

THE RESEARCH QUEST:

The Search for a Thesis



Detail of a miniature of a hermit at work on a manuscript, from the
Estoire del Saint Graal, France
(Saint-Omer or Tournai?), c. 1315 – 1325, Royal MS 14 E III, f. 6v

WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER IS LIKE EMBARKING
ON A QUEST
(WELL, SORT OF)



Edmund Leighton, *God Speed*, 1900

Certainly, there will be dangers (like missing deadlines and discovering that you are actually a gnostic heretic) and drudgeries along the way, but you can always find help - librarians ready with insight and tools - to speed you on your journey.

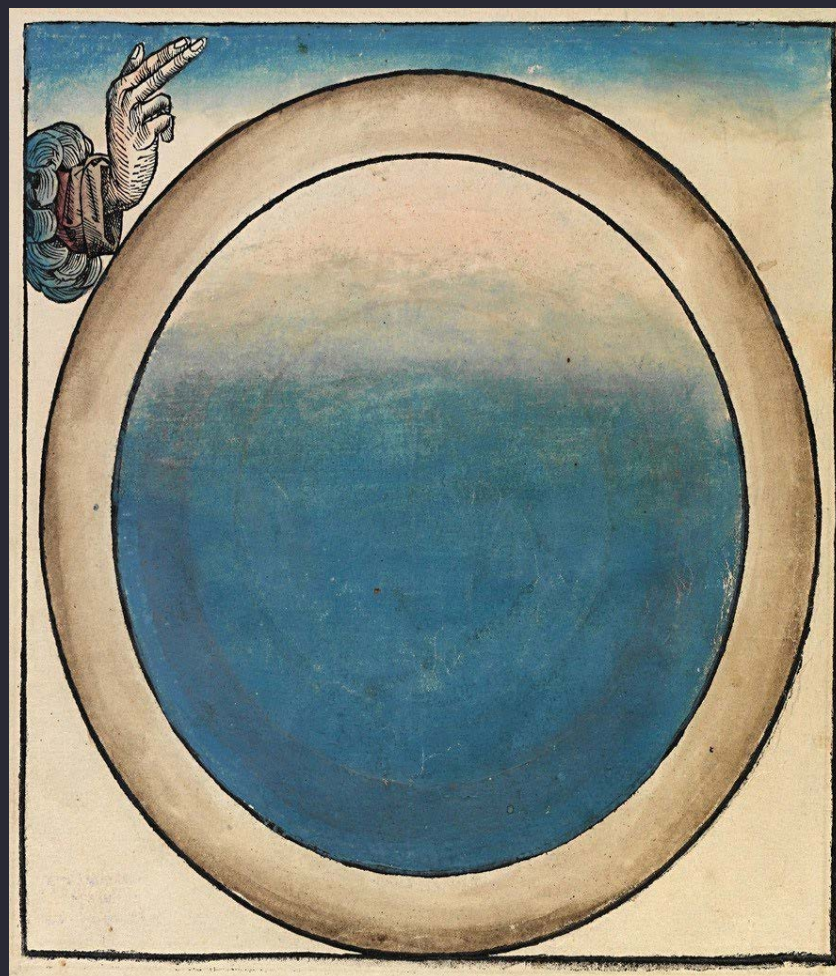
WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER IS LIKE EMBARKING
ON A QUEST
(WELL, SORT OF)



