

# Introduction

## English for Bible and Theology

**English for Bible and Theology (EBT):** The teaching or learning of the specific variety of English used in Bible and theology classes, textbooks, and articles in these disciplines, sermons, etc. One subtype of EBT is **Theological English (TE)**, which focuses on aspects of English related to the study of theology, including theological terms, the range of complex sentence structures used in theological writing, and even the broader organizational patterns used by theologians in their teaching and writing.

This introduction addresses some fundamental questions teachers and learners often ask about English for Bible and Theology (EBT): What is EBT? How does an EBT course differ from other English classes for those who are native speakers of other languages? What is the difference between EBT and Theological English (TE)? Is specialized instruction in English really needed in order to study theology? Why isn't a high level of language proficiency, plus a good dictionary, adequate for the learners' needs? How do EBT and TE courses differ from the range of Bible and theology courses found in seminaries and Bible institutes as well as in graduate and undergraduate Christian higher education? Before we discuss these questions, we need to define some acronyms used for different types of English courses.

## Common Acronyms

<b>ESL</b>	<b>English as a Second Language:</b> English taught or learned in countries where it has an official status and is commonly used as the medium of general communication. These countries include the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. ESL learners are often immigrants or refugees who plan to remain in the country or students who may return to their native countries after a period of study. Although we use the term <i>second language</i> , English may be the learners' third, fourth, or even tenth language.
<b>EFL</b>	<b>English as a Foreign Language:</b> English taught or learned in countries where English has no official status and is not commonly used as the medium of general communication, as the medium of academic instruction, or for other purposes such as government and media. For example, those who teach English in Russia, Turkey, and China teach English as a foreign language. Some authors and practitioners in the field blur the contrast between ESL and EFL. North Americans often use ESL as a generic acronym to refer to teaching English to native speakers of other languages regardless of the country or environment in which instruction takes place; in other parts of the world, the terms EFL and ELT (English Language Teaching) are preferred.
<b>GPE</b>	<b>General Purpose English:</b> Sometimes called General English (GE), this refers to the common core of language skills essential for learners from all disciplines.
<b>ESP</b>	<b>English for Specific Purposes:</b> The teaching or learning of the varieties of English used for specific professional or job-related tasks or skills (e.g., Business English, Medical English, English for Aviation, English for Banking). ESP includes both English for Academic Purposes and English for Occupational Purposes.
<b>EAP</b>	<b>English for Academic Purposes:</b> The teaching or learning of the varieties of English used in academic work (e.g., English for Bible and Theology).
<b>EOP</b>	<b>English for Occupational Purposes:</b> The teaching or learning of the varieties of English used in different professions (e.g., English for Engineers) and occupations (e.g., English for Tour Guides).

For a more complete list of terms and acronyms, see the following Web sites:

Institute for Cross-Cultural Training:

<http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/ICCT/ResandLinks/acronyms.html>

*The Internet TESL Journal*: <http://iteslj.org/acronyms.html>

## Types of English Courses

To illustrate where EBT courses fit into the larger context of ESL/EFL instruction, Figure I.1 provides a visual summary of the different categories and subcategories of classes, along with a few of the many possible courses in each category. It shows instruction categorized according to overall focus: General Purpose English (GPE) or English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

In addition, we can distinguish between two broad and often considerably overlapping categories of ESP, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). EAP courses are generally for students who are learning in a classroom or another academic setting, while EOP courses are usually for on-the-job workers with very specific and usually non-academic uses for English. Note that we have placed EBT in the EAP family. Because most students require this knowledge for academic purposes, we consider EBT to be a subcategory of EAP, not EOP. However, like nearly all other EAP courses, the EBT course content also has considerable value for those who are not studying in an academic context.

