



Getting the Most Out of SempRef

A practical guide for using SempRef well.

Welcome. Whether you've been in ministry for decades or you're just beginning to explore Reformed theology, SempRef was built with you in mind. This guide will help you get real, useful work out of it-not just impressive -sounding answers. Think of SempRef as a sharp, well-read study partner who knows the confessional standards, thinks carefully, and never gets tired. But like any good partner, it works best when you communicate clearly. That's what this guide is about.

Before You Type Anything: Reset the Room

SempRef doesn't carry memory between sessions the way a human colleague does. Each new conversation starts fresh. If you don't re-establish context, you'll get generic answers-and you'll blame the tool when the real issue is a cold start. Make it a habit: begin each session with a brief context statement. "I'm a ruling elder in a confessional Presbyterian church preparing for a difficult Session discussion about church discipline." One sentence. That's all it takes to move from generic to useful.

1. Treat Your Prompt Like a Brief, Not a Vibe

The difference between helpful and frustrating output is almost always structure. Before you

type, think through five things:

- Goal - What are you trying to accomplish?
- Context - Who is this for? What situation are you in?
- Materials - What text or facts are you providing?
- Task - What do you want done?
- Output - What should the final result look like?

Provide those five, and SempRef can do real work-not just sound informed.

2. Surface Assumptions Before Answers

This is one of the most powerful-and most underused-techniques available to you. Try it

early, before the real work begins:

"Before answering, list your assumptions. If any are high-impact, ask me one clarifying question." This exposes hidden gaps, prevents overconfidence, and aligns the response with your actual situation. Most errors in AI output live in unstated assumptions. Bring them into the light before they cost you time.

3. Be Specific About What You Want

Vague prompts produce vague theology-often with unnecessary confidence.

Instead of:

"Help me with justification"

Try:

"Explain justification according to the Westminster Standards, contrast it with sanctification, and list common preaching confusions." Specificity isn't pedantry. It's the difference between a general overview and something you can actually use.

4. Define the Task - Verbs Beat Nouns

If you only give a topic, you'll get a lecture. If you give a task, you'll get a tool.

Use clear action verbs like:

- Outline
- Distinguish
- Compare
- Critique
- Rewrite
- Map
- Generate questions

For example:

"Critique this paragraph for doctrinal ambiguity and unstated assumptions." "Map the argument, identify weak points, and propose tighter wording." SempRef is strongest when given explicit tasks. Tasks produce results you can use.

5. Ask for One Clear Deliverable

Quality improves when the request is focused.

Weak:

"Help me think about this."

Strong:

"Give me a one-page outline with headings and subpoints." "List doctrinal ambiguities and the questions I should clarify." "Create a Session-level checklist we can use before we vote." One solid deliverable is better than ten scattered ones. And it's faster to iterate.

6. Tell SempRef Your Role, Audience, and Stakes

The same question can require very different answers depending on context. Give SempRef

helpful signals:

- Your role: student, candidate, ruling elder, pastor

- Your audience: Session, congregation, classroom, public statement
- The stakes: internal vs. public, pastoral vs. academic, low-stakes vs. high-stakes

For example:

"I'm a ruling elder preparing for a difficult Session discussion." That one sentence will materially improve the response. High-stakes questions typically need tighter structure, slower reasoning, and fewer assumptions.

7. Name Your Framework Up Front

If you don't define the standard, SempRef will still use one-it just may not be yours.

Be explicit:

"Use the Westminster Standards as the baseline." "Stay within confessional Presbyterian categories." "Frame this in terms of required / permitted / disputed." SempRef is designed to work within defined theological frameworks. Give it the framework.

8. Provide Your Material Whenever Possible

SempRef works best with something concrete in front of it. Paste:

- Your sermon draft or outline
- A policy draft or overture text
- A paragraph, bullet list, or email
- "What we plan to say"

Instead of:

"Is my sermon good?"

Try:

"Here is my outline. Identify weak transitions, missing definitions, and likely confessional ambiguities." Text beats guesses every time. If you don't provide the material, SempRef will necessarily operate at a more general level-and may miss what matters most in your specific document.

9. Ask for Structure Explicitly

Clarity improves when structure is requested. Ask for:

- Bullet points with headings
- Numbered reasoning steps
- Argument maps (premises → conclusion)
- Categories and subcategories
- "Strengths / weaknesses / open questions"
- "Required / permitted / disputed" (especially useful for polity questions)

Prose is readable. Structure is usable. SempRef is designed to make things examinable-but tell it what structure you want.

10. Use Follow-Up Questions Intentionally

The best results come through refinement, not one-shot prompts. A simple workflow:

1. Get an initial outline or response

2. Identify weaknesses

3. Revise one section

4. Tighten the language

Examples:

"Define your terms more precisely." "Where would this be disputed?" "Shorten this without losing meaning." Think of it as progressive sharpening, not instant perfection.

11. Ask for Critique - Not Just Content

SempRef is often more valuable as a reviewer than a writer. Try:

"Where is this unclear?" "What would a presbytery (or examiner) question here?" "What are the strongest objections?" "What terms need tighter definition?" "What sentence could be misread or weaponized later?" This turns the interaction into clarity testing, not just content generation. SempRef is most useful when it's allowed to challenge you-not just agree with you.

12. Use Templates to Make This Repeatable

Good structure shouldn't require heroic typing every time. Here are two reusable patterns:

Quick Analysis Template

Field Your Input

Task

Audience

Context

Text / Facts (paste here)

Question

Constraints (tone / length / citations)

Deliverable

Polity Template

Field Your Input

Issue

Relevant standards (if known) Facts (verified only)

Question

Output Step-by-step reasoning + implications + open questions Templates turn good intentions into repeatable results.

13. Stay Within Real Authority Structures

SempRef is a disciplined tool for analysis-not a seat of authority. It can help you:

- Clarify
- Structure
- Test reasoning
- Draft and refine

It cannot:

- Replace a pastor
- Replace a Session or church court
- Settle disputes
- Bind consciences

Think of it the way you'd think of a sharp, trusted study partner: genuinely helpful, worth consulting, but not the final word. The final word belongs where it always has-in Scripture, the Standards, and the accountable leadership of the church.

14. Expect Usefulness, Not Perfection

SempRef aims to avoid speculation, stay within confessional bounds, and name uncertainty when it exists. But it is still a tool.

For anything that matters:

- Verify in primary sources
- Request reasoning, not just conclusions
- Test against Scripture and the actual standards
- Remain under proper authority and real-world oversight

The goal is not flawless output. The goal is clearer thinking, stronger work, and better questions-done faster.

A Simple Rule to Remember

Clear prompts produce clear thinking. And in theology: the more carefully you define the question, the more faithfully you can examine the answer.

A Final Word

SempRef isn't here to replace study or ministry. It's here to sharpen your categories, expose weak reasoning, clarify your language, and strengthen work that still belongs-rightly -in the hands of accountable leaders. Used well, it

becomes more than a tool for answers. It becomes a tool for precision, discipline, and doctrinal clarity. Now go ask it something hard.

Ease of use:

After you have read this entire document through, consider printing just the following page.

It will be a handy reference for you to use going forward:

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- 3. Be Specific About What You Want**
- 4. Define the Task - Verbs Beat Nouns**
- 5. Ask for One Clear Deliverable**
- 6. Tell SempRef Your Role, Audience, and Stakes**
- 7. Name Your Framework Up Front**
- 8. Provide Your Material Whenever Possible**
- 9. Ask for Structure Explicitly**
- 10. Use Follow-Up Questions Intentionally**
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