Amazon, at Barnes & Noble, on books.google.com, and on some publishers' websites.

Both Amazon and Google limit the number of pages that you can see in any particular book. So it's a good idea to *save what you see*. However, you can't save or print the page in the normal way. But you can use a camera, or you can use your computer. Press the button on your keyboard that says "Print

Screen” (on a laptop, it may be “prt scr” and might work only when you press the function key at the same time). This copies the screen into the computer’s memory.⁵ Then you can open Word, or a graphics program such as Paint, and press Control-v to paste it into the program, and *then* you can save it to disk or print it from there. This process is not quick, but it *is* something you can do from anywhere in the world.

Another feature of Amazon that can help you research a topic is that Amazon will link you from one book to other books that people bought at the same time. By following a trail like that, you can accumulate a large list of related books. You can also type your subject into Amazon’s search bar, and Amazon will show you what’s available on that topic, even books that do not necessarily have that term in the title.

If you find a book that is interesting, you have several options:

- 1) If Amazon lets you view the inside of the book, you can examine the table of contents, and sometimes the text, to see if the book meets your needs.
- 2) If you think it will be very helpful, a good addition to your own library, you can buy the book. You can use bookfinder.com to find lower prices elsewhere.
- 3) You might be able to borrow the book from the GCS library (see above).
- 4) Or you can borrow the book from a local public library. Many local libraries participate in an interlibrary loan program. The worldwide database (searchable at www.worldcat.org) includes millions of titles, and many of those can be sent to your local library as an interlibrary loan. Worldcat will also inform you if the book is available at a library near you. Some local libraries charge a small fee to help pay for this service, but almost anything published can be obtained in this way. Ask your reference librarian about interlibrary loan services. Plan ahead!

⁵ A “snipping tool” can do a similar thing for a selected area of the screen.

- 5) Some books can be viewed electronically, either through a local library's website, free at archive.org, or on other websites.

J. Citing your sources

An important part of academic papers is giving credit to your sources. If you have obtained important facts or quotes from a source, you should give credit to the source. Quotes must be enclosed in quote marks, and the source and page number given. A style manual for term papers will give the details on how this should be done. We recommend *Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology*, by Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson.⁶

We give some simple instructions in our document “How to Format an Academic Paper,” at <https://learn.gcs.edu/mod/book/view.php?id=5854>.

K. Grades

In GCS courses, as in most other seminaries, grades are based largely on written papers and projects. There is an unavoidable amount of subjectivity in assigning grades to these papers. Grades are based on the experience the instructors have had with papers from many previous student papers at this and other institutions.

Retake policy: Papers may be rewritten and exams may be taken again only with the permission of the instructor.

⁶ The fourth edition was published by Zondervan in 2020. Another good book is Kate L. Turabian et al., *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*, 9th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

II. Using Our Website

Most students are able to navigate our website without too much difficulty. If you encounter problems, email us at support@gcs.edu, or phone us at 1-980-495-3978. If you send us a message, please let us know which browser you are using, what page you were on, and what you were trying to do.

A. Computer support and complaint procedures

If a student has a complaint about technical issues on our website, the student should first seek help from computer support services, at support@gcs.edu, or by phoning 1-980-495-3979. If the support personnel are unable to help, please contact the Registrar (registrar@gcs.edu) with a description of the situation.

If a student has a complaint about academic matters or administrative issues, see section II.H.

B. Getting started: logging in

After you are accepted to be a student at Grace Communion Seminary, you will be given a user name and a password. This is the electronic key that enables you to see the course materials.

Our website has two sections: one for the general public, and one for students, accessible only by password. There are several ways to get to the student pages: 1) you may click on the “student login” link in the upper right corner of our home page, or 2) you may bookmark <https://learn.gcs.edu/login/index.php>.

Below we show a picture of that page, showing where you can type in your user name and password:

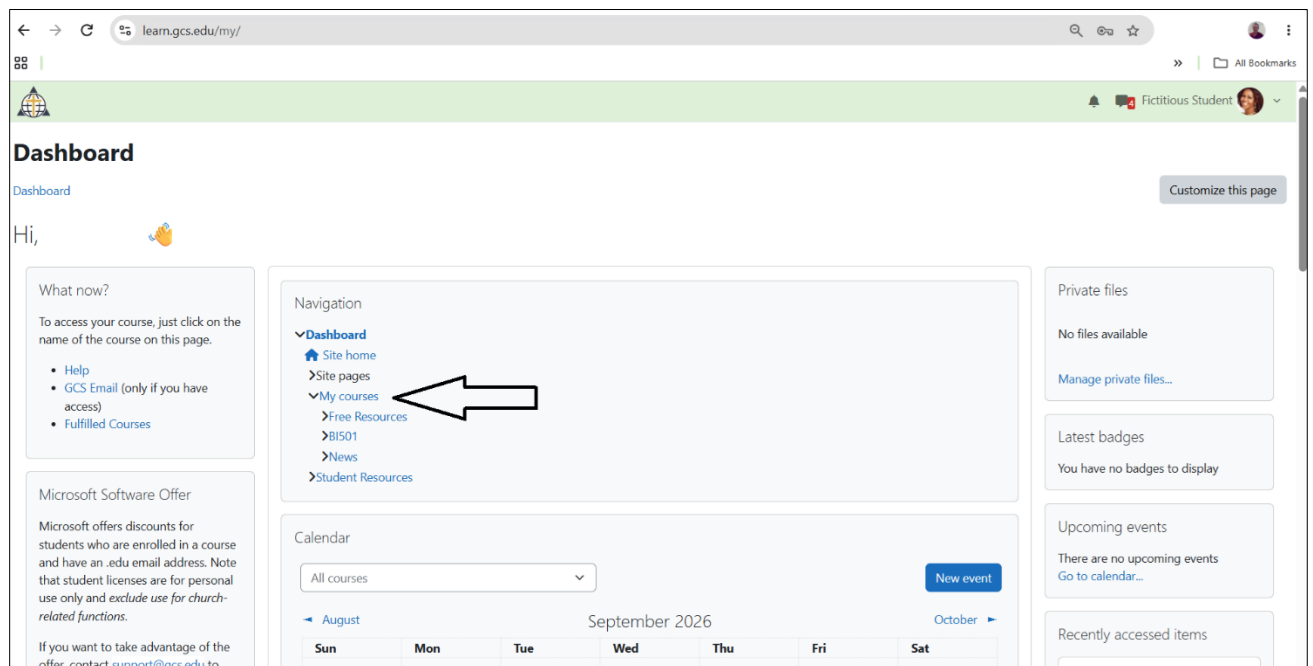


GRACE COMMUNION SEMINARY

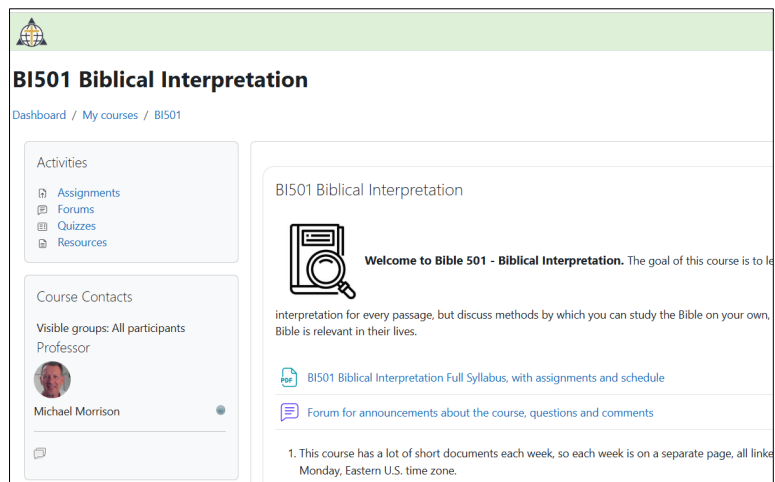
[Lost password?](#)

Some courses may allow guest access

After you log in, you'll be taken to the "dashboard." In the left column is a link to our help page, and the center column shows which courses you can access.