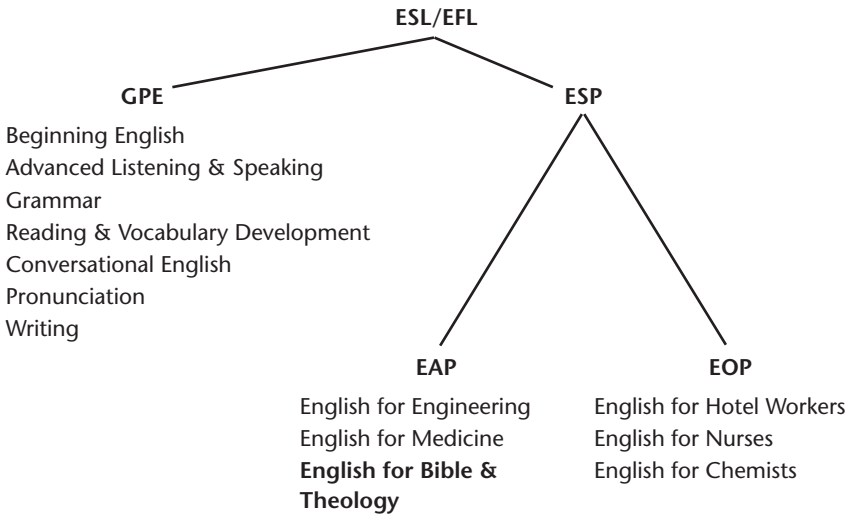


Figure I.1: Categories of ESL/EFL Teaching and Learning

**General Purpose English (GPE).** Regardless of their ultimate purpose for learning English, beginning ESL/EFL students tend to have many shared instructional needs. All learners require a basic knowledge of grammar and high frequency vocabulary. The majority also want to develop oral communication skills (proficiency in listening and speaking) as well as literacy skills (proficiency in reading and writing). These non-specialized needs can be met by instruction in General Purpose English. By choosing to focus broadly on the learners' shared English-language needs, we find that the ESL/EFL content and learning activities suitable for seminary students may differ little from the content and learning activities useful for medical workers, bankers, and those engaged in international trade. In fact, in many classrooms where GPE is taught, students represent a wide variety of contexts for their future use of the language. Furthermore, GPE courses may be offered at all levels (beginning, intermediate, advanced), in all skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), and for all language components (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation). While

instruction for beginning and intermediate learners may cover all skills and components in a single course, high-intermediate and advanced classes frequently deal with only one or two skills (e.g., high intermediate reading, advanced listening and speaking) or components (e.g., advanced grammar, advanced pronunciation) or combinations of skills and components (e.g., high-intermediate reading and vocabulary development, advanced conversational English).<sup>1</sup>

**English for Specific Purposes (ESP).** Once they have reached the intermediate to high-intermediate level, most ESL/EFL students also use their newly acquired language skills beyond their English classroom. If they are working in a job or profession, communicating with co-workers about job-specific responsibilities is likely to require a command of specialized vocabulary and terms. If they are students, they may need English to read an article, listen to a lecture, watch a DVD, or attend a conference in which presentations are in English. Learners such as these have very specific purposes for using English. Their motivation is often the highest and their learning the most efficient when instruction takes into account the English-language subject areas they will need to deal with (e.g., theology, medicine, business) and the tasks they must carry out (e.g., reading textbooks, understanding academic lectures, dealing with medical patients, selling products internationally). Language teaching specialists categorize these courses under the rubric English for Specific Purposes. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, 19) define ESP as follows:

ESP is not a particular kind of language or methodology, nor does it consist of a particular type of teaching material. Understood properly, it is an approach to language learning, which is based on learner need. The foundation of all ESP is the simple question: Why does this learner need to learn a foreign language? . . . ESP, then, is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's need for learning.

**English for Bible and Theology (EBT).** When their English-language needs include tasks such as reading theology textbooks, writing term papers about church history, participating in class discussions about biblical topics, and perhaps even teaching Bible studies or preaching, these learners can profit from the category of ESP that we call English for Bible and Theology. In particular, high-intermediate and advanced learners can usually progress more rapidly when materials and learning activities focus on (1) the content they will deal with in their Bible and theology course work (and for some, their future ministry), (2) the discipline-specific language they must master, and (3) the range of tasks they will need to handle in English.

