

## Observation

**Introduction** - Observation answers the question, “What does the text say?” The dictionary defines observation as the “act of recognizing and noting a fact or recurrence”. It means to be mentally aware of what one sees.

- This is sort of like the work of a detective, discovering the facts.
- Later stages (i.e. interpretation, application) will build on the observations made in this first stage.
- Accuracy is important to discover what the text actually states.
- It is tempting to jump right into interpretation and start to determine the meaning of the text, but try to suspend judgment on what the text means until you have gathered all the facts.
- It may turn out that not all the facts out have gathered are relevant to determining the meaning of the passage.
- You don’t have to use all the observation techniques on every text. Some techniques open up the text, others don’t. See which key works in the lock and use it.

### 1 *Repeated Words and Phrases*

When you read through a passage, look for repeated words and phrases. Repetition of words and phrases will give you an example of what the author thought was important.

**Examples:** 1 Corinthians 13 - The word “love” appears multiple times. John 17 – The word “world” is used 17 times. Matthew 18 – The phrase “kingdom of heaven” is used 4 times. Galatians – The word “law” is used many times.

### 2 *Key Words and Phrases*

When you read through a passage, look for key words and phrases. These words may not be repeated many times, but they are crucial to a correct understanding of the passage. These may be words you decide to perform word studies on during the interpretation step.

**Example:** 1 Timothy 3:16 Key word in this passage would be “teaching”, “rebuking”, “correcting” and “training “ (NIV)

### 3 *Verbs and Verb Tenses*

They indicate when an action or event, has already taken place (past), is currently taking place (present), or will take place (future). You may also notice the other features of a verb, is it a command? What is its “mood” (e.g. subjunctive). Something “should” happen, something will likely happen. Note what you can about the verbs.

**Example:** John 5:24 - “I tell (present) you the truth, whoever hears (present) my word and believes (present) Him who sent (past) me has (present) eternal live and will not (future) be condemned. He has crossed (past) over from death to life. John 3:16-18 ‘16”For God so loved (past) the world that he gave (past) his one and only Son, that whoever believes (present) in him shall not (future) perish but have (present) eternal life. 17 For God did not send (past) his Son into the world to condemn (present infinitive) the world, but to save (present infinitive) the world through him. 18 Whoever believes (present) in him is not condemned (present), but whoever does not believe (past) stands condemned (present) already because he has not believed (past) in the name of God's one and only Son.”

#### 4 **Outlining**

An outline is a good way to summarize the important points and organize the facts. The outline will help you categorize or group major segments of information.

**Examples:** Colossians 1:1-8

- I. Introduction
  - A. Greetings
    - 1 From Paul and Timothy
    - 2 To the saints and faithful brethren
    - 3 Grace and peace from God
  - B. Thanksgiving
    - 1 The reason
      - a Their faith in Christ
      - b Their love for the saints
      - c Their hope in heaven
    - 2 The basis
      - a Response to the gospel
      - b Understanding the gospel

#### 5 **Questions-Answers:**

**Who, What, When, Where, Why, When, How** – These are basic questions you can ask about the text, such as who, what when, why, where, and how. In the Observation step, look for answers to these questions that can be answered by direct observation of the text. During the Interpretation step, we will try to answer some of these questions that cannot be answered by direct observation

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Why?
- Where?
- How?

**Examples:** Ephesians 1:4-14

- Who? God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ
- What? Chose us in Him (to be blameless and holy in His sight)
- When? Before the creation of the world
- Why? to the praise of His glorious grace
- Where? In Christ
- How? In accordance with his pleasure and will

#### 6 **Conditional Clauses**

Conditional clauses are “if-then.” Many times the word “then” is implied.

**Examples:** 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, **if** anyone is in Christ, **(then)** he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! Galatians 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for **if** righteousness could be gained through the law, **(then)** Christ died for nothing! Galatians 3:21 Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For **if** a law had been given that could impart life, **then** righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

## 7 *Purpose Clauses*

These clauses express purpose. Typically look for, “in order that” or “so that”

**Examples:** Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, **so that** no-one can boast. Galatians 3:14 He redeemed us **in order that** the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

## 8 *Connecting or transition words*

Connecting words reveal key ideas, relationships, thought patterns, progression of thought, logic. Look for words like

but	therefore	because
that	so that	so then

**Examples:** 2 Corinthians 5:17 **Therefore**, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! Galatians 1:18 **But** even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

## 9 *Lists*

Lists are series of words, phrases, or related thoughts. A list might be in one verse, cover several verses, or a whole chapter. A list probably has no sequence of cause and effect. See below for sequences.

**Examples:** Galatians 5:19-21 – (Deeds of the flesh vs. 19-21). 19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Fruit of the Spirit vs. 22-23) 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

## 10 *Sequences*

A sequence is a special type of list. This list may imply and order or cause and effect.

**Examples:** 2 Timothy 3:16-17 teaching, rebuking, correcting, training in righteousness. James 1:2-4 – trials, testing of your faith, endurance, perfection (i.e. maturity)

## 11 *Comparisons & Contrasts*

Comparisons show how things are alike. Contrasts show how things are different.