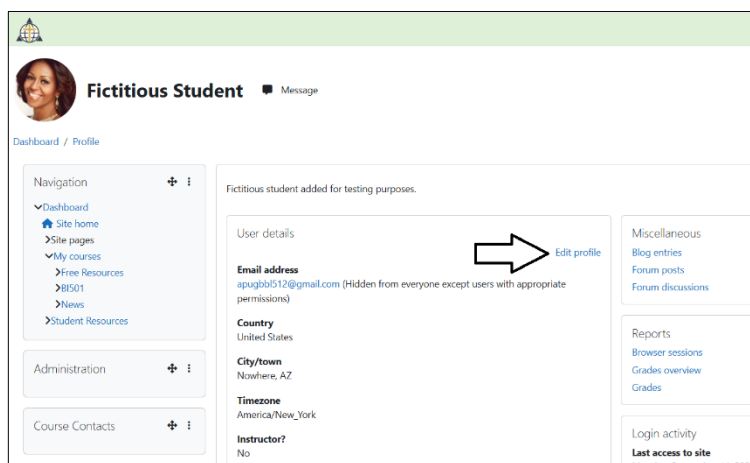
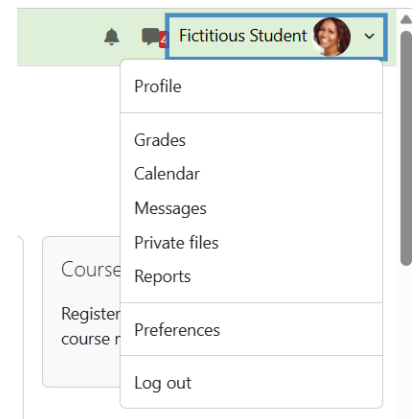
The screenshot shows the GCS Student Dashboard at learn.gcs.edu/my/. The dashboard is titled "Dashboard" and includes a "Customize this page" button. It features a "What now?" section with links to Help, GCS Email, and Fulfilled Courses. A "Microsoft Software Offer" section is also present. The "Navigation" section on the left includes links to Site home, Site pages, My courses (highlighted with a large black arrow), Free Resources, BIS01, News, and Student Resources. The "Calendar" section shows a calendar for September 2026. On the right, there are sections for Private files, Latest badges, Upcoming events, and Recently accessed items.



- Near the top of most pages, there are some blue words at the top of the left column, starting with “Dashboard.” These show a pathway (sometimes called “a breadcrumb trail”) of where you are on our site. You can click on those words to move backwards. For example, you may click the course code (for example, BI501) to get back to the course home page.

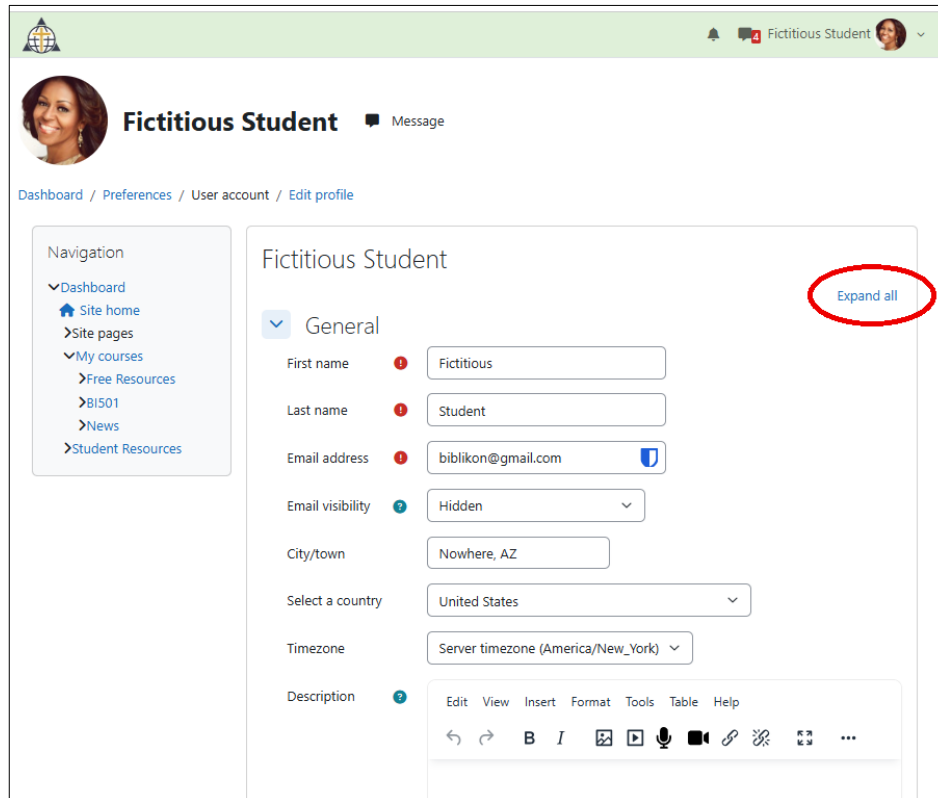
C. Managing your profile

Please begin by updating your profile. In the upper-right corner of the page, you will see your name. Click on that, and a menu will drop down. One option will be “Profile.” Click there and you will see a page that can tell other people about you. It looks like this:



In the center column, under “User details,” click on “edit profile.” (An arrow points to it in the image above.)

Then you'll see the top part of the Edit Profile page. To see it all, click on "Expand all" in the upper right corner.

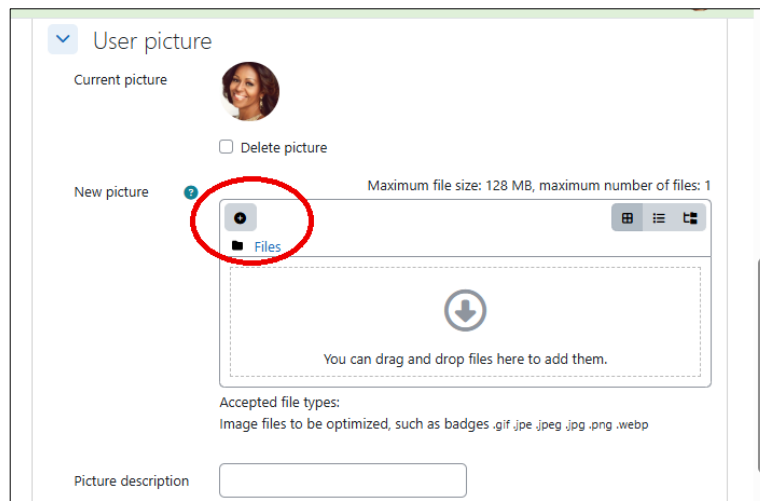


Here you can edit your name and email address. In "Description," you can tell people a bit about yourself – your family, occupation, ministry, etc.

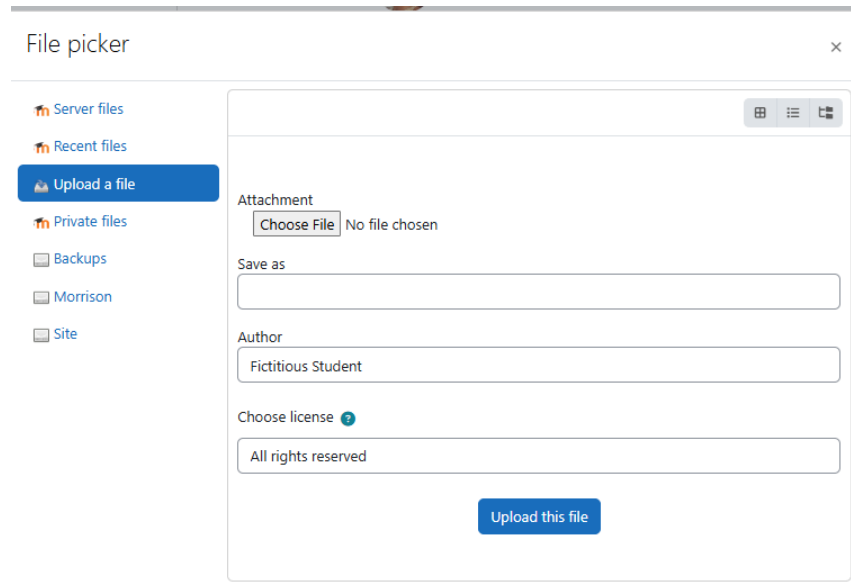
We'd also like a photo, so that we and other students can see who you are. This is not a place for baby photos, or your dog. That would be like walking into a classroom with a mask over your face. This photo is so other students can put a face to the comments they will see on the discussion forums.

There are two ways to share a photo of yourself. Here's the first method:

1. Go down the profile page until you get to the "User picture" section.



2. Click the “Add” icon in the upper left of the “New picture” box (circled above). (The name of an icon appears if you hold the mouse pointer over it for one or two seconds.)
3. On the left, click “Upload a file.”



4. Click “Choose file.”
5. Navigate through the folder and file structure in your computer until you find the file you want to upload. Then double-click on the file. You can use the “Save as” box to give it a new name, if you want to.
6. Click “upload this file.”

