

Helps for Inductive Bible Study: Four Practical Steps for Making Observations

Women of the Word • Saturday, January 10, 2026 • Brad Klassen

THE FOUR STAGES OF BIBLE STUDY

Stage 1: Surveying the Text's Context
Stage 3: Interpreting the Text's Meaning

Stage 2: Observing the Text's Content
Stage 4: Applying the Text's Message

What is “observation”?

Observation can be defined simply as “the act of _____.”

“The process of observation should generally resemble the absorbing process of the _____ when it is exposed to a liquid” (Traina, *Methodical Bible Study*, 48).

The primary objective of this stage is to answer the question, “What does the text _____?”

1. Read the text.

Principle: Good observation begins with a thorough acquaintance with the text, and a thorough acquaintance requires good reading.

Reading is needed both to _____ (*what is there*) and to _____ (*what is not there*).

Read prayerfully, inquisitively, repeatedly, progressively, and patiently.

Plan A reading:

Plan B reading:

2. Query the author.

Principle: To increase awareness, the student should generate a leading question for each sentence of the text, creating a kind of *Q & A dialogue* with the writer.

One of the greatest threats to sound observation is the “illusion of _____”—the opinion that “I already know this.”

- a) Create a two-columned chart, with the column on the left designated for the “leading question,” and the column on the right for each sentence of the text.
- b) Paste the sentence of the text in the right column; it serves as the biblical author’s “answer.”

Leading Question	Answer (Romans 8:31)
	Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

- c) Generate a question that appropriately *leads into* the answer.
- d) Each subsequent question must take into account the previous “answer” given, and lead into the next “answer.”

3. Compare the translations.

Principle: The student should compare the text in several _____ translations in order to recognize both the simple and complex details in the text.

The translation used as the standard should be _____ translation like the NASB or the LSB; two or three other translations should be chosen for comparison.

Commonalities in the translations show details in the text which translators find easy to translate and less susceptible to interpretive disagreement. Differences among the translations show details which translators find challenging to translate; these are the details which require special study in the commentaries.

- a) Create a chart, with the standard translation in the left column and the other selected translations listed to the right.

NASB	ESV	CSB	NIV

- b) Insert a single verse of text in each row, under the appropriate translation.
- c) Arrange the display in such a way that each line of text corresponds in each of the translations.

4. Examine the particulars.

Principle: To observe the text well requires consideration of every _____. As is true for the effective investigator, no detail of the biblical text can be considered inconsequential.

Matthew 5:18

The _____ of a meticulous investigator is crucial. Aim for the most “hands-on” approach as possible.

- a) Write/print the text out on paper to allow you to underline, draw arrows, circle key words, and add notes.
- b) Use different color pens or highlighters to mark certain patterns.
- c) Devise a personal system for marking consistently the same kinds of things (main verbs, prepositional phrases, pronouns, etc.).
- d) Record your key observations and questions for further study.

Recommended Resource: Howard Hendricks and William Hendricks, *Living by the Book*.