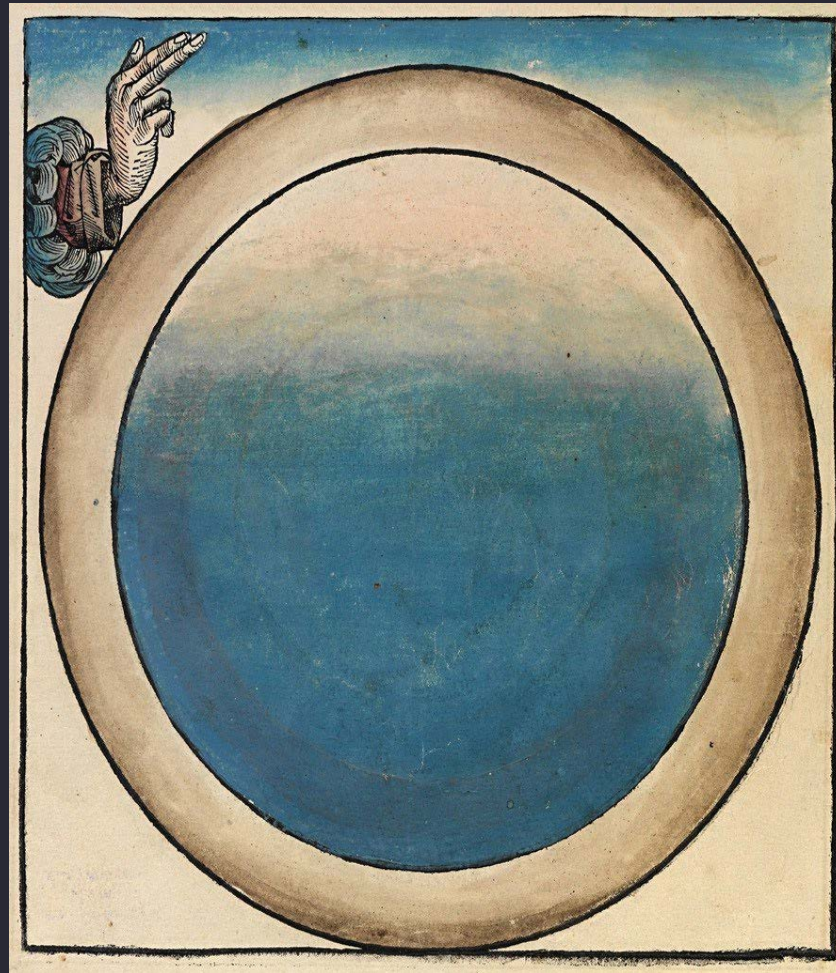
Edmund Leighton, *God Speed*, 1900

And, like a quest or an adventure, the point of a research paper ultimately is less about the end product than it is the process of getting there - what you learn and how you change along the way.

IN THE BEGINNING . . .

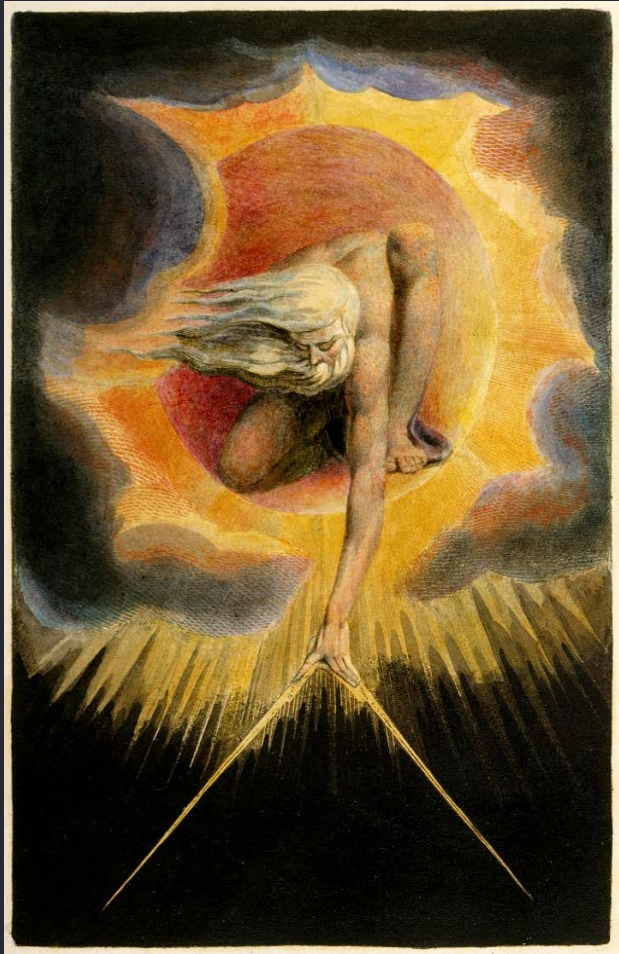


IN THE BEGINNING ...