The second method of uploading a photo is to use Windows File Explorer⁷ to “drag and drop” a digital image into the User Picture box:

1. In File Explorer,⁸ navigate to the folder that contains the file you want to upload.
2. Click on the file you want to upload *and keep holding the mouse button down*.
3. Using your mouse, “drag” the file to the tab for your browser (Chrome, Edge, Firefox, etc.) that is in the taskbar that is usually at the bottom of the screen. Keep the mouse button down.
4. When you position the mouse over the browser icon, the computer will display the browser. Continue holding the mouse button down and drag the file up to the “New Picture” box, where you want the photo to be.
5. Now let go of the mouse button (“drop”) and the file will be uploaded and a thumbnail displayed.

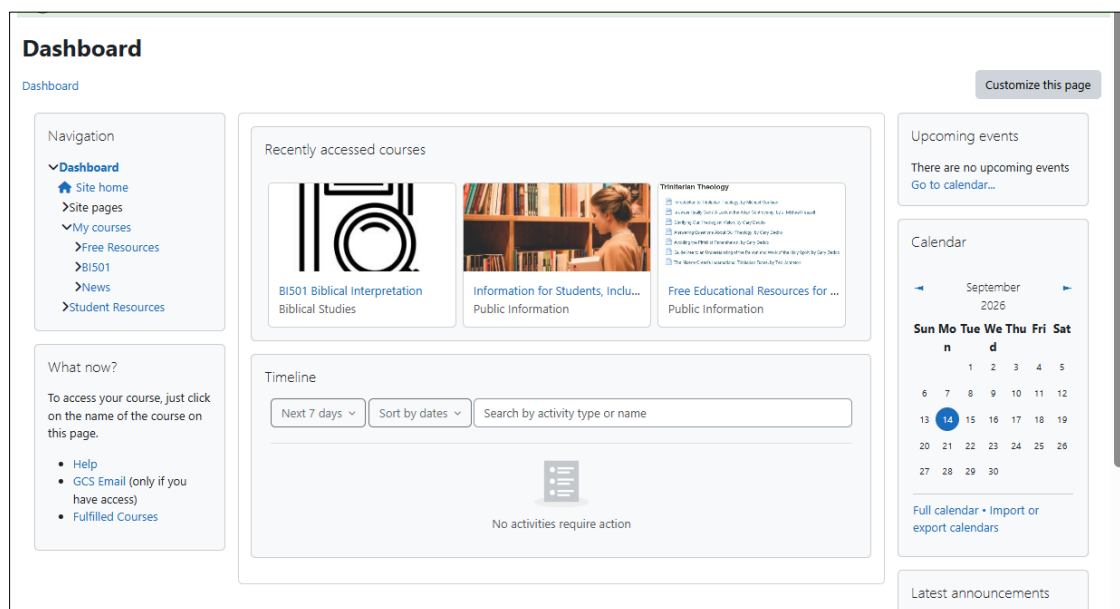
Fill in other fields of the user profile as you wish, and – **very important** – at the bottom of the page, click “Update profile.” Students and teachers will then be able to see a small photo of you whenever you make a comment in the discussion forum, send a message, or upload an assignment. That helps make the website a little less impersonal.

D. The “Dashboard” page

When you first log in, the website displays your “dashboard.” The center column may show a calendar, or “my courses, or “recently accessed courses.” You can change this with the “customize this page,” but we’ll skip the technical details of that.

⁷ We don’t have an Apple computer so we can’t verify how it works there.

⁸ In older versions of Windows, this is called Windows Explorer. You may need to click the “start” icon in the lower left corner of the screen, then click on Documents. The icon looks like a manila file folder.

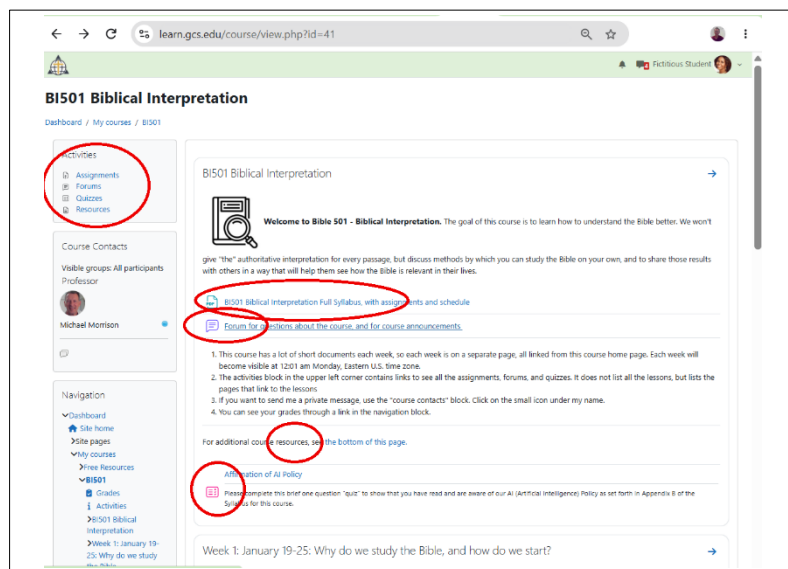


There are several links on this page that you may find useful:

- The “help” link will take you to the public information section of our site, which includes website instructions like the ones in this Handbook. You always have access (even without logging in) to the public information/help section.
- In the upper right corner, in the green strip, is your name. This link will take you to your profile. This area also has a “log out” link. If you are using a public computer, you should log yourself out when you are done, so that no one else can see your pages or sabotage your work.
- Just left of your name, you’ll see a red number if messages are waiting for you. Click on the number to go to the messages.

E. A sample course page

On the dashboard, if you click on the title of the course, you will be taken to the page for that course. Below we show BI501 as an example:



In the upper left corner is an “Activities” block. It has links to display all Assignments (where you upload some homework), Forums (where you answer questions and interact with other students), Quizzes, and Resources (documents you can download).

Below that is the “Course Contacts” block. Only the instructor is listed. You can send a message to the instructor using the small icon under the instructor’s name. The Navigation block below that gives links to the different weeks of the course.

In the center we have circled two types of course content:

- The faintly green icon is for a PDF document (portable document format). Most lessons are posted as PDF documents because they keep the same pagination no matter what kind of computer you use. In this case, we have circled the course syllabus. The syllabus is important because it tells you what the course is designed to do, what your assignments are, and other details important for the course.
- The blue or purple “balloon” icon (how speech is displayed in cartoons) shows a *forum* (what some websites call a threaded discussion). This is where students and faculty interact, discussing course content. Since GCS students are spread out in different time zones, we can’t all be online at the same time. We therefore post our comments so others can read them later.
- The pink rectangle icon is for a quiz, in this case, a one-question quiz asking you if you are aware of our policy prohibiting the use of

generative AI (artificial intelligence). We want to see your thoughts, not your skill in getting a computer to churn out materials for you.

The course may have additional resources listed at the top of the course home page. In this case, due to the quantity, they are all at the bottom.

In this course, if we click on “Week 1” (either in the left navigation block, or in the central content block), we will see the components for the first week of this course:

Week 1: January 19-25: Why do we study the Bible, and how do we start?

Dashboard / My courses / BI501 / Week 1: January 19-25: Why do we study the Bible, ...

Navigation

- Dashboard
- Site home
- Site pages
- My courses
- Free Resources
- BI501
 - Grades
 - Activities
 - BI501 Biblical Interpretation
 - Week 1: January 19-25: Why do we study the Bible, ...**
 - Start here! Assignment check-off list for week 1 (MS Word format)
 - Week 1 discussion forum: introductions
 - Week 1 lessons in three formats: text, video and audio

BI501 Biblical Interpretation

Week 2: January 26-February 1: What are we studying?

Start here! Assignment check-off list for week 1 (MS Word format)

Week 1 discussion forum: introductions

Week 1 lessons in three formats: text, video and audio

Assignment for week 1: Read the book of Hebrews, then choose a passage for further study.

- Hebrews 5:1-10
- Hebrews 11:29-12:2

After your first set of observations about the passage, submit them on the forum below. You can submit them as an attached document - or if you write your observations on paper, submit a photo of your work. These will not be graded on quality, but merely on whether you did it. These are to be submitted on a forum, so that other students studying the same passage can see what you observed. They might learn from what you observed.

Instructions for the first paper, due at the end of next week

Optional template for making observations on Hebrews 5:1-10, ESV

Optional template for making observations on Hebrews 11:29-12:2, ESV

You are welcome to start with another translation, or to write your observations by hand, and then upload a photo of what you did.

Post your observations on Hebrews 5 or 11

Do not add a new topic - reply to one of the two topics already posted. That way, all the comments about Hebrews 5 will be on one page, and all the comments about Hebrews 11 will be on another page.