Although learners can acquire their knowledge of EBT through self-study, many gain this expertise more easily through enrollment in a course or through individual tutoring. EBT courses are often more essential in an overseas context where English is not commonly spoken, but they are also

valuable additions for international students in countries where English is the dominant language. Most international students who have not taken previous Bible and theology course work in English, including many who have used English as the medium of instruction in other courses, can profit from EBT instruction before or concurrently with their first Bible and/or theology course taught in English.

EBT is a broad category that encompasses a variety of courses related to the study of ESL/EFL and to the subject matter of the Bible and/or theology. Some EBT courses focus on areas that are not necessarily academic in nature, such as helping students learn common biblical terms, understand English sermons, or read the English Bible or Christian journal articles written for a lay audience. However, EBT classes usually deal with topics that are more academic, such as teaching the skills needed for reading theological publications, listening to lectures on biblical themes, discussing opposing theological viewpoints, or writing scholarly articles.

When students must do most or all of their Bible and theology course work in English, their EBT course should include all four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Even at the high-intermediate to advanced level, these same students will probably need to focus on content areas such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, and perhaps also learning strategies and other areas related to second language acquisition.

In many Bible schools and seminaries in an EFL context (i.e., where English is not the language of the wider community), students handle most of their learning activities in their native language. This includes listening to lectures, interacting with professors and colleagues, and writing papers. In many of these same institutions, however, only a small number of theological publications are available in the native language. Therefore, the school's library and the professors' reading lists may consist primarily of volumes written in English. To access this broad range of theological textbooks and journals, students must have at least a moderately strong reading knowledge of English. For these students, the optimal EBT course would be one that focuses primarily on the reading skill.

**Theological English (TE)** courses focus on the English-language needs of theology students, and they are generally quite academic in nature. Some students in TE classes can also profit from taking other EBT classes that focus on a variety of English skills as well as different types of biblical and theological content. Others may need only a Theological English class, and not the broader EBT instruction.

*Exploring Theological English* is a TE textbook that is primarily for those interested in studying theology in an academic context. Our English-language goal is to help learners develop their English skills in the areas of reading, theological and general academic vocabulary, and advanced grammatical structures. While we recognize that theology students may also want to focus on the other three language skills (listening, speaking, and writing), this textbook does not focus directly on those needs. Our

theological goal is to introduce the range of topics and vocabulary found in most introductory theology textbooks.

### **The Need for Theological English Instruction**

When discussing the need for Theological English (TE) instruction, teachers and administrators typically voice a range of opinions and concerns. Those who have not personally observed students having difficulties in using English for their theology studies may ask, “Do students really need specialized English instruction which focuses on this discipline? Isn’t a good General Purpose English course sufficient preparation, especially if it’s a course that emphasizes academic skills?” They may even mention students who do very well in their theology classes without the benefit of a TE course. We acknowledge that there are gifted learners who develop a high level of proficiency in English, and without specialized TE instruction they handle their theological studies quite well. These are the students, usually few in number, who somehow make it to the top of their classes in spite of having less-than-ideal formal language learning experiences. These, however, are usually not the typical learners; they are the exceptions. In addition, these same individuals often tell us that they could have reached more easily, or even exceeded, their present level of proficiency with the help of a TE course and a range of learning materials designed to meet their specialized needs.

Those who have observed students struggling with the English language may ask, “Why is it that the majority of my students have a horrendous time trying to make sense of reading assignments in our introductory theology textbook, but they can understand the same concepts when presented in their native language?” Or, “Can anything be done to help our students so that they won’t have to spend ten hours poring over a single page of theology—and then not really understand what they have read?” Or, for classes comprised of native and non-native speakers, “I know Mr. Kim understands the theological arguments better than 90% of his classmates, including most of the native English speakers, but he seems to comprehend little from his reading assignments. What can I do to help him?”

