

Making Observations

Structural Observations

1. Cause and Effect — an event, concept, or action that causes another (therefore, so, so that, then, in order that, as a result). (Mark 11:27-12:44; Rom. 1:24-32; 8:18-30)
2. Means — an agency, instrument, or method used to attain an end; the item that enables the effect (by, through, according to).
3. Comparison — two or more ideas that are alike or similar (like, as, too, also). (Psalm 1:3-4; John 3:8, 12, 14; Heb. 5:1-10)
4. Contrast — two or more ideas that are unlike or dissimilar (but, yet). (Psalm 73; John 10:10; Acts 4:32-5:11; Gal. 5:19-23)
5. Explanation or reason — the presentation of an idea or event followed by its interpretation (for, because). (Dan. 2, 4, 5, 7-9; Mark 4:13-20; Acts 11:1-18)
6. Repetition — terms or phrases used two or more times. (Psalm 136; Matt. 5:21-48; Heb. 11)
7. Proportion — emphasis indicated by the amount of space the writer devotes to a subject relative to other subjects covered. (Gen. 1:11; 12-50; Luke 9:51-19:27; Eph. 5:21-6:4)

Grammatical Structure

1. Identify the verbs. What tense is it? Is it active or passive? (In Ephesians 5:18 Paul writes, “be filled with the Holy Spirit.” It does not say “fill yourself with the Spirit.” The verb is passive, which means someone else is doing the filling.)
2. Identify the subject and object. The subject does the acting and the object is acted upon. (Galatians 6:4 says, “But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another.” The subject is “each one;” the verb is “examine;” the object is “his own work.” Paul is arguing for self-reflection, which is important in the context of him talking about intervening with other believers when they have sinned.)
3. Modifiers are descriptive words such as adjectives and adverbs. They expand the meaning of the words that they modify. (John 10:10 says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” The modifier “abundantly” means life *to the fullest*—God does not shortchange us.)
4. Prepositional phrases tell you where the action is happening: *in, on, upon, through, by, to*, and so on (“in Christ,” “by the Spirit,” “in the flesh,” “under the law,” “through faith”).
5. Connectives are some of the most important words in the Bible. *And, but, therefore* will tell you so much about how things are related. (*And*: Psalm 37:4 says, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.” *But*: Numbers 13:31; 2 Samuel 11:1; Luke 22:26; John 8:1; 1 John 3:17.)

Asking Questions

1. Who are the people in the text? What does it say about them? Search them out in the Bible to learn more about them. For example, Psalm 88 tells us that it was “Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite” who wrote it. The Psalm does not tell you who Heman the Ezrahite is; you have to go to the historical books to find out. There you will find a portrait that explains why Psalm 88 is so dark and disturbing.
2. What is happening in the text? What are the events? In what order do they occur? What happens to the characters? What is not happening or not mentioned? What is the point? (In 1 Samuel 15, Saul wipes out the Amalekites and then praises God. What did he do wrong that causes Samuel to ask in verse 19, “Why did you not obey the Lord?” Saul had not obeyed completely, so you have to know what was required and what he did to know why.)
3. Where is the narrative taking place? Where are the people? Where are they coming from? Where are they going? Where is the writer? Where are the original readers from?
4. When did the events take place? When did the events take place in relation to other events in the book or scripture? (Mark 1:35 says, “And in the early morning, while it was still dark, [Jesus] arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there.” When did this happen? The context tells you it is after one of the busiest days of his life and yet he did not sleep in, even though he had every right to.)
5. Why is this included? Why was this not mentioned? Why was it placed here? Why do people do or say certain things? Why do they not do or say something? Why is this important? There are infinite *why* questions that can be asked. (Why does the book of Acts end the way that it does with no answer to what happens to Paul and the other apostles.)
6. How did it happen? How is this affecting the people or events in the passage? How are the events, people, or ideas related or not related?

The Context of the Passage

1. What are the most important terms in the verse?
2. Are there any terms that need to be defined?
3. How do the verses fit together?
4. Look for connectives.
5. Evaluate the passage in light of the book as a whole.
6. Look at the historical context of the book.