Quiz for week 1 lessons and readings

This open-book quiz is only a small percentage of your grade. It should not be difficult if you have read the lessons and the book by Abernethy. It is designed to help you review this material; we are not trying to trip you up. After each question, click on

The icons here are

- light green for a document (in this case, in the Microsoft Word “docx” format),
- blue for a forum discussion,

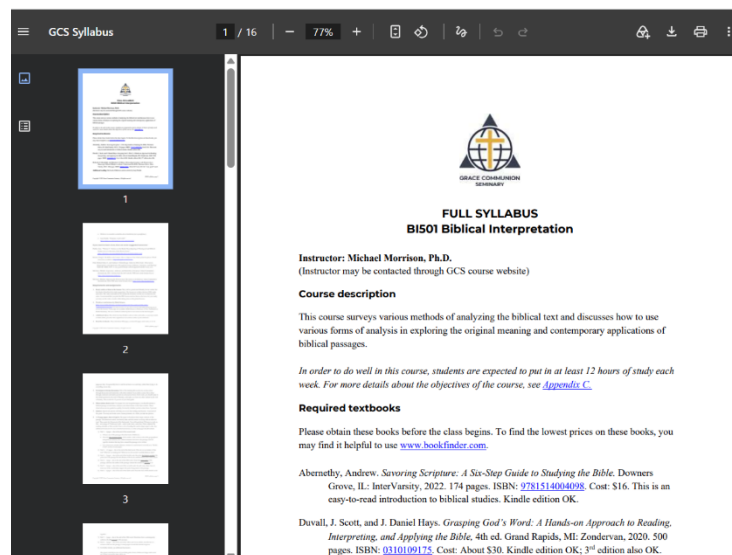
- green (with no mention of PDF or DOC) for a document in the website format (in this case giving links to seven short lessons for the week),
- a green chain for an internet link (in this case, linking to a document on the course home page), and
- pink for a quiz about the first week's lessons and readings.

F. PDF documents: viewing, saving, printing, enlarging

Most of our lectures and lessons are posted as PDF documents. If you click on the name of the document, you should be taken to a new page.

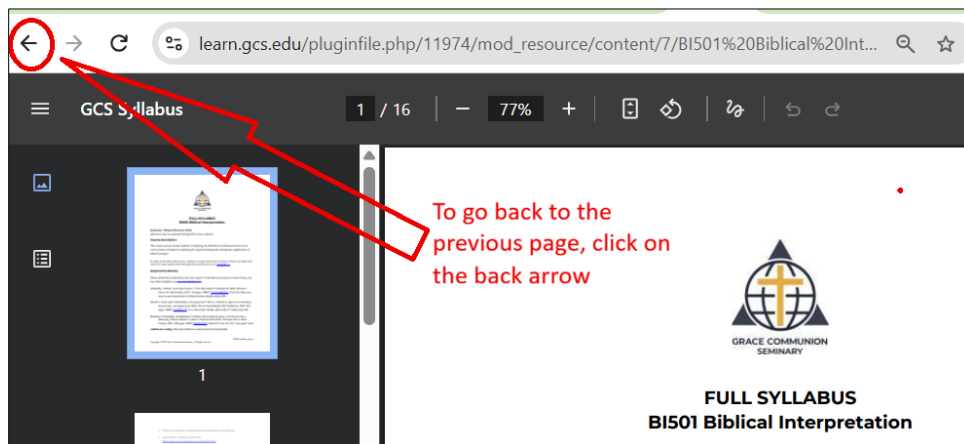
Sometimes it takes the browser a few seconds to start up the PDF display mechanism.

Below we show a PDF document – in this case it is the syllabus for BI501. Different browsers will display PDF files a little differently. For our illustration, we used Chrome version 153; other browsers may put the icons in other places. Note the icons in the upper right (in some browsers you might not see them unless you move your mouse over that part of the screen).



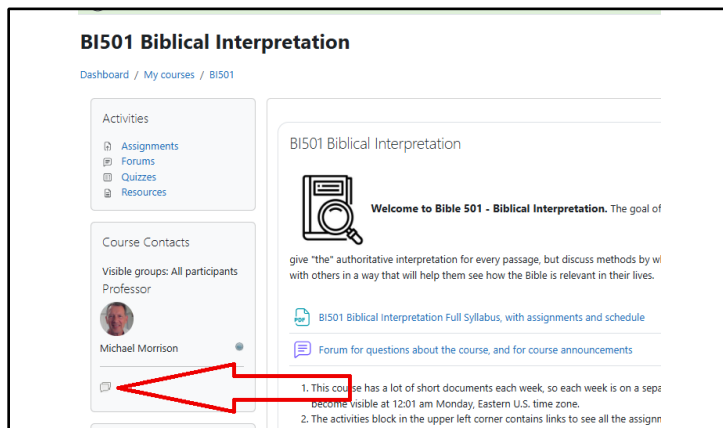
- The top strip shows the title of the document, which page you are seeing (1), how many pages are in the document (16), and the scale at which it is displayed. Click the minus sign to make the text smaller, or the plus sign to make it all larger. You can also specify an exact percentage, if you want. The F11 key will give you a full-screen view.

- Also in the center are icons for displaying the entire page, or the full page width, for rotating a document, and for marking the document with free-hand lines.
- In the upper right are icons for saving the PDF to Google Drive, for downloading the document to your own computer (highly recommended), and for printing the document (also recommended). (Keyboard shortcut: press Ctrl and p at the same time.)
- To go back to the course home page, click the “back” arrow on your browser (upper left), or press Alt and left arrow at the same time.



G. Send a message to your instructor

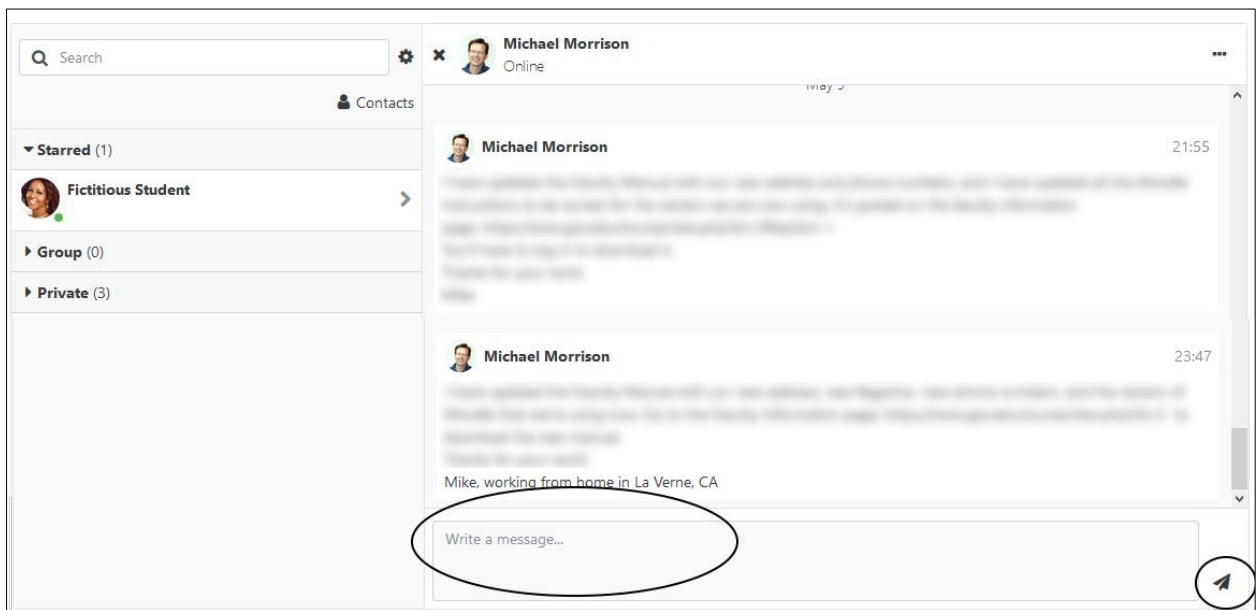
To make it easier to send a message to your instructor, every course home page has a “Course contacts” box on the left.



If you click on the picture, you’ll see the instructor’s profile, and at the top of that page, you can click on “message” to send a message. There is a quicker way, though:

There is a tiny icon under the instructor's name that depicts two messages. Click on it to be taken to the messaging app (shown on the next page). It will show all the messages you have sent and received from the instructor, and with other instructors, too. Type your message into the small box at the bottom right, then click the "paper airplane icon" to send the message. (If you prefer to send by pressing "enter" on the keyboard, you can change your message preferences. Click on your name in the upper right corner, then preferences, then message preferences.)