Unfortunately, in many Christian institutions a large number of non-native English speakers struggle through their assignments and activities that require advanced English ability. They take longer to complete reading assignments, and their comprehension is often inadequate. They frequently rely on others for help with required assignments and they seldom do optional assignments that might enrich their learning. They tend to refrain from taking courses with extensive and/or difficult readings, and some fail to graduate, dropping out of school before completing their studies. These students desperately need the kind of instruction that will help them bridge the gap between what they learn in their GPE classes and the level and type of English required by their theology courses. Figure I.2 illustrates this gap between what students learn in their GPE classes and the English-language demands of their theology courses.



Figure I.2: The Gap Between GPE Courses and Theology Courses

To explain in more detail the need for TE instruction, we will look first at two typical GPE classes taught in countries where English is not the primary language of instruction. Then we will focus on the English-language reading demands of a typical theology course with a textbook and other readings only in English. This will allow us to see more clearly the gap that exists between the instruction provided in even the best GPE courses and the English-language needs of theology students. Examining this gap can help us understand more fully why GPE classes fail to provide adequate preparation for most theology students and, in turn, help us recognize the contribution of courses designed to meet the reading goals of these students.

Although there can be dozens of types and subtypes of GPE classes, we will look at two fairly typical classes taught in overseas contexts. Each offers learning opportunities that help students grow in their English proficiency. However, neither provides the most effective preparation for students who must read theology materials in English.

**A communicative GPE class.** Moscow, Russia: 20 adults meeting for two semesters, three times per week for two hours per class. The prominence of grammar and vocabulary learning are less obvious in this communicative class in Moscow. Instead, the primary emphasis is on oral communication with students interacting verbally with the teacher, in small groups with other class members, and sometimes in pairs. The focus is on everyday language—the topics and typical phrases and sentences used when interacting informally with others. Homework varies from listening to a tape or CD-ROM and answering questions by writing short sentences to finding another person and practicing the dialogues or other oral content of the day’s lesson. The second semester of this communicative curriculum differs from the first primarily in the complexity of language and the types of activities that students handle. For example, students often take part in group discussions, plan projects together, and watch television or movies.

*Evaluation:* This course is more appropriate for those who want to travel to English-speaking countries as tourists and those who wish to interact informally with English speakers in Russia. However, its lack of emphasis on reading and writing skills make it less desirable for those who need to use English for academic work. Bible and theology students who spend two semesters in this curriculum will find it exceedingly difficult to handle the demands of a theology course with a large number of reading assignments in English.

**A traditional GPE class.** Warsaw, Poland: 25 young adults meeting for two years, twice a week for two hours per class. Primary emphasis is placed on the learning of grammar and general-purpose vocabulary. Classroom activities generally consist of explanation of grammar points followed by sentence-level pencil-and-paper exercises (e.g., fill in the blank, short answer, multiple choice), memorization of vocabulary lists (often supplied by the teacher), and occasional translation of sentences from one language to the other. Oral work consists mainly of going over the written homework exercises. Reading and writing assignments tend to deal with sentences and short paragraphs. Most students rely heavily on their bilingual English-Polish dictionaries.

*Evaluation:* While it is important for students to learn English grammar and general vocabulary, courses such as this one often cover far too many grammar points with far too little practice. Students frequently finish two years of English with little ability to actually use the language and often with low motivation to continue learning. After completing this traditional curriculum, some students can read most basic biblical resources, especially when they have dealt with similar subject matter in their native language. Most, however, find even two years of English to be inadequate for their needs. While these students have learned a great many vocabulary words and have practiced their reading skills, they have not dealt with vocabulary or topics similar to those found in the Bible or theological materials. These learners are generally unprepared to handle the activities and tasks in a typical theology class.