Starting a research paper can feel like the beginning of the creation story – like the earth, your blank page is “*tohu vabohu* – without form and void” and full of darkness

LET THERE BE – A THESIS



You know that you need a thesis – and possibly divine intervention – to help bring order to the chaos, but where and how can you find a thesis?

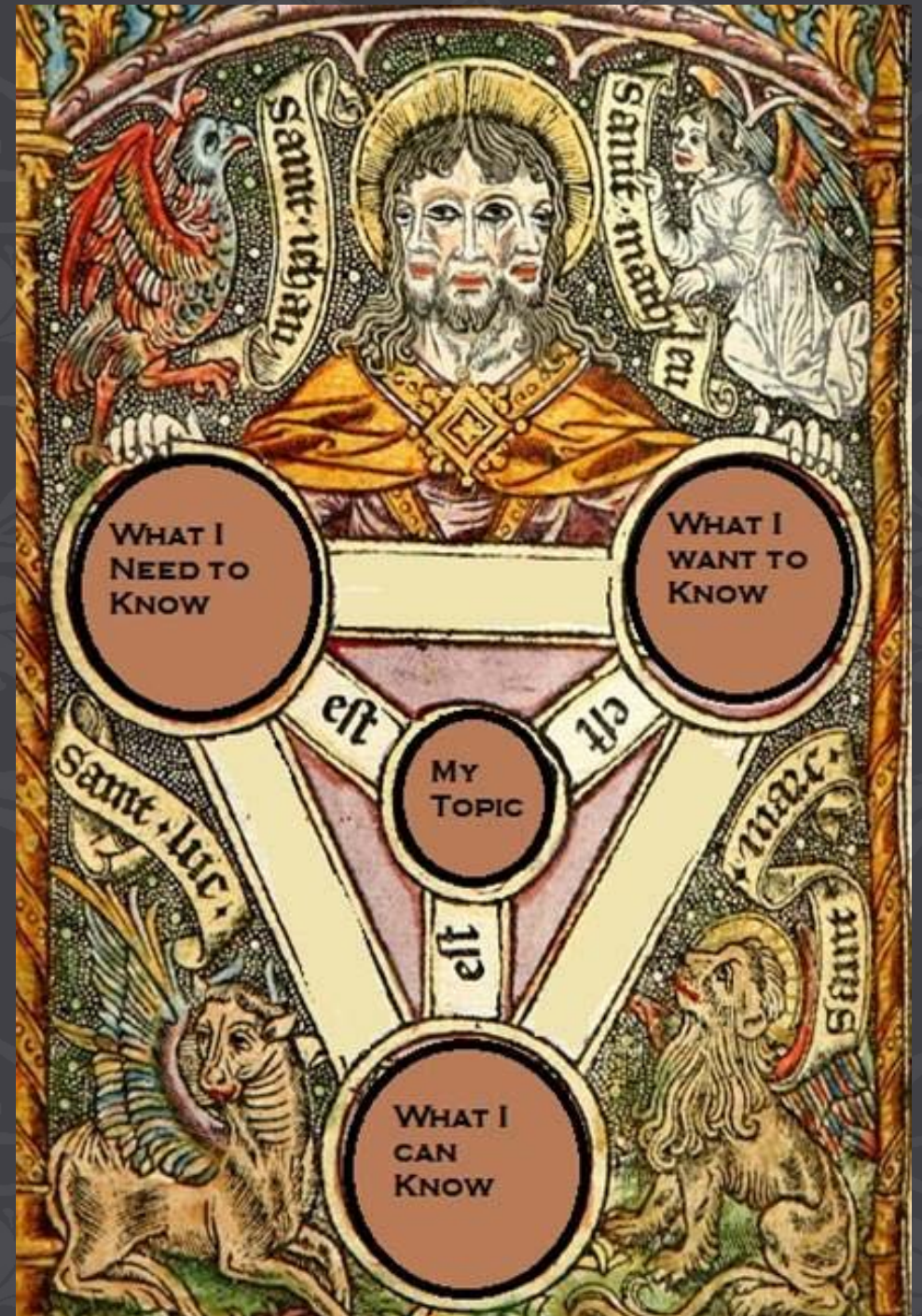
FINDING YOUR THESIS

A thesis is an assertions about *something*. So to argue a thesis, you first need to know what you are making an assertion about. This is a matter of finding connections or intersections among:

- What you want to know (your interests, values),
- What you need to know (your assignment, course, or task at hand), and
