

Analytical Outlines

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What is an Analytical Outline?

1. An analytical outline is a way of displaying a text of Scripture so that the interconnections between the grammatical parts become clear.

An analytical outline does not rephrase the text. It merely breaks it up and indents it onto separate lines to highlight the connections. The purpose of an analytical outline is to help you see how things fit together. There are two benefits to doing an analytical outline: it causes you to closely observe the text, and it forces you to recognize and deal with interpretive problems, some of which might be skipped over.

2. There are no right or wrong ways to do analytical outlines.

Analytical outlines are a private aid to help you better see how the text fits together grammatically. Therefore you should choose a method that helps you. Different people may have different ways of doing analytical outlines. The specific guidelines that follow are only to get you started. If you can improve this method to make it more helpful to you and others, please do so!

3. An analytical outline is not the same things as an interpretation.

Rather, it is merely a help. The grammatical structure of a text gives you lots of clues to what the author is trying to say. However, the grammatical structure is not always identical to the meaning.

4. Analytical outlines can be very valuable.

For if your understanding of the text cannot explain the grammatical structure of the text, then your understanding is probably wrong. The meaning of the text comes out of the words. If there were no words, there would be no meaning. So keep honing your understanding until it fits with the grammatical structure.

5. Language is very flexible.

There are so many different ways to say things that it is impossible to come up with a rigorous scheme for them all. Instead, we use a number of guidelines that work in most cases. If you encounter passages that are hard to outline, don't worry too much about it. But do work to develop a consistent approach to everything you encounter.

General Guidelines for an Analytical Outline

1. Divide the whole text into passages. Work on one passage at a time.
2. Start main (independent) sentences at the left margin.
3. Put modifying (dependent) phrases or clauses under the words they modify.
4. Make the parallel phrases obvious. If necessary, connect them with lines.
5. Place lists of qualities, actions, etc. in vertical columns.

Making the Most of an Analytical Outline

- 1 Look for different interpretive options as you write your outline. Each time you put a phrase under a word, ask yourself if it could go under anything else. These different possibilities may open up new ways of seeing the passage, and perhaps even a new understanding of what the author is really saying.
- 2 Watch for repeated words or phrases.
- 3 Distinguish main statements from explanations, modifying clauses, and rabbit-trails.
- 4 Identify crucial words of the text for later word studies.

Note: The New American Standard Bible is closest to the grammar of the original languages and therefore one of the best versions to use when making an analytical outline.

Specific Guidelines for an Analytical Outline

- A. Start the first sentence of a passage at the left margin.

Blessed be the God and Father . . . (Eph. 1:3)

- A.1 If the first sentence begins with "and", "but", etc. put it in the middle of the page by itself, then start at the left margin continuing as normal.

But
now in Christ Jesus... (Eph. 2:13)

- A.2 If the first sentence introduces the book, put the author, the recipient and the word (s) of greeting all out to the left margin.

Paul...
to the saints...
grace...
peace... (Eph. 1:1-2)

- A.3 If the first sentence is a command, put the command verb at the left margin, even if you have to change the word order.

Speak truth... (Eph. 4:25)

- A.4 If the first sentence begins a command passage, put each command back out to the left margin.

Speak truth...
do not let... (Eph. 4:25ff)

B. If there are two or more prepositional phrases modifying one word or phrase, indent them under it.

*...giving thanks
 always
 for all things
 in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ
 to God ...* (Eph. 5:20)

B.1 If prepositional phrase is a relative clause, indent the relative under the word or phrase it modifies.

*...the shield of faith
 with which you will be able to extinguish...* (Eph. 6:16)

C. Indent participles under the main verb they modify.

*For he chose us
 in Him
 before the foundation of the world
 that we should be holy ...* (Eph. 1:4)

C.1 If a participial phrase comes before its main verb, change the word order so the participle can be indented underneath the verb.

*I do not cease giving thanks for you
 having heard of ...
 making mention of ...* (Eph. 1:15-16)

D. Indent appositional phrases under the word they modify.

*...formerly you
 the Gentiles in the flesh
 who are called uncircumcision...* (Eph. 2:11)

E. Indent explanatory sentences ("for", etc.) under the word or phrase they explain. Do the same for causal sentences ("since," "because", etc.), purpose sentences ("in order that", etc.) and other related statements.

*...you have been brought near by the blood of Christ
 For he himself is our peace... (Eph.2:13-14)*

F. In a list of two or more similar parts of speech, write them in parallel under one another.

*speaking to one another in psalms, and
hymns and
spiritual songs...* (Eph. 5:19)

F.1 If the sentence resumes following a list, continue it on the last item on the same line.

*Let all bitterness and
wrath and
anger and
clamor and
slander put be away from you* (Eph. 4:31)

G. Place major logical conjunctions ("therefore," etc.) and independent questions in the middle of the page in all capital letters.

*THEREFORE
take up the full armor of God...* (Eph. 6:13)

H. Put unimportant connections (and's, but's or's, etc) at the end of the line.

*Tychicus
the beloved brother and
faithful minister* (Eph. 6:21)

I. Put important connectives at the beginning of a line with any corresponding parts lining up in parallel.

*remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh. . .
that at that time you were separate. . .
But in Christ Jesus now you, the ones formerly . . .* (Eph. 2:11-13)

I.1 In a command passage, even if there is an important contrastive before a new command, the contrastive must still go at the end of the previous line (as in H above).

*Let him who steals steal no longer, but rather
let him labor,*

J. When an author begins a transitional sentence, indent it under the point of transition.

*... in order that you might order certain ones . . .
:
:
Now the end of the order is. . .* (1 Tim. 1:4-5)

Example: Ephesians 5:3-13 (NASB)

³ But

do not let immorality or
 impurity or
 greed, even be named among you
 as is proper among saints. ⁴ and
 no filthiness and
 no silly talk or
 coarse joking which are not fitting, but rather
 giving of thanks.

⁵ For this you know with certainty that no
 immoral or
 impure person or
 covetous man
 (who is an idolater)
 has an inheritance
 in the kingdom of Christ and God.

⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words
 for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

⁷ THEREFORE

do not be partakers with them.

⁸ For you were once darkness
 but you are now light in the Lord.

walk as children of light

⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, and
 righteousness and
 truth)

¹⁰ trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

¹¹ And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead
 expose them.

¹² For it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.

¹³ But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light
 for everything that becomes visible is light.