While these two English classes can be of value to many different types of language learners, neither provides the optimal match for theology students who must handle reading activities and tasks such as those listed in Figure I.3. For these learners, instruction in GPE—when it excludes any work in EBT and especially TE—is not the most efficient approach to language learning because it requires devoting large blocks of time to the mastery of content that often has little value for the students' personal and professional goals. When time and effort are given to content and activities of lesser value—even when essential skills such as reading are emphasized—more important needs are neglected and the learners often lose motivation to study English. Furthermore, without help for their specialized needs, even many of those who have attained a high level of proficiency in GPE may have difficulty in handling highly technical discipline-specific tasks, such as reading theology textbooks with a moderate to high level of comprehension. Therefore, for optimal success in second language acquisition, as well as their subject-matter discipline, we believe that intermediate to advanced students will learn more efficiently and maintain



higher motivation when at least some of their classroom instruction or individual tutoring is geared to the specialized uses of the language.

## **Bridging the Gap Between GPE Instruction and Theology Courses**

The primary purpose of TE instruction is to prepare learners for the English-language requirements of theology courses. This is accomplished by bridging the gap (Figure I.2) between what students have learned in GPE classes and what will be required of them in their theological studies. More specifically, TE courses are designed (1) to bridge the gap between the generic content common to most GPE courses—topics of general interest and usefulness to all students—and the content of theology courses and (2) to sharpen the students’ learning skills, such as reading and vocabulary development, that are essential for their academic course work. The precise focus of each TE class should differ, depending on the English-language content and language-learning skills required of that particular group of learners in their theological studies.

**Theology courses.** The primary purpose of theology courses differs considerably from that of Theological English courses. Theology courses are designed to involve students in the discipline of theology so that “they acquire a deeper understanding of the subject matter and can formulate a biblically based, historically informed, reasonably consistent, and contemporaneously meaningful statement of a Christian worldview” (personal communication with J. Julius Scott, Jr., Professor Emeritus of Biblical and Historical Studies at Wheaton College Graduate School).

Figure I.3 highlights the similarities and contrasts between these two types of courses: a TE course, *English for Theology: Reading and Vocabulary Development*, and an introductory theology course, *Christian Doctrines*. An examination of the goals, learning materials, and sample learning activities for the two courses shows that they differ in each of the three categories on the chart. Although Figure I.3 shows that there is some overlap between the two courses, the primary focus of the TE course is on English language skills while the major emphasis of the Christian Doctrines course is on theology. For example, the most basic goal for the theological English students is the development of language skills related to reading, while a more advanced goal is the application of these skills to the learning of key theological concepts and vocabulary. On the other hand, the Christian Doctrines course assumes learners are beginning their studies with the requisite English skills for accomplishing each of the four goals listed in Figure I.3. In this course, learners must first understand broad theological themes. After that, they go beyond this basic goal to three others that involve the application of this newly acquired knowledge to a range of practical issues Christians face in their daily lives.

	<b>English for Theology: Reading and Vocabulary Development</b>	<b>Christian Doctrine</b>
<b>Goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop language skills needed to read theology books and articles written in English</li> <li>• learn key concepts and vocabulary used in theology books and articles written in English</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand the normative themes of Christian theological literature</li> <li>• address concerns regarding the relevance of Christian theology</li> <li>• encourage genuine convictions concerning the Christian faith</li> <li>• acquire a better understanding of the role of Christian theology in the church</li> </ul>
<b>Learning Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• variety of exercises to develop reading and vocabulary skills</li> <li>• readings (often simplified) that deal with key concepts and terms</li> <li>• two English Bibles (one translation that is a literal or formal equivalent, one that is a functional or dynamic equivalent)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bible</li> <li>• theology textbook(s) and articles</li> </ul>
<b>Sample Learning Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use available clues to determine meaning (e.g., context, grammatical structures, graphic symbols)</li> <li>• identify main idea and supporting details</li> <li>• scan passage for specific information</li> <li>• use English-only theological dictionary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• complete reading assignments</li> <li>• listen to class lectures and take notes</li> <li>• participate in class discussions</li> <li>• write a critical review of a chapter from a required textbook</li> <li>• write your personal doctrinal statement</li> <li>• take two written examinations</li> </ul>

Figure I.3: Contrasts Between EBT and Theology Courses

### Four Typical Sequences for EBT and/or TE Instruction

Figure I.4 illustrates four typical instructional sequences that provide effective preparation for the study of Bible and theology in English. Although some students may take only one GPE course, most will take a number of courses. While EBT and/or TE may be a single course, we prefer to have two separate courses so that students can begin with more general EBT instruction and then focus on TE with its more challenging concepts as well as its more complex English-language demands. Also, in some situations teachers may wish to focus on listening and speaking skills in an

EBT course and then put more emphasis on reading (and perhaps writing) in the TE course.

