

Y. Preparing an exegetical paper

Helpful here is the book by Gordon Fee, New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983). I have adapted a number of Fee's recommendations here.

A. Place the text in its *context*. This includes both the historical and literary context.

1. Read the entire document through in one sitting. Repeated reading is preferred. Identify the major subjects (or themes) of the document.
2. Discover whatever you can about the historical background of the document. Who is the author? Who are the recipients? What were the circumstances that called forth this writing? Here you will use both internal and external helps.
3. In the light of the larger context, identify the major theme (or themes) in your text. Observe how these fit in with the broader concerns of the document. Prepare a tentative outline of the passage.

B. Confirm the limits of the passage and establish the text.

The concern here is to make sure that the text you are looking at is relatively self-contained. Additionally, you should identify any problems with the textual tradition; these are issues of "lower criticism" that are dealt with in other courses in the seminary curriculum.

C. Translate the text.

1. The first concern here is to deepen your awareness of the content of the text. Translation often will focus your attention on aspects of the text which were not previously evident to you.
2. Translation will also reveal some of the complexities involved with the the exegesis of the particular text, e.g., the specific function of a participial phrase, the significance of a noun in the genitive case, the importance of a particular preposition. What aspects of the text constitute major problems for understanding the author's intention?
3. You will want to observe particular words which merit further study.