

OUTLINE PREPARATION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a *structure* of a passage? [Question 1]

Structure is a way of talking about how a passage in the Bible is organized. Beneath the surface of each passage is an underlying arrangement of material, an outline or logic or shape that the author has used to organize the text. You might think of it as the author's outline. And each part of the passage has a role to play in that structure. When we ask you to identify the structure of a passage, then, we are asking you to identify the underlying shape. It might be a grammatical or logical structure (common in discourse), or it might be a plot or literary device (common in narrative), or it might be the separation of the passage into stanzas (in poetry). However you determine the structure, you should mark the sections of the passage, including the verse numbers. Please note that we are using the term *structure* to refer to the organization of a passage. For the structure of a whole book, the term *macro-structure* is more appropriate.

What about genres?

Genres are categories of literature that have distinctive characteristics and, as a result, require some particularized reading strategies. Most people would not read a newspaper the same way as a novel, or a recipe, or a letter, or song lyrics. The Bible has several different genres within it, including: Old Testament Narratives, Prophetic Literature, Wisdom Literature, Apocalyptic Literature, Gospels and Acts, and Epistles. The worksheet questions are based on principles, and so are applicable to any genre. You will want to use genre-specific reading strategies for some of the questions, of course. More hints about each genre are available on the website.

What about text types?

Text types are a slightly different idea from genres. They are both categories of literature and even use some of the same words (e.g., narrative), so it can be a little confusing. Genres are a bigger category and take in to account things like content, place in history, form of literature, and rhetorical purpose. Text types, however, refer only to the form of the text. In the Bible, there are three major text types: narrative (or stories), discourse (or speeches) and poetry. Importantly, each of these text types appear in each of the genres. That is, there is narrative and discourse and poetry in each of the genres listed above. Because text type refers to the form or shape of the text, it is most often useful when talking about structure. Each text type has specific structures and requires specific tools for finding those structures. More hints about structure in text types can be found on the website.

Can you explain *main idea* and *aim* further than what is given on the preparation worksheet? [Question 3]

Main idea and *aim* are both ideas referring to the particular passage as a whole, yet they are somewhat different in function. The *main idea* of a passage is the main point of the author. It's descriptive. It's the answer to the question: what is the main point that the author is trying to get across? As you work on articulating your main idea, please keep in mind that it needs to be specific enough to the passage that it clearly comes from *the particular passage* (and not any other passage). However, it also needs to be articulated in a foundational enough way that it describes a basic truth for all of God's people in every age. The *aim* of the passage, unlike the main idea, is prescriptive. It gets at the author's agenda. Given the main idea, what does the author want his readers to do, think, feel, believe, change, remember, trust, turn away from, etc.? Keep in mind the *aim* is for the *first readers* (we'll get to modern readers with *argument* and *application*). Where this gets complicated is that sometimes, the *main idea* of a passage IS an *aim* because the author's primary point is a call to action (usually stated as an imperative). The hope, then, is that you write one single sentence that is both short and clear, and captures the *main* or *aim* (or both!) of the passage. The goal is NOT to cram as much of the passage into your *main idea* or *aim* as possible, but rather to focus in on the main point and main purpose as clearly as possible. Our hope is that you will supply your best attempt at the *main idea* or *aim* as a way of demonstrating that you understand the point of the passage as the author is presenting it.

What do you mean by *argument*? [Question 5]

The argument of a sermon or message is the fundamental and abstract statement of what the speaker today is trying to convince the audience today. In expository preaching, it will certainly be intimately related to the author's *main idea* and *aim* for his original audience, but you might think of it more as that most basic idea of