Unfortunately, you cannot attach files. For that, you might need to use an assignment upload area.



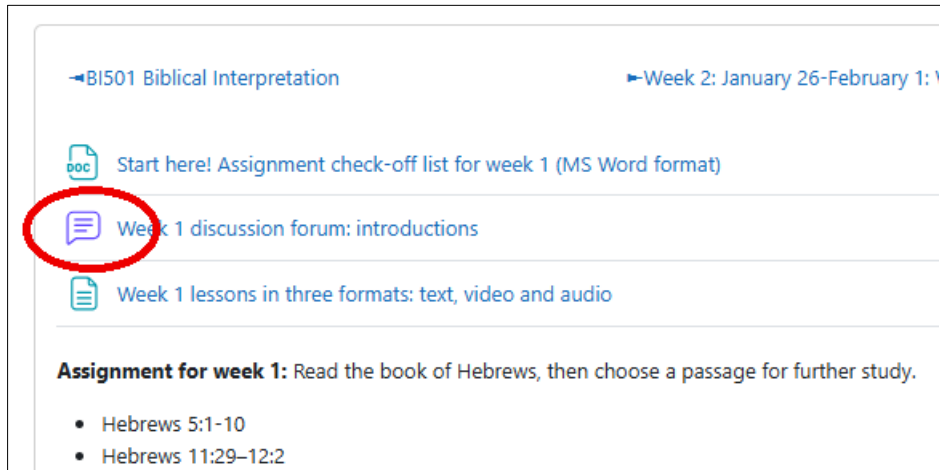
Some of our instructors work part-time, and may not check their messages every day. If the instructor has not responded within 48 hours, please phone us or email registrar@gcs.edu and we'll try to find out if there's a problem.

H. Asking questions

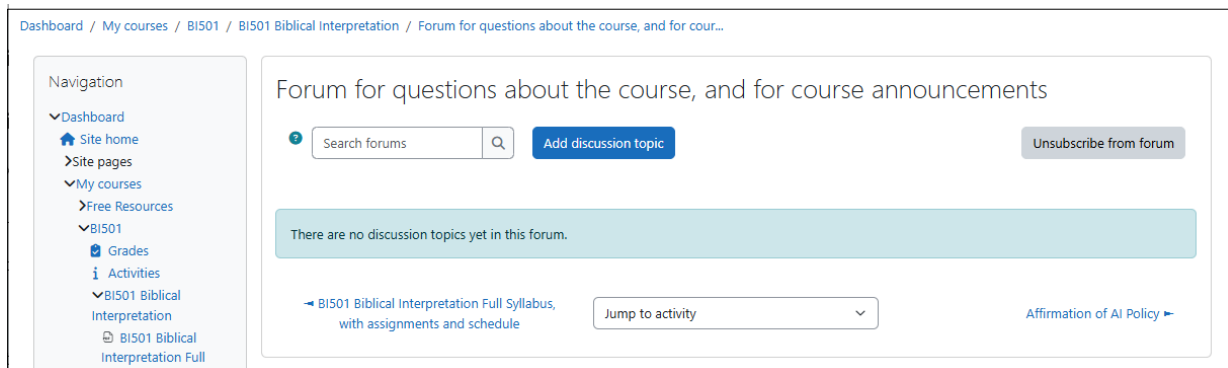
If the course has a general discussion forum, you can use it to post a new topic. (In BI501 it is called "Forum for questions about the course, and for course announcements.") See below for instructions on how to add a topic to a forum. Using the discussion forum makes the question and the answer available to other students, too. You might think your question is dumb, but you are probably not the dumbest pencil in the box, so other students will probably benefit from your question and the answer.

I. Forum: how to post new comments

Most GCS courses have forums in which students respond to questions given by the instructor, and in which the students interact with one another. Some forums are more complicated than others; we'll show details for the most complicated. This involves several steps, so this section is a little long. We'll give a picture of the screen at each step, starting with the main page for the course. We'll start with the page for week 1 of BI501:



In the image above, the entry for the forum is circled – it's a blue icon with a text balloon. Don't click on the icon – click on the name of the forum. You may see a page like the one below:



- In the example above, click on “Add discussion topic” to get the forum started.
- In some cases, you will see only a question, and a link for “reply.” In such cases, the instructor has set the forum up so that everyone discusses the same topic, and you cannot add new topics. All you can do is to click

on “reply.”

/ TH501 / Week 1: May 5 - May 11 / Week 1 Class/Student Discussion Forum

Week 1 Class/Student Discussion Forum

This Forum is for you to use to talk further with each other about the topic/topics covered during each particular week. Your assignment is to post one comment, observation, question or concern about one of the topics covered during the current week to see what others in the class are thinking or how they are responding to what we are covering in this week.

Then you are to reply to at least one of the other students postings. But you should read them all to see what others are thinking, encouraged by, puzzled or concerned about.

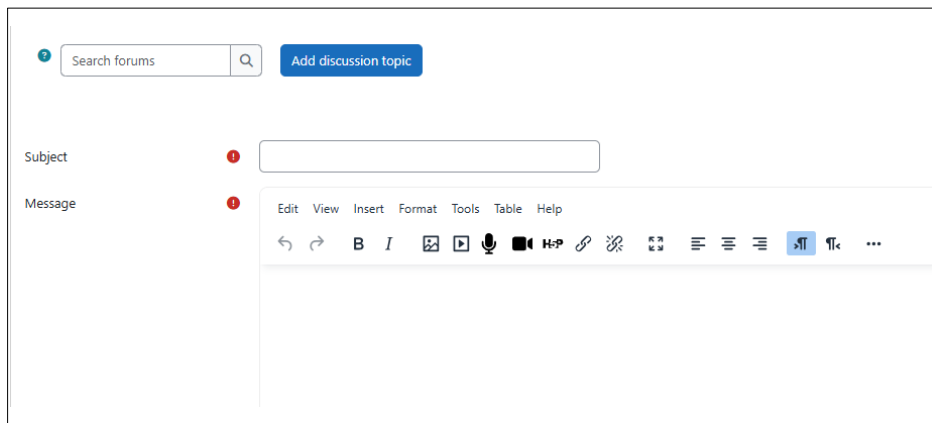
So in this Forum you **do** start a new discussion using the blue Add New Discussion button . Then you use the "Reply" link to reply to another student's posting which you will see lining up as links within this Forum.

Again please make your own posting before the Week is over to keep our discussion together. Then try to make your Replies to the other student no later than the Monday following--sooner if possible. Again, this makes it more like we're all in the classroom together. Thanks.

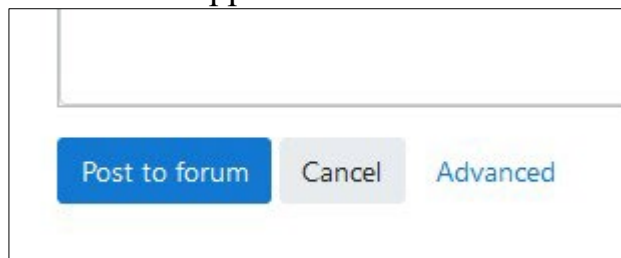
  [Add discussion topic](#)

Discussion	Started by	Last post ↓	Replies ✓	Subscribe	
☆ Oneness	 [blurred]	 Gary Deddo 14 May 2025	2	☐	⋮
☆ Mystery of the Incarnation	 [blurred]	 [blurred]	2	☐	⋮
☆ Have We Been Brainwashed?	 [blurred]	 [blurred]	1	☐	⋮
☆ We are without excuse	 [blurred]	 [blurred]	1	☐	⋮

- At the top you will see the instructions given by the instructor. Below that, in the left column, under the word “Discussion,” you may see a few topics that have been added by other students, as shown above (sections have been blurred to protect student privacy). In the center you can see which student (with a picture, if it’s available) started the discussion on that topic (also called a “thread”). If you click on a student’s name, you can send a private message to that person. We’ll show you how to do that a little later.
- You can also see how many replies have been given to the topic. One column shows who made the most recent comment in that topic and when it was. For now, we want to start something new, so we will click on the blue rectangle at the top: “Add a new discussion topic.” After you click, you will see:



- You must describe what your comment is – type a title in the box to the right of the word “Subject.” Then type your comment into the box labelled “Message.”
- You can use the gray icons for boldfacing, italicizing, underlining, etc. (You can also use keyboard shortcuts: Ctrl-b, Ctrl-i, Ctrl-u). For more formatting options, click the three dots at the right.
- If you want to type your comments in Word first (to check grammar and spelling, for example), you can do that. In Word, highlight what you want to copy. Press Ctrl-a if you want to highlight everything in your document. Press Ctrl-c to copy. Come back to your browser, and click in the message box and press Ctrl-v to paste.
- You can put pictures in your comments. Click on the icon that depicts mountains and sun; then navigate in your computer to find the right file. You can also attach short videos or audio files.
- You will generally be “subscribed” to the discussion. That is, you’ll get an email whenever anyone else makes a comment there. If you want to stop that, look in the upper left corner for a gray button named “Unsubscribe from forum.”
- If you want to attach a document, click on “Advanced” underneath the message box. A box for attachment will then appear. Click on the “Add...” icon in the upper left (looks like a plus sign). The instructions are similar to uploading an assignment, which we will cover shortly.



