*When we listen to people talk we do not begin by analyzing words or sentences, but we listen to all they have to say. People arrange their material in order to communicate their meaning.*

*So in written work the larger contex, not merely the individual word, is the primary determiner of meaning. The speaker/ writer has bound the words, sentences, and paragraphs together by certain relationships. When we understand these relationships we are enabled to “hear” what the speaker/writer is saying. It is all about finding out “how things fit together”!*

![MC900434854[1]]()

Here are some of the ways in which “things fit together”:[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. **Preparation or Introduction:** The inclusion of the background or setting for events or ideas. Thereby the reader is prepared to understand that which follows by that which precedes. This kind of composition is frequently utilized in **narrative literature.** For example, Genesis 2:4-25, the account of creation of Adam and Eve, provides the situation for the fall in Genesis 3.
2. **Comparison:** The association of like things. The unity of Hebrews 5:1-10 is based on the use of this law. The priesthood of Christ is compared with the Aaronic priesthood. Note the *so also* in v. 5.
3. **Contrast:** The association of unlike things. Note the contrast between law and faith in Romans 4. Sometimes things are both compared and contrasted to show in what ways they are alike and not alike. Note Adam and Christ in Romans 5.
4. **Repetition:** The repeated use of the same or very similar terms, phrases, clauses, etc. In Leviticus the term *holy* is repeated many times. Note Jesus’ repeated *You have heard that it was said* in Matt. 5:21, 27, 31, 33. 38, 43. Repetition may be subservient to other structural relationships. In Matthew 5 with each time Jesus uses this statement he is giving a particular example of how our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. See on particularization below.
5. **Continuation:** Repetition refers primarily to words, phrases, and clauses. Continuation to the completion of the explanation of an idea or to the carrying through of a series of events to its end. For instance, the story of Lot in Genesis 13-14 is continued in 18-19. The first chapters show his choice, capture, and rescue. The last two show the result of that choice in his involvement with Sodom and Gomorrah. One could also describe Genesis 18-19 as being in harmony with 13-14 because they show the appropriate result for Lot’s choice. See on harmony below.
6. **Turning Point:** The turning point is the pivot or hinge of the passage. The subject matter is arranged so that it turns around or upon some one factor. After this turning point the ideas or events go in a different direction. Peter’s confession in Mark 8 is such a turning point. The disciples have finally come to realize that Jesus is the Messiah. After Jesus tells them that he the Messiah must die they are completely baffled, at least until the Resurrection. Acts 11:19-21 is a turning point—people begin to purposefully preach to the gentiles. The rest of Acts goes in a different direction because of this event.
7. **Climax:** The arrangement of material in such a way as to progress from the lesser to the greater and ultimately to the greatest. The book of Exodus is arranged climactically, with the high point coming when the Glory of the Lord descends on the Tabernacle in 40:34-35.
8. **Particularization:** Movement from a general statement to particular examples or applications of that statement. Matt. 6:1 makes the general statement that we should not do our acts of righteousness before other people. Matt. 6:2-18 gives three particular examples of such acts of righteousness—giving to the needy, praying, and fasting. For another example see under see under #4 above.
9. **Generalization:** The opposite of particularization. Movement from particular examples to a general statement. James 2 begins with the particular example of mistreating a poor person who comes to church and then comes to the general statement that partiality is sin (vv. 8-9)
10. **Cause and Effect:**  The progression from cause to effect and from effect to cause. Romans 1:18-32 moves from cause to effect. Humanity sinned, which caused God to judge them by giving them up to their sin. His giving them up to their sin caused further sin. Because of this further sin, God judged them again by giving them up to this deeper sin, which caused further sin, etc. Several other structural relationships are sub-categories of cause and effect: **Substantiation:** Stating a proposition and then giving the reasons for it. This relationship appears in logical argumentation. In Rom. 8:18 Paul states that the suffering of the present is not comparable with the Christian’s future glory. In vv. 19-30 he gives us reasons why.  **Result:** Another way of speaking about cause and effect. One action has resulted in another action. However, the resulting action may not have been inevitable. In John’s Gospel Jesus’ signs cause some to believe, but some disbelieve.  **Purpose:** This relationship involves the intention of the doer. One person does something with the intention of causing something else to happen, with the purpose that a certain thing will result. Jesus preached with the purpose that people would believe.
11. **Instrumentation:** The setting forth of the means to an end as well as the end itself. Instrumentation thus involves the factor of purpose. The Gospel of John, in view of the author’s statement in 20:30-31, exemplifies this relationship. The signs recorded in the book are a means to an end, namely, belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, in order to make possible eternal life. Instrumentation asks the question *how*, while cause and effect asks the question *why.* In Ephesians 6 Paul tells us how to *be strong in the Lord*. We are strengthened by putting on each piece of the armor of God.
12. **Explanation or Analysis:** The presentation of an idea or event followed by its interpretation. In Mark 4 Jesus tells the parable of the sower and then explains it. This relationship is closely related to particularization and continuation.
13. **Summarization:** The employment of an abridgment or compendium either preceding or following a unit of material. Joshua 12 summarizes the cities conquered by the Israelites, before the author begins to describe the distribution of the land. John 12:37-50 summarizes Jesus’ ministry to the world which has been described in John 1-12, before moving to his time with his disciples and his crucifixion/resurrection.
14. **Problem-Solution:** A problem is presented followed by its solution. In 1 Corinthians Paul refers to problems in the Corinthian church and then gives their solution.
15. **Question and Answer (Interrogation):**  The use of questions and answers. Questions and answers can be used in the problem-solution relationship above. They can be used in argument to support substantiation. They can be used rhetorically to elicit an expected answer. Paul uses them rhetorically in Romans 6 when he asks if Christians should continue in sin, with the obviously expected negative reply. He is also using them in this context to carry forward his argument.
16. **Harmony or Balance:** The effecting of unity by means of agreement. This relationship indicates consistency, correspondence, such as the correspondence between a disease and its remedy, a crime and its appropriate punishment, a promise and its fulfillment. In Rom. 1:18-3:20 Paul describes the sinfulness of humanity. Then in 3:21ff he describes God’s grace to deal with that sinfulness. The one balances the other. Harmony is often subservient to other relationships. For instance, the example just given from Romans is also problem/solution.

**Some Things to Look For:**

When trying to understand how a passage fits together, it is often helpful to note both **changes in** and **repetition of** the following **“five”:**

![MC900445254[1]]()![MC900240341[1]]()

**Persons Events**

![MC900047911[1]]()

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**Places Time**

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**Ideas**

**Also look for introductory and concluding statements.**

1. Adapted from Robert A. Traina, *Methodical Bible Study*, pages 50-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)