- What you can know (your access to enough credible sources)

It is, appropriately, Trinitarian.

If you are having trouble thinking of a topic — feel free to stop by the library. We are always glad to help you brainstorm.



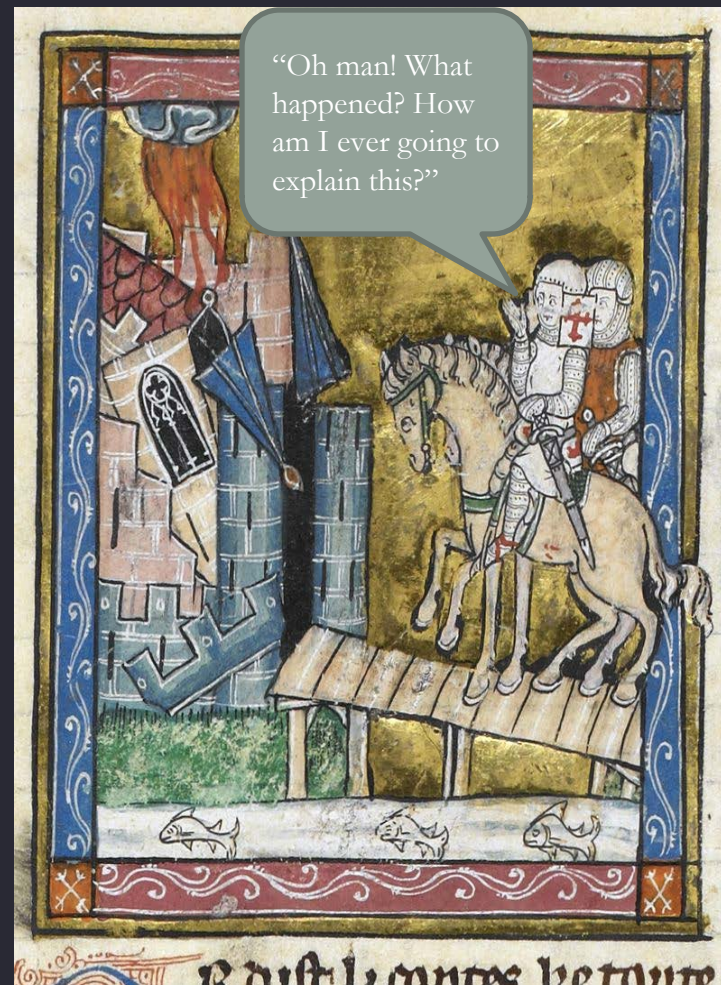
TANGENT: LIKE YOUR TOPIC



When selecting a topic for a research paper, please make sure it is something that interests you. Because if you don't like it now, you really won't like it at 2:00 am the morning before its due to be turned in.

“I tried to warn ye. I told ye not to choose ‘Joseph of Arimathea’ as your topic. But oh, no! You wouldn’t listen. ”

ONCE YOU HAVE YOUR TOPIC, START ASKING QUESTIONS



A THESIS IS A QUESTION REPHRASED AS AN ASSERTION.

