

Introduction to Bible Study with a Manuscript

Methods Used

A. Observation – Interpretation – Application

1. **Observation** Questions: "What does the text say?"
 - a. Reporter questions – Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
 - b. Laws of Composition – Repetition, contrast, juxtaposition
2. **Interpretation** Questions: "What does the text mean?"
 - a. Define unclear words, look up places on maps, etc.
 - b. Significance of your discoveries, e.g., "Why does this section follow that one?"
3. **Application Questions:** "What does the text (and especially its main point) mean for me/us?"
 - a. Application arises out of a thorough study of the text. If the Bible is God's word to us, we should expect God to speak to us through the Bible.
 - b. What do I learn about God? Myself? What do I need to change? Is there a promise that can help me?

B. Whole – Parts – Whole

1. **Whole:** "What is our overall view of the passage? (Telescope)"
 - a. Read through to get the flow of the passage.
 - b. Divide into thought units or paragraphs and title them. These may center around a theme, place, event, or time.
2. **Parts:** "What does each section mean?" (Microscope)"
 - a. Using observation and interpretation questions, try to determine the meaning of each section. What is the one main thought of each section?
3. **Whole:** "How do all the pieces fit together?" (Mapping)"
 - a. Discover links between the sections, how do they relate to one another? Do they illustrate each other? Build on each other? Is there a pattern?
 - b. What is the common thread through this whole passage?
 - c. How does it connect to the passages before it in the whole book (and ultimately in the whole Bible)?

Helpful Hints About Manuscript Study

1. Use symbols and colored pens or pencils to trace repeated themes and note other connections.
2. Write all you want in the margins, between the lines, or even on the back of the previous page.
3. We will be using both principles - O-I-A and W-P-W - for individual passages and for the whole book.

Laws of Composition

Adapted and expanded from Methodical Bible Study by Robert Traina, p. 50-52.

A writer constructs a piece of writing in a way that will most effectively get the message across. Because the structure carries the content, if you can discover the basic structure of a piece of writing, you can find the main points the writer wants to communicate. One way of discovering the structure of a piece of writing, including a passage of Scripture, is to look for laws of composition which the writer has used. These laws (or principles of construction) are used not only by writers, but by engineers, architects, composers, speakers, painters and others, for these are universal ways the mind works, and universal ways of discovering the purpose in the mind of the writer, the architect, etc. Here are some laws of composition we find most frequently in studying Scripture.

Repetition	The reiteration of the same terms.
Continuity	The repeated use of similar words, phrases, ideas.
Contrast	The association of opposites.
Comparison	The association of like things which vary in some way.
General to particulars	The movement from a general idea or activity to particulars about that idea.
Particulars to General	The movement from a particular to a general idea or activity.
Cause to effect	Progression from cause to effect.
Effect to cause	The progression from effect to cause.
Explanation or illustration	The presentation of an idea or event followed by its explanation.
Preparation or Introduction	The inclusion of the background or setting for events or ideas by which the reader is prepared to understand what follows.
Progression to Climax	The arrangement of material in such a way as to progress from great to the greater and then to the greatest.
Means to end	The setting forth of the means to an end as well as the end itself. Often the words "that," "so that," or "in order that" are present. Means to an end is like a planned cause & effect.
Interrogation	The use of a question or problem followed by its answer.
Juxtaposition	The placing of incidents or ideas side by side, to point to their relationship to one another.
Inclusion	The reporting of one event within the reporting of another.

How to Do Inductive Bible Study

Studying Individually or Corporately

Pray! That God would meet you in his living Word.
 Read the passage as if you were reading it for the first time.

1. Observe carefully – Get the story straight (What is the author saying?)

Use colored pencils to mark words, phrases, concepts, connections, themes.

Journalism Questions	Connections/Relationships (see handout with the pictures)	Entering the Story
Who? What? Where? When? How?	Repetition Similarity Contrast Cause and Effect General to Particular Particular to General	Become a character in the story - What do you see, smell, hear, taste? - What are you feeling and experiencing?

What kind of literature is this?

Narrative – Dialog – Poetry – Letter (“Epistle”) – Gospel – Law – Prophecy
 There may be more than one kind of literature in a passage.

Mark all logical connectors (therefore, because, since, for, so that, but, etc.).

Mark units of thought in the text (change in location, time, theme, thought, action, characters, speaker). Make logical thought breaks and title each section.

Especially note things about Jesus, what he says and does.

Note the unexpected or unusual in the text.

If you are studying a New Testament passage, are there any Old Testament (OT) references or allusions? Look them up! Read the whole passage, not just the specific verse or phrase. Why did the author reference this particular OT passage?

Is there anything in the passage that raises a question for you? Anything that intrigues, perplexes, or troubles you? Write it down!

2. Interpret – Understanding (What does the author mean?)

Look back at the connections that you made as you observed. What are the main connections that run throughout the passage? What are the main threads?

Read the passage again and see if you can find more questions to ask the text.

- Go back to some of the things that troubled or intrigued you and formulate a good question about them.

- Look at the grammatical connections you found and formulate questions about them. Why does the author repeat this word? Why is this contrast here? What themes or meanings do these connections point to? What meaning is the author bringing out with each of the main connections? Try writing questions that start with “Why” or “What is the significance of...”

Refine your questions.

- Example of an ok question – “Why does Jesus say, ‘The Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel?’”
Example of a good question – “What exactly is it about the Kingdom of God being at hand that should lead people to repent and believe in the Gospel?”

Focus in on the most significant questions, those which arise directly from the text, cover large portions of the text, and help bring out the core meaning.

Formulate answers to the most significant questions.

1. Look first in the text itself. Read it over again carefully with your questions in mind. Often the text answers its own questions.
2. Look at the context, what comes immediately before and after this passage.
3. Look in a Bible dictionary or regular dictionary to define words, phrases, and concepts you don’t understand. Look at a map to understand physical context.
4. If you are studying a New Testament passage, look again at the Old Testament references and allusions that you found when you were observing.

Ask yourself the “big question” about this passage – What did the author intend to communicate to the original readers? What seems to be the main point or the core teaching of this passage? Why is this passage here?

Write the main truth in an overall, integrative sentence. Build a case for your answer.

3. Apply – Connect to your own life (How does this passage speak to your story?)

- How do you sense that God is speaking to you through this passage?
- What part of your life is connected to the core teaching of this text?
- How are you experiencing what a character in the story is living out?
- Is there a promise to trust, a command to obey, or an example to follow or avoid?
- Are you sensing any deeper insights into God or your experience with God?
- What specific actions are you going to take in response to what God is saying to you?
- If you are studying in a group, what action will you take together, in response to what God is saying to your community?

Adapted from Bob Grahmann, based on the paper “How to Use Individual Study Time” by Lindsay Olesberg. October 2016. This introduction to Bible study with a manuscript is from Intervarsity Christian Fellowship.