

LAWS OF COMPOSITION

A writer constructs a piece of writing in the way that will most effectively get the message across. If you can discover the basic structure of a piece of writing, you can find the main points the writer wants to communicate. One way of discovering the structure of a piece of writing, including a passage of Scripture, is to look for laws of composition which the writer has used. These laws (or principles of construction) are used not only by writers, but by engineers, architects, composers, speakers, painters, and others, for these are universal ways the mind works, and universal ways of discovering the purpose in the mind of the writer, the architect, etc. Here are some laws of composition we find most frequently in studying Scripture.

Repetition	The reiteration of the same terms. For example, in the Book of Leviticus the term holy is employed many times.
Continuity	The repeated use of similar words, phrases, ideas. For example, in Philemon, notice the repeated use of the similar terms brother , partner , and fellow-worker .
Contrast	The association of opposites. For example, in Psalm 1 the way of the righteous is contrasted with the way of the wicked.
Comparison	The association of like things which vary in some way. For example, the parable in Mark 4:3ff describes four kinds of soil; they are all soil but have varying degrees of receptivity to seed. The use of the word like signals a comparison. For example, James 1:6 states, "He who doubts is like a wave of the sea..."
General to Particular	The movement from a general idea or activity to particulars about that idea. For example, Psalm 23:1 makes a general statement, "Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing." The verses which follow give particulars which unfold the implications of that general statement, such as "In grassy meadows He lets me lie; by tranquil streams He leads me to restore my spirit."
Particular to General	The movement from a particular to a general idea or activity. For example, in Mark 1:30 Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law, and in the following paragraph he heals many people.
Cause to Effect	The progression from cause to effect. For example, in Mark 1:28ff the mighty acts of Jesus cause the crowd to flock to him.
Effect to Cause	The progression from effect to cause. For example, Ephesians 5:21 states, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."
Explanation	The presentation of an idea or event followed by its explanation. For example, in Mark 4:3ff, Jesus presents the parable of the soils, then explains it to his disciples in private.

Prep / Intro	The inclusion of the background or setting for events or ideas by which the reader is prepared to understand that which follows. For example, in Mark 1:2 the quotation from Isaiah prepares the reader for the appearance of John the Baptist.
Climax	The arrangement of material in such a way as to progress from great to the greater and thence to the greatest, where the climax corresponds to the greatest. For example, in Psalm 23 Yahweh is shown to meet everyday needs (great), then needs in times of crisis (greater), and then the needs for all the future, in this life as well as for eternity (greatest).
Means to an End	The setting forth of the means to an end as well as the end itself. Often the words or phrases 'that', 'so that', or 'in order that' are employed to signal a means-to-an-end construction. For example, John 20:31 states that, "These are written that you may believe..." Means to an end is like a planned cause and effect.
Interrogation	The use of a question or problem followed by its answer. For example, in John 9:2 the disciples question Jesus, and in verses 3 and following he answers them. Moreover, a writer of prose or didactic material may deliberately employ a question to excite greater interest in the answer which follows. Paul's question in Romans 6:1 is an important example.

Adapted from *Methodical Bible Study* by Robert Triana, pp. 50-52.