

What to look for in a passage

Adapted from Duvall and Hays- Grasping God's Word

Repetition of words- look for words and phrases that repeat

Contrasts- look for ideas, individuals, and/or items that are contrasted with each other

Comparisons- look for ideas, individuals, and/or items that are compared with each other. Look also for similarities.

Lists- Note where the text mentions more than two items

Cause and effect- There may be more than one effect from a single cause mentioned in the text

Figures of speech- look for expressions that convey an image, using words in a sense other than the literal sense.

Conjunctions- notice terms that join units, like “and”, ”but”, “for”. Note what they are connecting.

Verbs- Note whether a verb is past, present, or future; active or passive; also look for imperatives

Pronouns- Identify the antecedent for each pronoun

Questions and answers- note if the text is built on a question and answer format

Dialogue- note if the text includes dialogue. Identify who is speaking and to whom.

Means- note if a sentence indicates that something was done by means of someone/something (answers “how?”). Usually you can insert the phrase “by means of” into the sentence.

Purpose/result statements- These are a more specific type of “means,” often telling why. Purpose and result are similar and sometimes indistinguishable. In a purpose statement, you usually can insert the phrase “in order that”. In a result clause, you usually can insert the phrase “so that”.

General to specific and specific to general- find the general statements that are followed by specific examples or applications of the general. Also find specific statements that are summarized by a general one.

Condition clauses- a clause can present the condition by which some action or consequence will result. Often such statements use an “if...then” framework.

Actions/roles of God- identify actions or roles that the text ascribes to God.

Actions/roles of people- identify actions or roles that the text ascribes to people or encourages people to do/be.

Emotional terms- does the passage use terms that have emotional energy, like kinship words (father, son) or words like “pleading”?

Tone of the passage- what is the overall tone of the passage: happy, sad, encouraging, and so on?

Connections to other paragraphs and episodes- how does the passage connect to the one that precedes it and the one that follows it?

Shifts in the story/pivots- Is the passage being used as a key to understanding a dramatic shift in the story?

Interchange- does the passage shift back and forth between two scenes or characters?

Chiasm- does the passage have any chiasmic arrangements, like a-b-c-d-c'-b'-a'?