

Descriptions of Types of Academic Writing in Theological Study: March 18, 2023

This document provides descriptions of the types of writing assignments often required of theological students. The descriptions have been gleaned from numerous written and online sources; this document will be periodically revised. The specific requirements for each paper might vary, depending on the instructor's preferences and the type of course in which students are enrolled (e.g., independent study, continuing education course, academic course).

Students are responsible for clarifying paper requirements if questions arise with their respective instructors, usually through the course syllabus or directly with the instructor. All papers are expected to follow appropriate academic writing guidelines, including grammar and style (see the link for the Turabian writing manual on the [Student Services webpage](#)).

Case Study

This assignment is a detailed examination of the development in a real-life context of a particular person, group, place, organization, phenomenon, or event related to theology. It is both evaluative and analytical in scope. Students need to be able to analyze the key points of the case under examination and evaluate their significance and meaning, usually in response to an instructor's questions. The study is written from a third-person perspective (he, she, it) unless personal reflection of the case is requested by the instructor. A case study approach is often used to illustrate a particular theological principle or support a thesis for a theological project.

The following link offers a detailed explanation of a case study approach in practical theology: <https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/1235083/files/48413984/download?verifier=OnFH9iGyKqyMsIGOA6EF58jYGaJI8Vs2PIsm9G8S>.

Critique (a review)

This assignment summarizes the contents of then evaluates another published work, such as a book, article/essay, film. A review offers an extended summary of the work that includes the bibliographic information (usually at the beginning of the review), the intended audience, purpose, thesis, and concise summaries of the content (e.g., chapters if a book, sections if an article, or scenes if a film). The assignment needs to offer an evaluation of the work's strengths and weaknesses, then provide recommendations for its use by its audience and areas for improvement. The instructor might also require students to reflect on their experiences in reading or viewing the work. Citations in this assignment are usually informal, meaning page numbers are placed within parentheses after quotations or paraphrases of the work.

The following link offers a detailed explanation by Trinity College of a book review process: <https://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/library/research/theology/writing-theological-book-reviews>. It can also be adapted for other media. This link offers abbreviated examples of book reviews: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1248&context=asburyjournal>.

Reflection

This assignment comprises the student's personal observations and experiences of a subject: the reflection usually takes the form of a brief summary and a lengthy evaluation in response to an assigned reading, lecture, interview, or experience. The expectation is that students will first identify, narrate, and paraphrase the assigned material then explore, analyze, and evaluate it in relation to their own learning, experiences, and ministry, often in response to the instructor's questions and to a particular aspect of the material. Successful reflections engage with the ideas of the assigned material and respectfully describe that with which students agreed and disagreed and the reasons for these responses. Students might also explain in what way they were challenged by the material and how they might synthesize the ideas into their existing understanding of the subject and apply them to their lives and ministries. While the assignment is subjective in nature, students are expected to organize, develop, and support their observations according to appropriate academic writing standards and style. Often a reflection paper permits the use of first-person pronouns (I, me, we, us) due to its personal nature. Students need to verify this expectation with the instructor before writing and submitting your paper.

The following link offers one example of a reflection format at Covenant Theological Seminary: <https://covenantseminary.libguides.com/reflection-papers>.