which you are attempting to persuade your listeners. It should be well reasoned and, perhaps, articulated as the result of a proof. And, importantly, it should probably be tailored to two specific parts of your audience: the believers and the unbelievers, thus taking into account how your passage relates to the gospel and not merely its meaning for the first audience. Also importantly, the *applications* and *implications* will also likely be related to the *argument*. For example, if the author's *aim* in Luke 14:13-14 is that the first audience needs to consider how they view social hierarchy and thus serve the poor who cannot repay them, my *argument* for believers might be something like: 'you need to really consider whether you are serving those less fortunate than you, both in the church and outside, without expectation of honor or repayment as this is the example Jesus sets.' My *argument* for the unbeliever might be something like: 'consider how you are in need of Jesus Christ, who came to serve (and save!) by dying on a cross and rising again, and we have no hope of repaying him—it is not something we could have done ourselves.' And my *applications* might range from inviting people we might not otherwise consider inviting to dinner, to getting involved with mercy ministries, to adopting an attitude of sacrificial service in the church, to following up on this idea that Jesus came to save us without expectation that we 'repay' him or 'earn' that salvation.¹

What is the difference between *main idea/aim* and *argument/application/implication*? [Questions 3 and 5]

If the *main idea* and *aim* are for the author's first readers, then *argument*, *application*, and *implication* are our way of talking about the goal of the passage for our people today. Another way to think of it is that the *main idea/aim* is the text applied to them/then, and the *argument/application/implication* is the text applied to us/now.

What is a *homiletical outline*? [Question 6]

A *homiletical outline* is simply a teaching outline. The *homiletical outline* should be derived from your work in the text and should be related to the structure of the passage. While our structures are behind-the-scenes work, the homiletical outline is shaped and prepared to help your listeners follow along your presentation of the text for your audience. While some might include detailed notes in a homiletical outline for teaching, your homiletical outline for the Course needs only to be the outline itself, the headers you might attach to each section of your message or sermon.

Do I really have to write a *homiletical outline*? [Question 6]

Yes, you are required to write a *homiletical outline*. We did not previously require this, but it is now expected. People in ministry fulfill a lot of teaching roles. Some find themselves in preaching or teaching settings where a homiletical outline would be helpful. Other teachers lead ministries of the local church, write curriculum, train lay leaders, etc. Whichever way you are doing Word work, it is incredibly important to think homiletically!

What should my handout look like and why do I need to bring several copies?

Your handout should include your answers to the questions on the preparation worksheet. It is most helpful for small-group discussion if your handout is on one page (front and back). The art of being clear and concise is invaluable for preachers and teachers! Providing copies for your small group will make interaction more fruitful as they peer-review your work.

What should my presentation look like for my small group?

Your five-minute presentation will consist of simply presenting the content of your preparation worksheet, including your homiletical outline. The discussion that follows will build on that work with the hope of giving you one or two things on which to work. The *Simeon Course* is designed to equip preachers and Bible teachers with tools to study the Bible for the purpose of teaching it. To that end, we cannot delve in to assessing your choice of illustrations, your tone or speed of speaking in public, etc. The *Simeon Course* focuses on skills in studying the text in order to get it right so we can get it across.

¹ Please note: this is not intended to be a definitive, or even good, interpretation of the text. It is, rather, intended to be an example of the kinds of things to think and present while considering the idea of *argument*.

How should I prepare to help others in my small group?

In addition to presenting your two passages, there are other passages being presented by your peers. It is a good idea to prepare all of the passages (in addition to those you have been assigned). Try to read each text. Look at the context. Try to formulate a sense of the main idea in the passage. The better each person is prepared on each text, the better the feedback and discussion will be.

This is my first time. How am I supposed to prepare without having received the training?

We are glad you are taking the *Simeon Course*! This FAQ and our website are meant to help you prepare (specifically our *How to Prepare* page found at simeontrust.org/prepare). We'd all love the chance to hear instructions *before* completing our homework, but that would mean going through the Course without doing the homework. We have found we can't really grow in our teaching unless we bring our own work to review. So, whether you are a first-timer or a repeat-student, everyone will tell you there is always more to learn when taking the Course.

What if I get it wrong?

This is the last question on this FAQ, but often the first question on everyone's minds. It's okay to be nervous. We all worry about handling God's Word well. As Christians, we recognize the learning process is ongoing. We can always be stretched in new ways. Small group leaders will aim to foster a collegial environment where we will each be encouraged and challenged to grow. Most of us are not used to peer-review of our work, but we will all find it is invaluable to helping us grow as Bible teachers. So, enjoy the Course!