Schedule 1:	GPE	→	GPE/EBT/TE	→	Bible and Theology
Schedule 2:	GPE	→	EBT/TE	→	Bible and Theology
Schedule 3:	GPE	→		→	EBT/TE + Bible and Theology
Schedule 4:	GPE	→		→	GPE/EBT/TE + Bible and Theology

Figure I.4: Four Typical Sequences for EBT Instruction

Note that in Figure I.4 all sequences begin with General Purpose English (GPE). These courses are usually for beginning and intermediate to high-intermediate learners. Ideally, students would be at least at the high-intermediate level before studying EBT and/or TE, as this promotes an easier transition into the study of biblical and theological materials. However, we recognize that many students do not have the time nor opportunity to gain a moderate to high level of proficiency in the language before they begin their biblical and theological studies in English.

1. Schedule 1 allows learners to continue their study of GPE while also focusing on EBT and/or TE. This is often the approach that is most beneficial for those who have studied English for only a short time (e.g., 1–4 years), as it encourages these students to continue advancing in their weaker areas of GPE while also beginning their study of EBT and/or TE. This is usually the ideal sequence for Bible schools and seminaries in countries where English is not the primary language of instruction for all levels of education, beginning with the elementary grades.
2. Schedule 2 is usually most appropriate for those who have studied GPE for several years. This sequence can provide a good foundation in EBT and/or TE, making an easier transition for beginning the study of theology. It is usually appropriate for students who have been required to earn a high score on an English proficiency test, such as the TOEFL or IELTS,<sup>2</sup> in order to be admitted to a college or university where all instruction is in English. It may also be the most ideal approach for students who have studied other subjects in English and for those who have only a short time (e.g., a few weeks or months) to study EBT and/or TE before beginning a Bible and theology curriculum.
3. Schedule 3 can be a useful approach for learners with strong English skills—ideally those who are high-intermediate to advanced learners in GPE and perhaps have also taken other courses in English. This approach may also be appropriate for those who anticipate that their study of Bible and theology will be challenging either because they have occasional difficulties with English or because they are not familiar with the English terms and concepts

used in these disciplines. For students who do not already have at least moderately strong English skills, Schedule 3 can work successfully only when the biblical and theological content is presented in simplified English or when the student's native language is used for part of the instruction.

4. Schedule 4 is ideal for advanced learners who need to give some attention to one area of GPE, such as pronunciation or writing skills, yet they generally have sufficiently strong English skills for studying EBT and/or TE and a limited amount of Bible and theology. In addition, this approach is often appropriate for those who need some individual or small-group tutoring in English in order to keep up with classmates who have more advanced English skills. We do not recommend Schedule 4 for those who do not have at least moderately strong skills in GPE.

## Conclusion

Each year more biblical and theological materials are published in English than in any other language. No matter which country our students come from or which language they speak natively, most non-native speakers of English find it moderately challenging to exceedingly difficult to read theological publications written for native English speakers. The goal of our student textbook, *ETE*, is to make this task easier by giving learners the kind of instruction they need in order to bridge the gap between their current command of the English language and the very specific language demands placed on them as they seek to comprehend theological articles and books written in English. The goal of our *Teacher's Guide* is to provide you as the instructor with the kind of help you need in order to teach *ETE* more effectively. This includes addressing the need for EBT and TE instruction, helping you in planning and implementing instruction that is appropriate for your students' needs, and giving chapter-by-chapter teaching suggestions and an answer key for all exercises.