You may need to do this if you are uploading to the forum a document for other students to read and comment on. Otherwise, it is best to avoid attached documents, because they require additional steps in order for other students to read them.

- **The most important part of the page** is the button at the bottom: “Post to forum.” If you click on it and nothing happens, perhaps you have forgotten to type in a subject, which is a required field. You will have 30 minutes to go back and edit your comment; the message will then be emailed to everyone who is subscribed.

J. Forum: reply to a comment

The forum is a place for student discussions. “Discussion” means that you are not just posting your own comments — you are also responding to what other students have written.

If we click on one of the discussion topics, we’ll see what others have written, as shown below (the text is intentionally blurred):



In this example, one student has posted a comment, and another has responded to that topic. The second comment is slightly indented (or nested) to show that it is a response. If a third person responds to the response, it will be indented yet a little more. That’s because the forum is set (at the top center) to “Display replies in nested form.” You can change that if you want to, although this works best for most students. You will see “edit” and “delete” only for your own comments. At

the end of the first comment is the word “reply.” Below the first response is also the word “reply.” If you scroll down the page, you’ll see that every comment in the discussion thread has the word “reply.”

- You need to choose which comment you are replying to. If you are interacting with the original posting, then click on its “reply.” If you are interacting with a later comment, click on the “reply” at the end of that one. That way the website will know where to display your comment, and other people can then see where you have entered the conversation, and what you are referring to. (The indents do not display in the email version, so to help email recipients know what is going on, it is helpful to begin your comment by giving some indication of what or who you are responding to – for example, “Jane, I had a question about your comment.”)
- If you click on “reply,” a box will open where you can input your text, while you can still see the text you are replying to, as well as the other comments that have been made in this group. If you want to change the subject heading or attach a document, you’ll need to click on “Advanced” below the message box.

A screenshot of a web forum interface. At the top, a header bar shows a profile picture, the text "Re: Bible Translation", and "by [username] - Monday, January 21, 2019, 3:19 PM". Below this is a large text area containing a blurred comment. To the right of the comment are three links: "Permalink", "Show parent", and "Reply". Below the comment is a large text input box with the placeholder text "Write your reply...". At the bottom left of the input box are two buttons: "Submit" and "Cancel". At the bottom right is a link labeled "Advanced".

- Type your message into the large box, just as you did to make your initial comment. When you are replying to a comment, it is often helpful to begin your reply with some context, such as, “Bob, I was intrigued by your comment about...” That way your post makes a little more sense in the email version that is sent to subscribers. Last, scroll to the bottom and click “Post to forum.”

K. Problems with forum messages

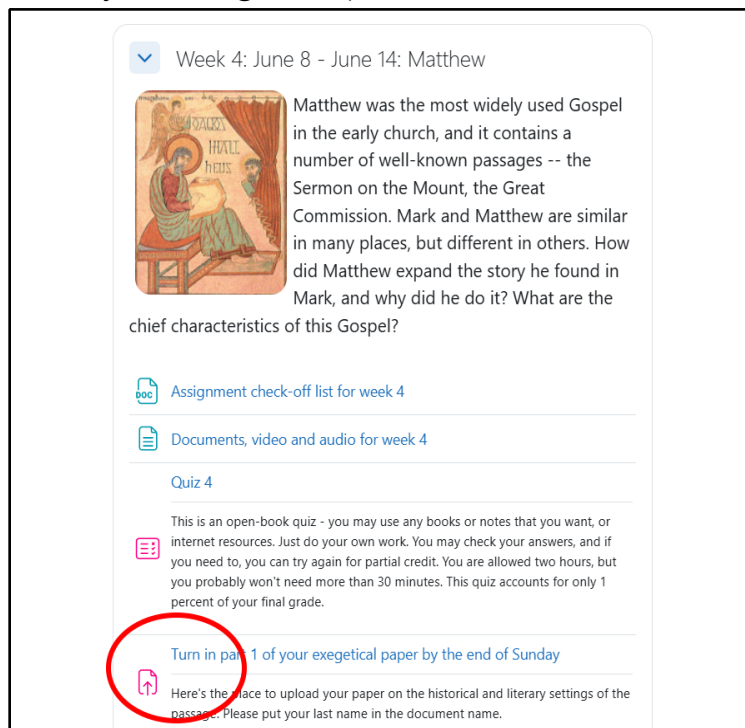
When the instructor or other students post their comments on the discussion forum, you should receive an email copy. If these message are not coming to your email inbox, there are a few things you can do:

1. **Check your email spam or junk mail folder**, and in Gmail, the “promotions” folder. Sometimes messages get flagged as spam mail even if they aren’t. (Your email provider may detect that a computer sent the same message to multiple people.) You may be able to adjust your email settings to prevent GCS mail from being flagged as spam.
2. Logout when you leave. Messages may not be sent to your email when the site thinks you are online. When you are done, click on your name or picture in the upper right corner and click Log out.
3. Change your message settings. Click your name in the upper right, then “Preferences.” Click “Message preferences” and make sure that email is set to “on.”

III. Assignments and Grades

A. Upload a new assignment

Now let's walk through the steps involved in uploading an assignment, such as a paper you have written. Unless your instructor tells you otherwise, we prefer Microsoft Word documents. Uploading your paper will take a few steps (the multiple steps are designed for security, so that no one else can see your assignment). Let's start at the course home page:



Circled above is the icon for an assignment upload area. Click on the title and you will see a page with the assignment name, due date, etc., as shown on the next page:

Paper 1

Due: Friday, September 18, 2026, 11:59 PM

Here's the place to upload your paper on the historical and literary settings of the passage. Please put your last name in the document name.

Add submission

Submission status

Submission status	No submissions have been made yet
Grading status	Not graded
Time remaining	8 hours 14 mins remaining
Last modified	-

This page may look slightly different in different assignments and courses, depending on the length of the description given by the instructor. Click on “Add submission” and you’ll see the next page:

Paper 1

Due: Friday, September 18, 2026, 11:59 PM

Here's the place to upload your paper on the historical and literary settings of the passage. Please put your last name in the document name.

▼ Add submission

File submissions Maximum file size: 5 MB, maximum number of files: 10

+

+

+

Files

↓

You can drag and drop files here to add them.

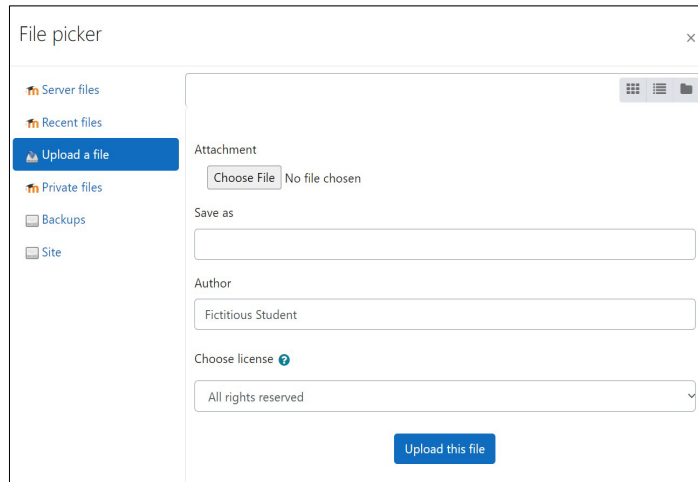
Save changes

Cancel

- You can use “drag and drop” to upload the file. Find the document in Windows File Explorer (a Word “File Open” dialog box also works). Put your mouse over the file, and while holding the left button down, move the mouse (“drag”) to the taskbar (usually at the bottom of the page) to the browser icon. Once your mouse is over

that tab, the browser should display. Still holding the left button down, move the mouse up to the drag-and-drop box on the assignment upload area. Then release the mouse button (“drop”).

