I. Introduction: An **argument** is the case made to convince the reader of your claim.

II. Basic structure of a scholarly argument

A. Typical structure of a thesis
   1. **Introduction**
      a. The **question**: What you want to find out and its importance
      b. The **claim**: your answer to the question
   2. **History of Research** on the question
      a. **Alternative answers** to the question: a review of previous work on the question, showing the need for further work.
   3. **Argument** for your position
      a. **Reasons** your answer is correct based on the evidence.
      b. **Rebuttal** against other answers showing why they are not acceptable
      c. **Defense** against likely criticisms and questions of a reader
   4. **Conclusion**: Summary of what has been demonstrated

B. This basic structure is repeated numerous times in a thesis as layers of the argument are built up.
   1. The evidence used to answer your main question is built up from answers to several smaller questions.
   2. Basic structure of answer to supporting questions is similar:
      a. **Question**
      b. List of **alternative answers**
      c. Weigh **strengths and weaknesses** of each answer
      d. Your **claim** about the correct answer
      e. **Reasons** this is the correct answer and **rebuttal** of other answers
      f. **Defense** against counter arguments
   3. Example: *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Romans 8:19-22 in Light of Jesus Apocalyptic Literature*
      a. Main question: “How is the theological outlook of Rom. 8:19-22 similar to Jewish apocalyptic literature?”
      b. Main claim: “Paul’s perspective of the natural world in Rom. 8.19-22 is similar to that strand of Jewish apocalyptic thought that believes that the fall of Adam damaged the natural world and that looks forward to God’s eschatological transformation of creation, by which the damage caused by sin will be removed and creation will be perfected and glorified.”
      c. Supporting questions use to build up the case:
         (1) What is apocalyptic thought?
         (2) Is apocalyptic theology found in Jewish literature that does not have the literary genre of apocalypse?
         (3) What is the theology of Jewish apocalypses on these topics:
             (a) The corruption of creation (the impact of human and angelic sin of nature)
             (b) The redemption of creation (how nature will be changed at the end of the age)
             (c) The personification of creation (since nature is strongly personified in Rom. 8:19-22)
         (4) What is the theology of Rom. 8:19-22 on these same three topics?
      d. The main question is then tackled, by comparing the theology of Jewish apocalypses and Rom. 8:19-22 on the three topics.
      e. Conclusion: Rom. 8:19-22 is similar to a particular stream of Jewish apocalyptic thought.

III. Types of evidence for an exegetical claim

A. The correct answer to an exegetical question is pointed to by the convergence of several factors (checkpoints for an interpretation of a passage):
1. Does the interpretation fit the normal meanings of words as used in the author's language and time?
2. Does the interpretation fit the grammar and structure of the passage?
3. Does the interpretation fit the context?
4. Does the interpretation fit the facts of culture, history and geography?
5. Is the interpretation consistent with the rules of interpretation for the type of literature?
6. Is the interpretation consistent with other Scripture?

B. These checkpoints are weighed together and logical reasoning is used to draw a conclusion about the meaning of the passage.

C. There may not be 100% certainty of the correct interpretation in some cases.
   1. The most likely view has the best evidence and the fewest difficulties.
   2. **Occam's razor**: If 2 interpretations are equally likely, the simpler explanation is more likely correct.

IV. Weighing alternative views

A. A scholarly research paper should be a **dialog not a diatribe**.
   1. A **diatribe** is a one-sided abusive argument for a position, without considering other views fairly.
      Often a diatribe mocks or ridicules other views or attacks the persons who hold the view (*ad hominem* attack)
   2. Scholarly writing is **not an apologetic** defense of a particular position.

B. Scholarly writing is a dialog with other scholars and the reader
   1. A dialog with other scholars:
      a. The history of research shows where the question is now and shows the need for your project.
      b. For each question, objectively weigh the strengths and weaknesses of each interpretation.
   2. A dialog with the reader:
      a. Carefully present evidence leading the reader to make the conclusion for himself that your view has the best support.
      b. Anticipate questions and objections of your reader and answer them.
   3. You are a moderator for a discussion gives everyone a chance to present their viewpoint.

C. For each question, list the major views and discuss the strengths and weaknesses for each view.
   1. Show an awareness of all solutions to your problem and that your view has better evidence
      a. *Turabian, 42:* “Readers will judge your report not just by the quality of your sources and how accurately you report them, but also by how deeply you engage them.”
      b. Specify the seminal thinkers for each view and possibly several other scholars (list in footnotes).
   2. Anticipate and answer objections to your claim. This makes your writing more persuasive than if you sweep the problems under the rug.
   3. If you have done your work well, the reader will conclude that your view has the strongest evidence.

D. For an exegetical work, mine commentaries for evidence for various views.
   1. Even if you disagree with them, find the reasons for their view.
   2. Even those you disagree with can have useful historical, comparative religions, linguistic and grammatical data that you can use to strengthen your case.

