

## Research & Writing for Seminary Papers



## Purpose of Seminary Papers ?

- Increase knowledge base
- Develop skill in disciplined research
- Enhance thinking & writing abilities
- Make a contribution to the life and witness of the Church



## What is Research?

“...a method of study, that through careful investigation of all evidence bearing on a definable problem, arrives at a solution.”

-Nancy J. Vyhmeister  
*Quality Research Papers  
for Students of Religion  
and Theology*

## Fields of Theological Research and the Questions to ask . . .

- Biblical – what does Scripture say?
- Historical – what has the Christian Tradition said about these things?
- Theological – how apply Scriptural truth to the contemporary context?
- Practical – what does this mean for the practice of the church?

Research fields are  
related to one  
another . . .

*Branches – Systematic*

*Trunk – Church History*

*Root – Biblical Exegesis*



## Research Process

- Collect data – library work
- Analyze/evaluate data
- Organization & presentation of data
- Conclusion – make an argument based on the data

## ? Selecting a Topic

- Personal interest / ministry issue?
- Is my specific topic researchable?
- What resources are available to me?
- Can I do this in the allotted time?
- Is my topic sufficiently focused?
- Have I defined the issue carefully?

## Preliminary Reading

- Read as widely as possible
- Understand the questions
- Acquaintance with terminology
- Broad grasp of prior research
- Know what you are talking about

## Hour glass principle. . .



Preliminary Reading  
Takes time!

→ Create a basic outline

Reading / Writing the Paper

## Ideas have to simmer until they are done



Start papers early!

## A Key Tool: Dictionaries and Encyclopedias

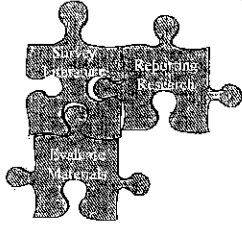
- Consult essays by scholars
- Multi-volume encyclopedias best
- Consider sources at end of essays
- Observe the outline of essays

## Contemporary Journal Articles are your friend!

- Provides updated overview of topic
- Shows who "major players" are in the discussion
- Points you to key bibliography
- May uncover potential outline for your paper



## A Topical Research Paper



## Survey of the Literature

- Consult the key sources
- Thorough but not exhaustive
- Demonstrate a basic grasp of issues involved
- Stay focused on specific topic

## Reporting your research

- Do not write an annotated bibliography
- Synthesize the material and make it yours
- Organize around themes
- Stay on topic - may list related material in footnotes with brief comments

## Evaluate the Materials

- Critical analysis of strengths & weaknesses of authors
- Consider the presuppositions of authors you survey?
- Acknowledge what you find valuable & not so valuable

## Historical Research



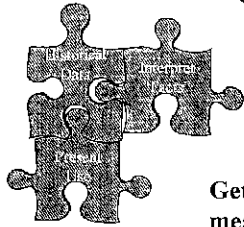
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## Researching the History



- Begin with secondary sources
- Familiarize yourself with the work others have done on the issue
- Are there diverse interpretations?
- Explore a few primary sources (read introductions!)
- Be sure you understand the historical context to aid your evaluation

## Interpretation and Application



Get what it  
meant, then ask  
what it means

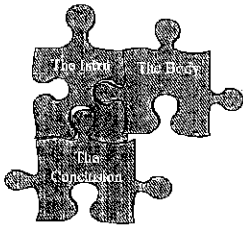
## Writing the paper . . .



**Momentum!**

**Start writing  
small pieces  
in the**

## Organizing Your Paper



## The Basic Outline

- Introductory paragraphs
- Body of the paper (may borrow outlines)
- Summary section
- Conclusion – make brief application to contemporary faith & practice

## The Introduction

- What are the most significant questions raised by this issue?
- Why are these issues important?
- Explain how your paper will approach the subject
- Justify your selection of sources
- Tell how your paper will make a contribution

## Beginning the main body: A Snapshot



Context:

Panoramic View

Mid-Range Shot

Close-Up (Topic)

## Writing Main Body of the Paper

- Report research & make your argument
- Cite sources to substantiate your perspective
- Use counter arguments to show other side
- **Don't overuse quotations** – summarize
- Use footnotes at end of paragraphs
- Make comments in footnotes
- Writer's opinions in conclusion not body

**“Build an argument ...  
Not a library!”**

## Conclusion

- Short summary of findings
- Answer the “So What?” question
- Be objective!
- Written last (along with Intro)

## Problems To Avoid

- Paper is too shallow and hurried
- Rely too heavily on secondary sources
- Imbalance of scholarly work and more popular material
- Parameters of research unclear
- Losing bibliographic info, incorrect copying or transferring to documents
- Too much time taking notes
- Too little time in the library

## Points To Remember

- Good research is essential! The work of others will make your work more productive.
- Do your homework! There is no excuse lacking resources for your topic.