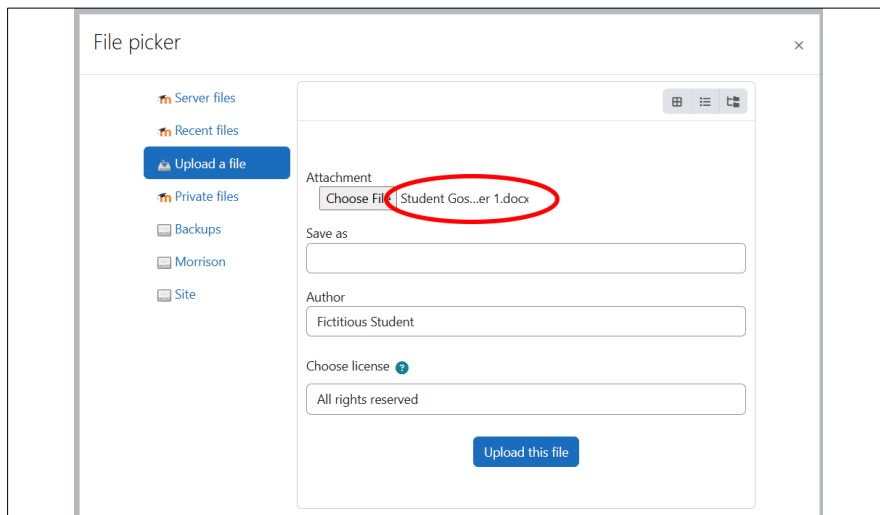
- You can also use the step-by-step method: Click on the “Add” icon (the plus sign circled above). You will then see the File picker:



Click on “Choose File.” (If you don’t see it, you may need to click on “Upload a file,” on the left.) When you click on Choose File, you’ll see a File Explorer “Open” dialog box (or something similar on a Mac...). Navigate in your computer until you find the folder where your file is stored. There are three ways to select the file:

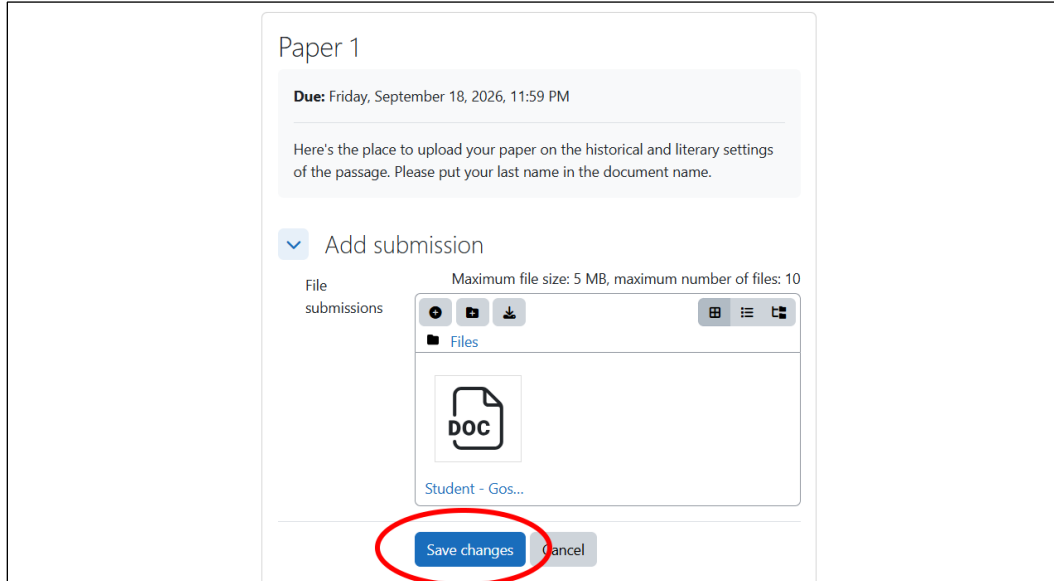
- double-click on the name of the file.
- click on the name of the file, then press Enter on the keyboard.
- click on the name of the file, then click on the button that says “Open.”

The name of your document is then loaded into the file picker. The document name will be displayed, as shown in the image below:



You can give the file a new name, by typing something in the “Save as” box. You should include your last name in the name of the file, to make it easier for the instructor to keep track of whose file is whose. Your name is automatically supplied as the “author.”

Click on “Upload this file” and you’ll be back at the GCS assignment page. The name of your file (or part of it) will be displayed in the box. If you want to see the full name of the document, click on the “list” icon in the upper right (mouseover text says “Display folder with file details”).



Last, click on “Save changes.” The website will display a confirmation page with submission status as “submitted for grading.” Check the document name again to be sure that you submitted the correct file(s).

B. Retrieve a graded assignment

Allow one week for the paper to be graded. When the instructor gives you a grade on the website, you will receive an email informing you that it has been graded. But since email is not considered a secure form of communication, the email will not say what your grade is. The email message will contain a link to your grade and you will have to log in to the course website.

On the website, the instructor may type general comments about the paper in a message box. In other cases detailed comments will be inside the document itself. This is normally done with Microsoft Word. If you cannot read Word files, or if you cannot see any comments,⁹ let the instructor know, so that the comments can be saved in some other format, such as PDF.

If you use the link provided in the mail, you will be taken directly to the grading area. You can also start at the course home page, and click on the name of the assignment. You will see the confirmation data, just as you did when you submitted the assignment. Below that, you will see “Feedback,” starting with your grade (shown as number of points divided by the potential points in the assignment). If the instructor has made additional comments, they can also be seen.

Click on the feedback files link to download the file(s) to your own computer. Depending on how you have told your computer to handle such documents, a small box may pop up to ask you how and where to save the file. Navigate in your computer to the folder you want the file to be in, and click “Save.”

The screenshot displays a web interface for a course assignment titled 'Paper 1'. At the top, it shows the due date as 'Friday, September 18, 2026, 11:59 PM'. Below this is a text area for uploading the paper, with a note: 'Here's the place to upload your paper on the historical and literary settings of the passage. Please put your last name in the document name.' There are two buttons: 'Edit submission' and 'Remove submission'. The 'Submission status' section shows a table with the following data:

Submission status	Submitted for grading
Grading status	Graded
Time remaining	Assignment was submitted 7 hours 43 mins early
Last modified	Friday, September 18, 2026, 4:15 PM
File submissions	Student - Gospels Paper 1.docx + September 18 2026, 4:15 PM Export to portfolio

The 'Feedback' section shows the following information:

Grade	93.0 / 100.0
Graded on	Friday, September 18, 2026, 5:47 PM
Graded by	Michael Morrison
Feedback files	Student - Gospels Paper 1 - 93.docx + September 18 2026, 5:47 PM

⁹ In “read mode” view, redline edits will not be seen. Use the “View” tab and choose “Print Layout.”

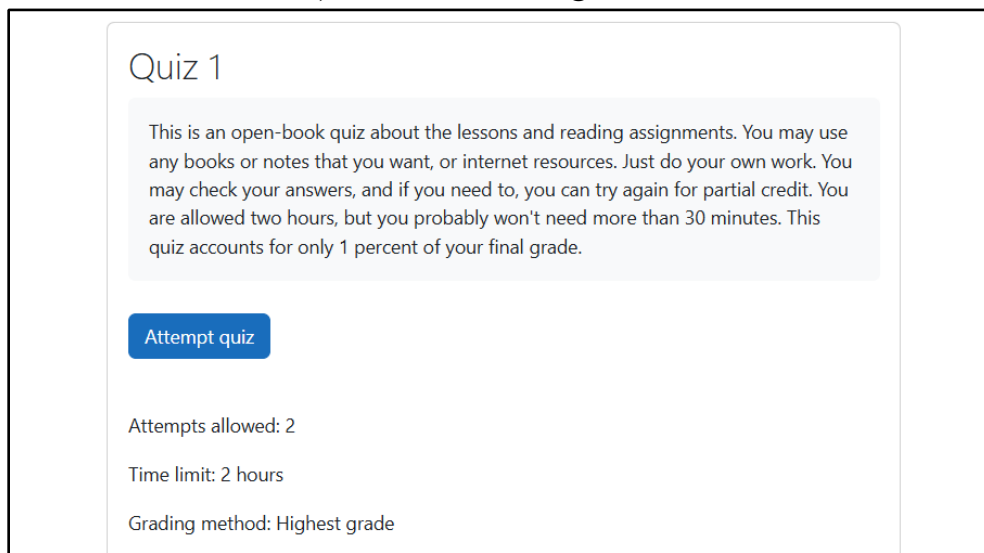
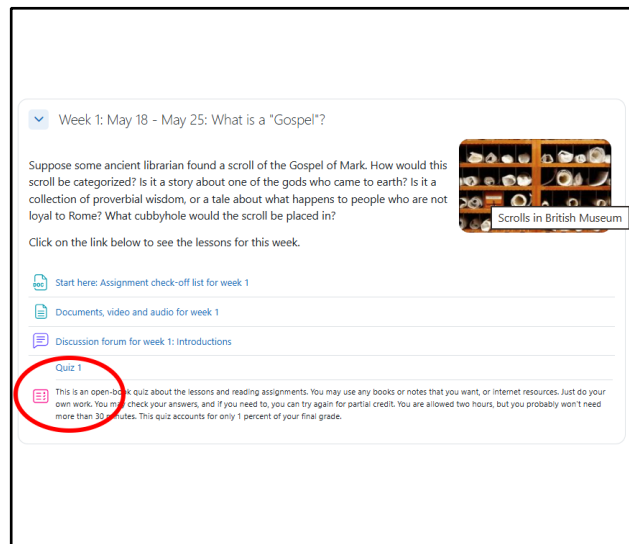
C. Make an archive copy of your papers

An important component of the MDiv Capstone Course is a review and analysis of a portfolio of your previous work at GCS. You will need copies of the major papers you did for many of the courses. We hope that you have stored printed or electronic copies of your papers and the instructors' comments.

