

# What to look for in a passage

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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'?

See also the “Look at the Book” videos online.