

HOW TO CREATE A STRUCTURAL DIAGRAM

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STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

FIRST STEP: SEGMENTING THE LARGER PASSAGE

The first step in expository preaching is to segment the Bible book into sections. Each segment should be a complete unit of thought. Expository preaching is not so much verse by verse preaching as it is unit of thought preaching. Compare the paragraphing of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament with several English translations to determine the units of thought based on the decisions of the editors. The goal is to segment the larger passage of Scripture into units of thought. Verse by verse exposition often loses the author's main idea in the details of the text. Effective exposition strives to expose the original author's units of thought so that people can think through the passage as the biblical author intended. Each unit of thought becomes the foundation for the sermon.

SECOND STEP: DIAGRAMMING THE UNITS OF THOUGHT

A structural diagram of a unit of thought traces the arrangement of the passage by following various structural clues. The objective is to see the passage and then trace in visual form the grammatical relationships of the clauses. There are excellent tools out there that diagram sentences for the expositor giving rich grammatical information about the passage. However, the danger of these grammatical diagrams is that the expositor gets lost in the details and cannot see the preaching points. The expositor cannot see the forest for the trees. We can become so immersed in the analysis that we cannot summarize the main points. Therefore, I recommend a block diagram for preaching purposes. A block diagram blocks out the main clauses in a visual format. We want to see what the author was trying to emphasize rather than what we want to emphasize, and we want to preach a sermon not deliver a doctoral dissertation.

A block diagram helps the expositor visualize the structure of the passage just like an electrical schematic helps an electrician visualize the wiring of a device. There are five values of block diagramming.

- 1) Block diagramming can be used for all genres of literature such as poetry, narrative and prophetic forms of communication in addition to the epistles.
- 2) Block diagramming is simpler and takes less time than grammatical line diagramming. The busy pastor is more likely to use block diagramming and will find it more useful to gain the information needed for sermon preparation.
- 3) Block diagramming emphasized the important information for preaching. Most of the information vital to sermon preparation pertains to the major clause and phrase breakdown. The many exegetical commentaries and tools available can provide the more specific and technical information as needed.
- 4) Block diagramming is more visual than other forms of structural analysis. The goal is to diagram the entire unit of thought on one page so that the expositor can see the main

preaching points. A diagram needs to be visual to be effective. It must summarize the text in a visual way so the expositor can easily see the structure of the passage. The block diagram helps the expositor summarize the essential issues for sermon preparation quickly and efficiently.

- 5) Block diagramming leads easily into a sermon outline. A good sermon outline should not go beyond the first (and in some cases second) level of structure. The main preaching points are the skeleton of the sermon. A sermon that becomes more detailed than that risks losing the people because they cannot follow the complexities of detailed outlines. A block diagram visualizes the main preaching points for the expositor.

Developing a block diagram:

Purpose: To visualize the flow of thought – to picture the structure.

Use the following format for your diagram.

Copy and paste the text into a word processing document. Keep the words of the text in order as you go through the next steps. Word order is important for exposition. Use the “enter” and “tab” commands to break the passage down according to major and minor ideas. Major ideas are on the left of the page, and subordinate ideas move progressively to the right. Parallel ideas should begin in the same column as the corresponding idea.

If you are using paper and pencil instead of a computer, you should divide the paper into vertical columns. Write the words of the text in order breaking down the text into major and minor clauses with the major to the left and the minor to the right.

Distinguish between major and minor clauses.

The expositor must distinguish between the major and minor clauses in a unit of thought which is an interpretive process that is basic to structural analysis. Identify the independent clauses first. The main verbs in each sentence are the keys to identifying the independent clauses since independent clauses, containing both a subject and a predicate, can stand alone in a sentence. In the Greek text, main verbs are indicatives, imperatives, and subjunctives that are not introduced by a subordinate particle. Participles, Infinitives and any indicative that is part of a subordinate clause are not main verbs. In the English text, it is sometimes harder since many translations turn subordinate verbs into main verbs for English readers. The translations that follow a dynamic equivalence method of translating are more likely to muddy the distinction between independent and dependent clauses. Therefore, the expositor should use English translations that follow a word for word translating method more closely to avoid the confusion. Comparing multiple translations will also help the expositor determine the main verbs in each sentence.

Enter each clause or phrase on a new line in the diagram. Decide the level of importance for each clause and move it to the right or left in the diagram based on your interpretive decision. Major clauses move to the left and minor clauses to the

right. Independent clauses should be to the left in the diagram and dependent clauses to the right. You will often make decisions the first time through the process that you will change later as you look more carefully at the text. Keep working with the interpretive decisions until you arrive at your schematic of the passage.

Conjunctions are the keys that unlock the structure.

Connectives are the hinges on which the passage swings. The conjunctions form the structural clues in the passage. There are a wide variety of such clues, and they are important to structural analysis out of proportion to their relative size. Each connective should start a new line in the diagram. The following is a sample (not exhaustive) list of connectives.

- a) Coordinating (and, nor, for, but, neither/nor, either/or, both/and, not only, but also)
- b) Contrasting (but, except)
- c) Emphatic (truly, certainly, in fact)
- d) Logical (therefore, then, wherefore, so)
- e) Transitional (and, wherefore, so)
- f) Subordinating (when, because, since, although, that, where)
- g) Comparative (as, just as, like)

Other clues help form the block diagram.

Several other grammatical clues are also useful for block diagramming. The following is a sample of such clues.

- a) Participles (generally distinguished in English by the “ing” ending of the word)
- b) Infinitives (generally distinguished in English by the preposition “to”)
- c) Repeated words (repetition is an important visual clue)
- d) Change of speaker is an important clue in conversational narrative
- e) Change of subject is an important clue, particularly in narrative.

THIRD STEP: FRAMING THE MAIN POINTS OF EACH SEGMENT

The clauses on the far left in the block diagram are the main thoughts in the passage. There should be two to five important clauses in each unit of thought. The expositor should principalize these ideas as universal truths. These are the principles to be explained in contemporary terms that the listener can apply to his/her life. The main points should follow the structural diagram. These main points form the outline of the exposition. The skill of the expositor is demonstrated in his/her ability to principalize the main points of the unit of thought in language that the contemporary listener can understand and apply. The expositor seeks to exegete the world of his/her listener to find contemporary life parallels and frame the ideas in those terms. It is important that the expositor works to develop the principles and frame the message for himself and his/her audience. Audience

analysis is critical for framing the message effectively. Using the outlines from another person short circuits the process of Bible exposition.