- Even if you do not plan to get the MDiv, it is possible that you'll change your mind later, so it is best to save your papers now, even before you formally enter the program. Even if you never get the MDiv, it might still be helpful to have an archive copy of your papers.
- Hard disks have been known to fail. Paper files have been known to disappear. As additional insurance for your papers, we highly recommend that you keep a copy of your final papers on the GCS website.
 - Log in and go to your dashboard.
 - In the right column is a box labelled "Private files."
 - Click on "Manage private files," then upload a copy of your papers here (label them by course number), and you will be able to access them in future semesters.
 - If the instructor has included comments or edits in a Word document, that is the version that should be saved. If comments have been made in a text box, they must be copied into a document (perhaps at the end of the original paper, or as a separate document) and then uploaded to "Private files."

D. Taking a quiz

Some of our courses have quizzes – sometimes multiple choice and sometimes short essay questions. Your instructor will tell you whether you can use a Bible, books and/or notes. The icon for a quiz looks like a pink list (circled at right). If we click on the title of the quiz (in this case, the blue text a couple of lines above the icon), here's what might see:



Different instructors will have different instructions for the quiz. Some do not allow the use of outside books; some allow only one attempt. If you aren't sure, ask your instructor. This introductory page gives instructions about the quiz and some of the parameters involved, such as how much time you are allowed to take, whether you can take the quiz again, and if so, how the grade is calculated. You can view this page ahead of time, without actually starting the quiz. Click on "Attempt quiz." You will then get a confirmation page to make sure you want to proceed:

The clock starts when you click “Start attempt.” You will see the quiz itself:

Start attempt

Time limit

Your attempt will have a time limit of 1 hour. When you start, the timer will begin to count down and cannot be paused. You must finish your attempt before it expires. Are you sure you wish to start now?

Start attempt

Cancel

Quiz navigation

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

Finish attempt ...

Back

Time left 1:59:38

Hide

Question 1

Not complete

Points out of 1.0

Flag question

Some scholars compare the four Gospels to ancient biographies. There are similarities, but the biblical Gospels have something else in them, too. Wright and Bird say that there is more going on in the Gospels than in most ancient biographies, because the canonical Gospels...

Select one or more:

☐

 a. place Jesus within the story of what God is doing in Israel.

☐

 b. report parables and other sayings of Jesus.

☐

 c. include the death of the main character.

☐

 d. put everything into chronological order.

Check

In the upper left corner of the quiz is a navigation block. This shows at a glance how many questions are in the quiz. The black boxes show which questions are on the page you are on. Unless the instructor has disabled this feature, you can jump back and forth to any question by clicking on its number.

A box in the upper-right corner shows you how much time you have left to take the quiz.

On a multiple-choice quiz, click in the small circle or square to the left of the correct answer. If you are not sure and would like to come back to the question later, then click on “Flag question.” If you change your mind and want to select a different answer, click “Clear my choice.”

To submit each question and to find out how you did, click “Check.” (If “Check” does not appear, your quiz does not allow it.) Depending on how the instructor has set up the quiz, you may be able to try again for partial credit if you selected the wrong answer on the first attempt.

At the end of each page, click “Next.” On the last page of the quiz, you will see “Finish attempt...” When you click that, you’ll see a summary. It will let you know if any questions have been flagged:

Quiz 1
Summary of attempt

Question	Status	Points
1	Correct	1.0
2	Correct	1.0
3	Correct	1.0
4	Correct	1.0
5	Correct	1.0
6	Incorrect	0.0
7	Correct	1.0
8	Correct	1.0
9	Incorrect	0.0

Return to attempt

Time left 1:49:14

Hide

This attempt must be submitted by Friday, September 18, 2026, 9:39 PM.

Submit all and finish

At the bottom of the page, **if you are done, click “Submit all and finish.”** You will have to confirm this on a small pop-up window. Then you will see the graded results:

Quiz navigation

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

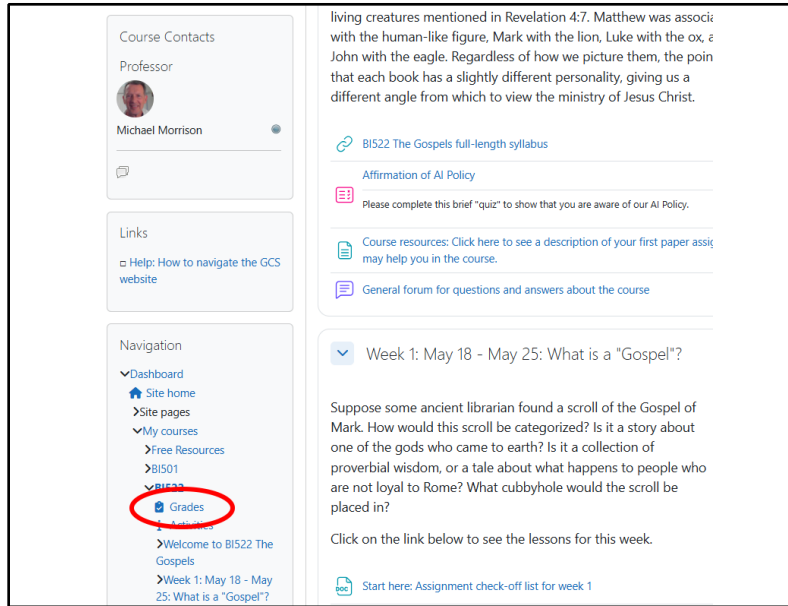
Finish review

Status	Finished
Started	Friday, September 18, 2026, 7:39 PM
Completed	Friday, September 18, 2026, 7:50 PM
Duration	11 mins 48 secs
Points	7.0/9.0
Grade	7.8 out of 10.0 (77.8%)

This page tells you how many questions you got right, and your overall grade. A pink background designates incorrect answers, and the correct answers are shown with green check marks. The website is able to grade multiple choice and true-false answers, but essay questions have to be graded by the instructor. That may take up to a week after the due date.

E. Seeing your grades

How are you doing so far? It's good to check the website to make sure that we have what we are supposed to have. So let's go back to the course home page, and look in the left column. In the "Navigation" block, there is a link for "Grades."



The icon for grades is a clipboard with a check mark. Click on the word "Grades" and you'll see how you have done so far. It shows your grades – and no one else's:

User report ▾						
 Fictitious Student						
Grade item	Calculated weight	Grade	Range	Percentage	Feedback	Contribution to course total
▾ BI522 The Gospels						
 QUIZ Affirmation of AI Policy	-	10.0 ***	0–10	100.0 %		-
▾ Forum discussion participation - 15%						
 MANUAL ITEM Forums, weeks 1-5	50.00 %	9.5	0–10	95.0 %		47.5 %
 MANUAL ITEM Forum, weeks 6-10	50.00 %	9.0	0–10	90.0 %		45.0 %
 AGGREGATION Forum total	-	9.3	0–10	92.5 %		-
▾ Quizzes - 10% of total grade						
 QUIZ Quiz 1	10.00 %	7.8 ***	0–10	77.8 %		7.8 %

Every course has a different grade structure. This course is organized into categories: forums, quizzes, and papers. You can see the overall score on each assignment, a percentage score, and the way it totals when weighted according to the importance of the categories. If the instructor has typed comments into the website, you can also see those. You can also see if any scores are missing – that might be something to ask about.

But the most important grades cannot be displayed here. That’s what you remember, what you understand, what you can teach, and what you apply in your own life. May it all be to the praise of the Father, Son and Spirit!