



Writing is one of the most intellectually demanding parts of your seminary experience, but it is also one of the most important skills you will learn at Southern Seminary. Your writing assignments will fall into two main categories:

Book Reviews:

Rather than coming up with your own thesis, book reviews require you to **engage critically** with the work of another author. The **key** to writing a good book review is to **pay attention and make detailed notes** (in the margins or at the end of each chapter) as you are reading. What is the author's thesis? How does (s)he support this thesis? Where do I agree/disagree? Where does the book excel? How could the author have improved their work? Are any questions left unanswered? (For help with your reading skills, see our handout on **Reading Strategies**.)

Research Papers:

These are the bread and butter of your theology courses, requiring you to **present your own original thesis** based on interaction with other published material. The **key** to writing a good research paper is to **choose your topic early and work on your paper throughout the semester**.

Choose your **topic** within the first few weeks of the semester. Once you have a general topic that interests you, narrow it down to a specific **thesis** for which you will argue. In some classes (e.g. position papers in your theology classes), a range of topics and the methodology of your paper will be provided; in other classes, you will need to get creative in developing your own research question. Feel free to run your topic/thesis ideas by your professor and/or the Research Hub in the library.

Next, **work backward to set benchmarks for your paper** in order to break down this large task into smaller tasks. For example, if your paper is due November 20, you could set up the following timeline: identify paper topic (Sept 15), sources compiled (Oct 1), thesis developed (Oct 20), main argument completed (Nov 1), rough draft submitted to Writing Center (Nov 10), final draft (Nov 18).

A good masters-level research paper should: draw from previous work on the same topic, introduce a thesis and relate it to this existing work, support the thesis with careful reasoning and references, and provide conclusions about extending the argument and its impact on the field.*

General Writing Tips:

1. Because writing is intellectually demanding, give it your best blocks of study time.
2. Make sure to use the Book Review and Research Paper **templates** on the library website.
3. When trying to find a topic, be on the lookout for something in your lectures/reading that piques your interest.
4. Utilize the **SBTS Manual of Style** (see the library website) for questions regarding formatting and content.
5. Always **read your syllabus carefully** for each paper's unique requirements—professors often adjust requirements from the general ones listed in the Manual of Style.
6. Do not start writing until you have at least a **rough outline** for your paper. You need a thesis and an outline to set a trajectory for your writing.
7. Utilize the workshops and the free advice/feedback available through the **Writing Center**.
8. Three **ways to find sources**: the footnotes found in more general resources, the Research Experts in the library, and some professors provide a list of recommended resources within their syllabus.
9. Make sure you leave time to **edit your paper** so you do not lose points for simple mistakes. Reading your paper out loud is an excellent way to catch errors or sentences that lack clarity.

*See Cal Newport, *How to Become a Straight-A Student*, 175. Newport's book contains many great writing tips.