E. Example: What is the meaning of κτίσις (“creation”) in Rom 8:19-23 [handout/PPT]
   1. **Major Options:**
      View 1: Universal view: All created things as a whole
      View 2: Cosmic view: The subhuman creation, or nature
View 3: Anthropomorphic view: Humanity
   3a: Unbelievers
   3b: Believers

2. Strengths and weaknesses of various views:
   a. View 1: All created things:
      (1) Pro:
         (a) V. 22 refers to “all creation”.
         (b) In many places in the NT κτίσις is comprehensive.
      (2) Con: Certain parts of the created order are excluded by the context:
         (a) V. 23 contrasts believers from “all creation” in previous verse (“also we ourselves”).
         (b) Demons do not eagerly await the coming of believers with Christ at his second coming.
             They also will not be redeemed (v. 21).
         (c) Unbelievers are not awaiting the revealing of the saints.
         (d) Angels have not been subjected to futility (vv. 20-21).
   b. View 2: Subhuman creation:
      (1) Pro:
         (a) When believers, unbelievers, angels and demons are excluded as above, nature is left
             from among created things.
         (b) Some OT and Jewish Second Temple passages use the term “all creation” to refer to a
             more limited class of created beings, depending on the focus on the context.
         (c) Some OT and Jewish Second Temple passages use the term “creation” for nature.
         (d) Many OT examples of personification of nature like this.
      (2) Con:
         (a) Emotional responses such as groaning and eager expectation are human responses, not
             animal or nature. (Rebuttal: this is personification, typical of the OT and Jewish
             Intertestamental literature).
   c. View 3a: Unbelieving humanity
      (1) Pro:
         (a) Mk 16:15 uses “creation” for humanity.
      (2) Con:
         (a) Mk 16:15 is not in the best manuscripts and using Mk. to support Paul is weak
             methodologically.
         (b) Unbelievers are not awaiting the revealing of the saints.
         (c) This would suggest all people will be saved (v. 21).
   d. View 3b: Believing humanity
      (1) Pro:
         (a) Previous context speaks about suffering and glory of believers.
         (b) Paul uses “creation” to refer to believers in 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15.
      (2) Con:
         (a) Rom 8 frequently contrasts believers from “creation” (v. 19, creation awaits them; v. 21.
             creation will benefit from the glory of believers; v. 23 contrasts the groaning of believers
             from the groaning of creation)

3. Conclusion (claim): Subhuman creation is best supported by the context and fits usage in other places.
4. Note the use of the various checkpoints for interpretation:
   a. Possible meanings of the word in Hellenistic Greek (LXX, NT, Second Temple Jewish)
   b. Grammar (“all”)
   c. Structure of the passage (repetition of κτίσις; contrast of believers in v. 23 with κτίσις in vv.
      19-22)
   d. Context (e.g. v. 23; references to various things that do not fit certain types of creatures)
   e. Culture and history (comparison to non-canonical Jewish literature)
   f. Literary type (personification)
   g. Other Scripture (especially LXX)
V. Other tips on presenting your argument

A. Don’t “cherry pick”: selectively present only facts that support your view (typical of a diatribe)

B. Avoid logical fallacies.
   1. *Ad hominem* attack: rejecting what a person says because of who the person is or what he believes, rather than considering the force of his arguments. (e.g. calling him a “liberal”; rejecting his interpretation of a passage because he is a homosexual)
   2. *Begging the question (circular argument)*: The conclusion of the argument is assumed explicitly or implicitly in one of the premises.
      a. Example: We know God exists because the Bible says so. (assumes the Bible is inspired by God).
   3. Syllogistic fallacies
      a. A *syllogism* is reasoning from a major premise and a minor premise to a conclusion:
         Major premise: All mortal things die.
         Minor premise: All men are mortal things.
         Conclusion: All men die.
      b. There are many ways that people make mistakes with syllogisms (see “Syllogistic Fallacy” in Wikipedias and D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* for many examples)
      c. *Undistributed middle*:
         All true Christians love their enemies
         Mary loves her enemies
         Therefore, Mary is a Christian
      d. *Drawing a negative inference from a positive premise*:
         (1) Just because a positive inference is true it does not mean a negative inference is also true
         (2) example:
            All orthodox Jews believe in Moses
            Mr. Smith is not an orthodox Jew
            Therefore, Mr., Smith does not believe in Moses
   4. Sources about logical fallacies

C. When and how much to quote [see Barzun & Graff, *The Modern Researcher*, ch. 14]
   1. Do not “pearl string” a series of quotations.
   2. Quote when the author provides a particularly clear and powerful expression of an idea.
   3. Quote when the author has a distinctive use of terms that is not easily summarized.
   4. Quote a view you want to refute, so you fairly present it before you refute it.
   5. In general, do not quote (or cite) an authority to prove a point. This only shows that he takes a certain view. With the quote, present his evidence to support his view.
   6. You can quote an expert in a secondary area that you are not an expert.
      a. E.g. if you don’t know Ethiopic, you can quote an Ethiopic expert’s explanation of the meaning of a certain word in 1 Enoch (a Jewish apocalypse that only exists in complete form in Ethiopic).
      b. However, you run the risk that your main claim will be discredited if it depends on the strength of this point and this expert is not well respected in his field or if he later shown to be wrong.

D. Keep on topic
   1. Lead the reader systematically through the evidence to support your claim.
   2. Mention side issues in a footnote or appendix.
   3. Omit anything that does not pertain to your main question and is not a necessary piece of evidence.

E. Don’t preach! Avoid personal references, anecdotes, applications or calling the reader to action.