**Examples:** Ephesians 2:1-9 1 As for you, **you were dead** in your transgressions and sins, 2\* in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 ¶ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 **made us alive** with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness

to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been **saved, through faith**--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 **not by works**, so that no-one can boast.

## 12 Expressions of time

Look for show the progression or sequence of events. Words that indicate a sequence of events might be:

after  
then

as soon as  
until

at that time  
when

**Examples:** Matthew 24:1-16 **when** will this happen (vs. 3) **Then** you will be handed (vs. 9) **At that time** many will turn away from the faith (vs. 10) **then** the end will come (vs. 14) **So when** (vs. 15) **then** let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains (vs. 16)

## 13 Figures of speech

Look for **metaphors, similes, hyperbole**, etc. A figure of speech is a word or phrase that departs from straightforward, literal language. Figures of speech are often used for emphasis, freshness of expression or clarity.

**Examples:** Matthew 5:14 (metaphor) You **are the light** of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Matthew 13:31 (simile) He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven **is like a mustard seed**, which a man took and planted in his field. Matthew 17:20 (hyperbole) He replied, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, **you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move.** Nothing will be impossible for you."

## 14 OT Citations, Quotations, Allusions, and Echoes

Look for Old Testament citations, references, allusions, and echoes. (See Paulien, *The Deep things of God*, chapter 7 for a detailed explanation.)

**Citation** – A citation is where the author quotes a passage and then cites the reference.

**Example:** Hebrews 4:7 (NASB) **7** He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS." In this passage, the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 95:7-8 AND gives the reference, David.

**Quotation** - A quotation is where the author quotes a passage but does not cite the reference.

**Example:** Hebrews 4:3 (NASB) **3** For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. In this passage, the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 95:11 but does not give the reference. The only difference between a citation and a quotation is the inclusion of the reference.

**Allusion** – An allusion is where the author points the readers to a commonly-recognized source, but the reference may be only a word, phrase, or an idea. The strength of the allusion is measured by the number of parallel words between the passage in question and the passage alluded to. There are a lot of allusions in the book of Revelation. Some authors refer to an allusion as a "direct allusion," meaning the author had a specific passage in mind, but does

not quote it or cite it. Paulien provides even more detail citing different forms of allusions (e.g. verbal parallels, thematic parallels, structural parallels, etc.) as well as examining the strength of the allusion. (The example below, since it has 4-5 parallel words is called a “probable allusion because it has 4-8 parallel words. If it had 8-12, it would be a “certain allusion, and if it had 2-3 parallel words it would be a “possible allusion.”) The point is not to get wrapped up in the details, but how to identify an allusion and have some measure of its certainty.

**Example:** Revelation 9:2 and Genesis 19:28 (NASB) He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the **smoke of a great furnace**; and the sun and the air were darkened by the **smoke** of the pit. (Revelation 9:2) may be an allusion to Genesis 19:28, and he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the valley, and he saw, and behold, the **smoke** of the land ascended like the **smoke of a furnace**. Note the words in bold that show the parallel words. Here there are 4-5 parallel words.

**Echo** – Echoes are very similar to allusions in that they may involve a word or a phrase or an idea. But there is a major difference. In a direct allusion, the author desires to point the reader to a specific source or reference. With an echo, the author has no specific source in mind. The author can even “echo” the language of the Old Testament, for example, without even being aware of it. The reader should recognize the terms, without tying it to a specific passage.

**Example:** In today’s world, we may speak of getting a “lemon” when we buy a car that has many problems. The idea came from a book published by Ralph Nader in 1970 and the car was a lemon with four wheels. Most people know what you mean when you speak of a car that is a melon, even though they may not be aware where that language came from. We may speak of the wrath of God in the book of Revelation, and not have a specific reference in mind.

## 15 Illustrations

Look for illustrations.

**Example:** The vine in John 15. 1 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. John 15:1-2 (NASB)

## 16 Sentence Diagramming

Remember high school? Sentence diagramming might be a useful technique to take apart long sentences to really discover in detail what the author is saying – particularly if it someone like Paul who tends to write in long, complex sentences. For a good reference online, see, <http://www.german-latin-english.com/diagrams.htm>

**Examples:** Ephesians 1:1-3 Paul writes in one sentence. Matthew 28:19-20a. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. The only verbs in this verse are “make disciples” and “I have commanded.” The words “go”, “baptizing” and “teaching” are actually participles. By diagramming the sentence, the function of the words in the sentence becomes clearer.

## ***17 Commands, exhortations, or instructions***

Look for commands, exhortations or instructions.

**Examples:** Exodus 20 contains the 10 commandments. In John 13, Jesus commands His disciples to love one another. In Romans 12:1, Paul urges the believers to offer their bodies as living sacrifices.

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Links:

[http://www.preceptaustin.org/inductive\\_bible\\_study.htm](http://www.preceptaustin.org/inductive_bible_study.htm)

<http://www.intothyword.org/pages.asp?pageid=53489>

<http://www.inductivebiblestudy.net/>

<http://www.onlineinductivebiblestudy.com>

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