



WHAT TO OBSERVE

What should you look for within a passage?

A. The Basic Questions:

- **Who** – Who is performing or receiving the action of the sentence or paragraph?
- **What** – What is occurring?
- **When** – When is it occurring? Is there a sequence of events?
- **Where** – Where is the action occurring? Does the location change within the paragraph?
- **Why** – What is the goal or purpose for the action? Who benefits? What is his/her motivation?
- **How** – What is the means or manner for accomplishing the action?

B. Key Words (especially theologically important terms)

C. Important Connectives - Indicate the relationships within and between clauses and paragraphs

- Temporal - after, then, as, until, before, when, now, while
- Local or geographical - where
- Logical – read next two pages entitled “Structural Indicators”
- Emphatic - indeed, only

D. Grammatical Construction - How does each word function in the sentence?

- Verb - creates the “action” or state of being
- Note the tense of the verb (when is the action being performed)
- Note the “voice” of the verb (active - the subject is doing the acting; passive - the subject is being acted upon)
- Noun - name of a person, place, thing or quality
- Pronoun - used in the place of a noun
- Adjective - modifies or describes a noun
- Adverb - modifies a verb, adjective or other adverb

E. Figures of speech - Non-literal language (e.g. “I am the bread of life”)

F. Context of the preceding and following passage

- How is this passage related to the previous and following passages?
- What connecting words are used between the passages?
- Does the audience, mood, or subject change between the passages?

G. Things that are missing – what is not included in a passage can be just as important as what is! What words, phrases, or ideas does the author not include that you would have expected?

IDEAS FOR INTERPRETIVE QUESTIONS

Components	Definitive (What?)	Rational (Why? How?)
Terms	What key words require word study? What is the meaning of the term ____? How does it function in this sentence? What verb tenses are used?	Why was this word (or verb tense) used here? What other word might have been used, and why was it not? Why does the author change terms? Is this word crucial to the argument of the paragraph or book?
Structure	What type of sentence is this? What laws of structure are used? Result/Purpose, Cause/Effect, Explanation/Reason, Association, Proportion, Repetition/Continuity, Comparison, Climax, General/Particular, Contrast, Interchange, Question/Answer, Preparation, Summation, Transition, Pivot, Illustration (main point or sub-point?) What key connectors are used?	Why was this type of sentence used? What are the causes, effects, reasons or purposes given in the main clauses? Why is this order of words, phrases or clauses used? What are the timeless principles taught in the main statements or clauses?
Literary Form	What literary form is used? What are the primary characteristics of this form? Is the language literal or figurative? What figures of speech are used?	How does this literary form help to convey the author's meaning? What other form might have been used and to what effect? Why are the figures of speech used rather than literal language? What increased understanding of the truth is communicated through the figures of speech?
Atmosphere	What is the general atmosphere (sarcasm, compassion, urgency, despair, humility, awe, gratitude, joy, anger, concern)? Is there any change in atmosphere? What clues does the author give to set the atmosphere of the passage? What emotional words are used? How are the author's and the audience's attitudes revealed?	Why does this atmosphere pervade the passage? What historical reasons might be affecting the frame of mind of the author or audience? What is the intended effect on the audience of the terms, structure, form and atmosphere (e.g. persuasion, motivation, repentance, encouragement)?
Synthesis	What is the flow of thought? How does this passage function within the broader structural unit of which it is a part?	Why does each idea follow or precede another? How might the argument have been developed differently? How would the argument be affected if this passage were omitted?

Brian Fisher