

Explaining and Applying New Testament Letters

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OBSERVE

- **Observe the Text.**
 - Read the text at least 10x, preferably using multiple translations.
 - Note key words: repeated words, unfamiliar words, word pictures, and theological terms.
 - Record questions that arise.
 - Create a structural diagram of the passage.
 - Use a literal translation (not a paraphrase like the NIV).
 - Keep the text in order as it appears in Scripture.
 - Identify the first independent clause (contains a subject and verb and can stand alone) and place it on the left margin of your diagram column.
 - Place supporting phrases under (or over-if they come first in the text) the center of the words they modify.
 - Place brackets around connectives (*but, for, and, therefore...*) and set them apart on their own line for emphasis.
 - Draw a line to connect words in a clause that are separated by intervening phrases.
 - Draw an arrow from each supporting phrase or clause to the word it modifies.
 - Identify the function of each independent clause: Is it a command (exhortation), an assertion (statement of truth), a warning, an expression of desire, a promise, a rebuke, or a request (entreaty), and write the function in the margin.
 - Identify the function of each supporting phrase/clause: Ask what question each phrase/clause is answering: *Who? What? Where? When? or How?* and write that function in the margin next to your diagram.
 - If you would like to be more specific with the functions, use the “Semantic Functions” supplemental handout to evaluate the specific function of each phrase or clause.

- Sample: Structural Diagram of James 1:2-4

2 Consider it all joy, my brethren,

when you encounter various trials,

3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

[And]

4 let endurance have *its* perfect result,

that you may be perfect

[and]

complete,

lacking in nothing.

Command

When to rejoice

Why to rejoice

Connector

Command

Result of enduring

Connector

Result of enduring

Result of enduring

INTERPRET

- **Define Key Words.**
 - Use a Bible dictionary such as blueletterbible.com.
 - Click on *Strong's Concordance*.
 - Scroll down to *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*.
 - Check *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*.
- **Explore the Literary Context (the *words* around the text)**
 - Read the passages immediately before and after your text, looking for repeated ideas or words or for teaching that sheds light on your text.
- **Investigate the Historical Context (the *world* around the text).**
 - Discover what was going on in the lives of the readers to further clarify the meaning as they would have understood it.
 - Resources: A study Bible, contemporary books of the Bible, *Nelson's Book of Bible Maps and Charts*, Bible dictionaries or encyclopedias, or Old or New Testament introductions.
- **Interpret the Meaning of Phrases and Key Ideas.**
 - Consult commentaries: <https://bestcommentaries.com>.
 - Attempt to summarize the key ideas in your own words.

- **State the Main Idea of the Text.**
 - Determine the subject of the text: What is the author talking about?
 - Determine the complement of the text: What is the author saying about what he's talking about?
 - State the big idea in one historical third person sentence.

- **Develop a Passage (Exegetical) Outline.**
 - Use the diagram to write the outline, using the main ideas as the main points of the outline and the subordinate ideas as the subpoints.

Sample: Passage Outline of James 1:2-4 (based on previous diagram)

- I. James exhorts his readers to rejoice (1:2-3).
 - A. The time of rejoicing is in the midst of trials (1:2b).
 - B. The cause of rejoicing is that testing produces endurance (1:3).

- II. James exhorts his readers to endure (1:4)
 - A. The first result is that the reader might be perfect.
 - B. The second result is that the readers might be complete.
 - C. The third result is that the readers might lack in nothing.

DEVELOP

- **State the Main Idea of the Message.**
 - This is a current-day expression of the main idea of the text.

- **Structure the Message Outline.**
 - The message points should be current-day expressions of the main ideas of the text.
 - Each message point should be logically related to the main idea of the message.
 - Each main point should come directly from the text (not from secondary texts).

Sample: Message Outline of James 1:2-4

- I. Rejoice in Times of Trial (1:2-3)

- II. Endure in Times of Trial (1:4)

- **Develop the Body of the Message.**
 - Explanation (you've already studied it; now you're organizing it to teach)
 - Helps listeners understand what the text is saying
 - Includes word meanings and interpretation of key ideas
 - Should be clear and support the message division
 - Argumentation
 - Addresses barriers to understanding or accepting truth contained in the text
 - Illustration
 - Uses analogies and examples to help listeners understand what the text means or how the text applies
 - Application
 - Describing how the truth of the text impacts people's individual lives

- **Prepare an Introduction.**
 - Establish rapport.
 - Arrest attention.
 - Create a need.
 - Offer an answer.
 - Direct to the text.

- **Craft a Conclusion.**
 - Restate the message idea.
 - Review the main points.
 - Exhort your listeners to a response of obedience, trust, or gratitude.

Material adapted from the following sources:

Akin, Daniel A., Bill Curtis, and Stephen Rummage. *Engaging Exposition*.

Guthrie, George, H. and J. Scott Duvall. *Biblical Greek Exegesis*.

McDill, Wayne. *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*.

The Charles Simeon Trust First Principles Curriculum.

Dean Taylor's personal coaching. 😊