? ➡ ! = Thesis

1. Ask a question about the topic.
2. Rephrase it as a statement.
3. That becomes your working thesis.

FOR EXAMPLE:
HOW IS IT THE CRUSADES AND ST. FRANCIS ARE
BOTH EXPRESSIONS OF MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY?



TANGENT: MANAGING SPACE AND TIME

SPACE



Frame your thesis so that it is an appropriate size for the number of pages your assignment requires.

TIME

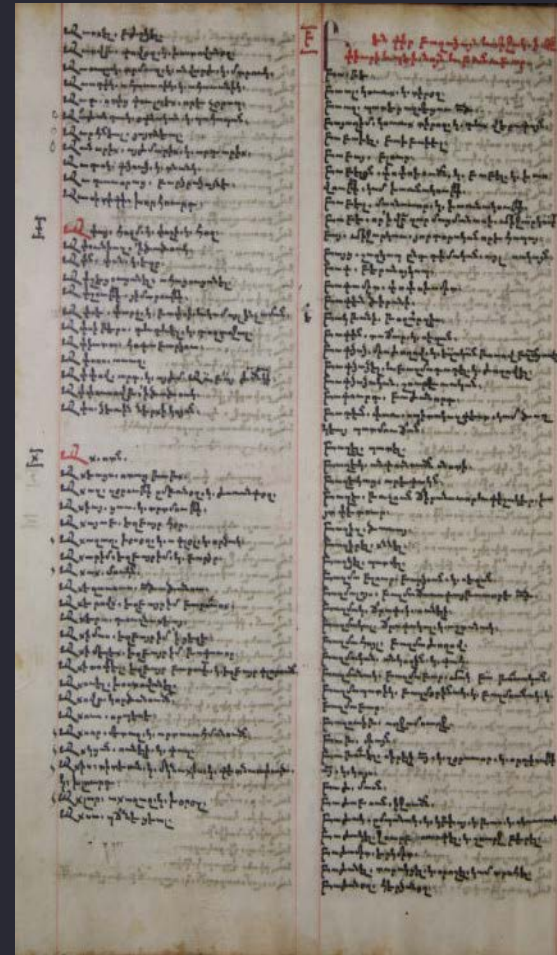


Divide the time you have to complete the assignment by the number of tasks you have to do to complete it.

GET THEE TO A DICTIONARY



In order to ask the kinds of questions that will help you form your thesis, you need to know something about your subject



RESEARCH REQUIRES SOURCES

(DIRECT DIVINE ILLUMINATION IS UNFORTUNATELY NOT A COMMON OCCURRENCE)



St. Bridget's Eucharistic Vision, from St. Bridget of Sweden, Revelations and other texts, in Latin, Italy, Naples, Late 14th century

RESEARCH REQUIRES SOURCES

(DIRECT DIVINE ILLUMINATION IS UNFORTUNATELY NOT A COMMON OCCURRENCE)



St. Bridget's Eucharistic Vision, from St. Bridget of Sweden, Revelations and other texts, in Latin, Italy, Naples, Late 14th century

As you are doubtless aware, direct divine illumination is unfortunately not a common occurrence.

The Almighty seems to be content working through more mundane means, which means that choosing appropriate, authoritative sources is essential.

RESEARCH IS LIKE A SPIRAL



Like a good conversation,
research is a give-and-take
process of asking questions,
going to sources for
information, which leads to
further questions and
additional research
FOREVER (not really –
that is why God has
graciously given us
deadlines)

REMEMBER:
YOUR THESIS IS AN ASSERTION *BACKED BY RESEARCH*
(BOTH THE ASSERTION, AND THE RESEARCH ARE
ESSENTIAL)



AUTHORITY MATTERS
(YOUR WORK IS ONLY AS GOOD AS YOUR SOURCES)



“Oh yes. He *is* the bishop. I read it on Wikipedia.”

ASK (FOR HELP), AND YE SHALL RECEIVE



Your librarians are here to help!

David Schmursal
dschmersal@austinseminary.edu

Contact us any time at libraryiq@austinseminary.edu with any questions.