Naselli, Andrew David. *How to Write a Paper: Five Steps to Writing a Theological or Literary Research Paper.* Lake Elmo, MN: Build & Fight, 2026. 127pp. + 10pp. (front matter).

A well-written theological paper is a goal worth pursuing for the virtues cultivated, the understanding achieved, and the theological shaping experienced. The rewards of this exercise, however, are greatly diminished if the aim is unclear, the means are unfamiliar, or the execution poor. All too commonly, one or more of these critical weaknesses attends the paper-writing experience of a theological student.

In *How to Write a Paper*, Andrew Naselli (Professor of Systematic Theology and NT for Bethlehem College and Seminary in Minneapolis; lead pastor of Christ the King Church in Stillwater, Minnesota; and prolific author, most recently co-authoring an update of the classic guide *Exegetical Fallacies* with D. A. Carson) brings to bear extensive experience in theological education and theological writing to provide accessible and actionable guidance for the endeavor of writing a theological research paper. This guidance is intended not only to significantly strengthen the final *product*, but also to improve a student's formative experience of the *process*.

After an introductory chapter, Naselli pursues these aims by breaking down the task of paper-writing into five key steps, each step occupying one chapter.

Chapter 1, "Six Introductory Questions," explains who the book is for (students, especially college and graduate school students), how it should be used (to save students and their teachers much grief by helping students know what to do to produce quality papers), why the author wrote it (to help students learn to write better and think better and to create papers that are a delight to read), why the book focuses on a *theological* or *literary* research paper (these are the types of research paper that students write at the author's school and these differ from other types of papers), what benefits attend working hard at writing a research paper (writing and thinking more clearly and deeply, communicating more clearly and concisely, more fairly evaluating opposing arguments, better affirming what is good and refuting what is not, better influencing others, better cultivating self-control, more faithfully stewarding God-given skills), and what steps are involved in writing a quality theological or literary research paper (understand the assignments, plan ahead, choose your approach, research and write, and revise). This chapter achieves its main value in articulating compelling reasons to invest in the worthwhile process of writing well. It also provides helpful up-front clarity regarding who will most likely find the rest of the book helpful and why.

Chapter 2, "Step 1. Understand the Assignment," directs students to orient their attention to the key requirements of their assignment (topic, word count, and format), to enter the assignment with a mindset geared toward making an academic argument as distinguished from preaching a sermon, and to ask clarifying questions up-front, as needed. Naselli also distinguishes five types of theological papers, which, as an instructor, I find to be helpful distinctions I aspire to be clearer about in future assignment instructions.

Chapter 3, "Step 2. Plan Ahead," exhorts the reader to "prepare far in advance so that you complete your research paper well before the deadline." That type of advice is easy to dismiss in the whirlwind

of real life (especially for busy students), so this practical and motivational chapter consists mostly of seven fairly persuasive arguments for this practice (you'll have to pick up the book to get those).

In chapter 4, "Step 3. Choose Your Approach," Naselli helpfully distinguishes between proving a thesis (deductive approach) and exploring a problem (inductive approach). Telling students *to do* so does not mean they will know *how* to do it—so thankfully, the rest of the chapter provides clarity on the difference between the two. Helpful charts distinguish between *proving a thesis and exploring a problem*, distinguish between *sample deductive theses and inductive research questions*, and contrast *strengths and weaknesses of both approaches*. Achieving this kind of methodological clarity is important; the concepts this chapter covers are critical to getting students productively started down the right path early in the writing process.

Chapter 5, "Step 4. Research and Write," is the heart of the book and the longest chapter. In it, Naselli treats the research and writing process in six components: (1) *Research* (with nine tips), (2) *Organize the Paper* (with four tips), (3) *Develop a Coherent Argument* (with nine tips), (4) *Interact with Contrary Views* (with four tips), (5) *Write Clearly and Concisely* (with seven rules), and (6) *Use Proper Grammar, Syntax, and Format* (with twenty-four rules). Leveraging significant skill gained from world-class training (Naselli credits Layton Talbert and D. A. Carson for teaching him to research and write), prolific professional writing, and extensive experience as a professor of theology, Naselli clearly presents these six components and fifty-seven rules/tips in a chapter worth more than the price of the book.

In chapter 6, "Step 5. Polish the Cannonball," Naselli briefly advances two strategies for the revision process: (1) "Solicit feedback" and (2) "Read your paper aloud to help you refine how you argue and to improve your grammar and style." This crucial step may deserve more development and specificity than was given in the short space devoted to it. However, I believe much of the detailed material students need to be successful in this endeavor is included in chapter 5 (especially in the thirty-one rules provided under components five and six in that chapter). I plan to point this out to students so that they know how to use the rest of the book to give this final step the detailed attention and emphasis it deserves in their personal writing process.

Five substantial appendices augment the value of the book in practical ways. Appendix A deals with plagiarism. Appendix B is a timely, winsome take on the use of artificial intelligence, providing policy wording and explanations the author uses with his own students. Appendix C provides a sample grading rubric. Appendix D provides helpful productivity advice for students (this topic isn't out of place, either, as it essentially expands on chapter 3, "Plan Ahead," by giving detailed advice on how to wisely steward time for research and writing ahead of the last-minute crunch). Appendix E provides two detailed examples of the research and writing process from the author's own recent projects. I found this final inclusion particularly helpful, in that it helped me visualize how to better tackle professional research and writing projects with organization and intentionality.

How to Write a Paper is a practical, accessible, skillfully crafted how-to. In places (for instance, in some asides or footnotes) the book comes across as a bit more informal or personal than I might have expected, but Naselli was clear from the outset that this book was written first with his own students and his own classroom in mind. I am grateful to be welcomed into that space to reap the benefit of

what he has skillfully put together for them. This book's clarity, practicality, and manageable length combine with actionable, specific exhortation to make it a genuinely helpful resource for students pursuing research and writing excellence.

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