Relationships between Propositions


**COORDINATE RELATIONSHIPS**

1. **Series (S):** Each proposition makes its own independent contribution to the whole.
   
   \( \text{kaiv, dev, tev, ou\[te, oujdev, mhvte, mhdev} \) [and, but, both/and, neither/nor]

2. **Progression (P):** Each proposition is a step closer toward a climax.
   
   \( \text{kaiv, dev, tev, ou\[te, oujdev, mhvte, mhdev} \) [and, but, both/and, neither/nor]

3. **Alternative (A):** Each Proposition expresses different possibilities arising from a situation \( \text{ajllav, dev, h[, mevn . . . dev} \) [but, or, on the one hand/on the other hand]

**SUBORDINATE RELATIONSHIPS**

**Support by Restatement**

1. **Action-Manner (A/M):** The statement of an action, and then a more precise statement that indicates the way or manner in which this action is carried out. (Key Words: *by, in that; w/modals*)

2. **Comparison (Cf.):** A statement or action in the main proposition is explained more precisely by a comparative statement showing what the statement in the main proposition is like. \( \text{wJ", kaqwv", ou{tw", w{sper} [as, just as, thus, in this manner]}

3. **Negative-Positive (—/+):** Two alternatives are given: one is denied and the other is affirmed. \( \text{ouj, mhv, ajllav, dev} \) [not, but, now]

4. **Idea-Explanation (Id/Exp):** The addition of a clarifying statement to the main proposition. \( \text{tou\[t j e\[stin, gavr} \) [this/that is, for, because]

5. **Question-Answer (Q/A):** The question is stated and the answer to the question is given.

**Support by Distinct Statement**

1. **Ground (G):** A statement is made in the main proposition, and the subordinate one gives a reason or ground for the statement. \( \text{gavr, o{ti, ejpeiv, ejpeidhv, diovti} [for, because, since]}

2. **Inference (. . .):** A statement or event from which a conclusion or inference is drawn. \( \text{ou\^n, diov, w{ste} [then, therefore, thus]}

3. **Action-Result (Ac/Res):** The relationship between an action and a consequence or result that accompanies that action. \( \text{w{ste} [with the result that]}

4. **Action-Purpose (Ac/Pur):** The relationship between an action and the intended result of that action, which may or may not come to fruition. \( \text{i\{na, o{pw", i\{na. . . mhv [in order that]}

5. **Conditional (If/Th):** Show that the causing action is potential only. If the condition is an assumed reality, the conditional clause is really an equivalent to a ground. \( \text{ei\j, ejavn [if . . . then]}

6. **Temporal (T):** The relationship between the main proposition and the occasion when it occurs. \( \text{o{te, o{tan} [when, whenever]}

7. **Locative (L):** Indicates the place in which the action occurred, or the place where the action is operative. \( \text{ofpou, ou} \) [somewhere, where]

8. **Bilateral (BL):** Supports two propositions: one preceding and one following. (same conj's as 1&2)

**Support by Contrary Statement**

1. **Concessive (Csv):** Develops the argument with a contrary statement that contrasts the main proposition with the concessive one. \( \text{kaivper, ei\j, kaiv, ejavn kaiv} \) [even though, even if, although]

2. **Situation-Response (Sit/Res):** A situation in one proposition and a response in another: can be positive or negative, and focuses on a person’s response.
TRACING AN ARGUMENT
by Brian Vickers

I. Propositions

The first step in tracing the argument in a text is to divide the text into propositions.

A proposition is an assertion or statement about something.

To understand and interpret a sustained argument, you have to begin with the fundamental parts of the text – the propositions.

Ex: “Listen” – implies – “You listen”
“Listen” – implies – “You listen”
“We are going to learn tracing”

The following is a short “argument” for learning tracing. It contains several propositions (P). See if you can pick them out.

“We are going to learn tracing because tracing is one of the best methods to learn in order to read the Bible carefully. And tracing is important to learn because it teaches us to read arguments by following the logic of the author. Therefore we should want to learn tracing.”

If you tried to pick them out, before looking below, you might have come up with something like this:

1. Listen.
2. We are going to learn tracing
3. because tracing is one of the best methods to learn
4. in order to read the Bible carefully
5. And Tracing is important to learn
6. because it teaches us to read arguments
7. by following the logic of the author
8. Therefore we should want to learn tracing.

Notice that a proposition is not the same thing as a sentence. One sentence may have several propositions. A proposition is simply some sort of statement. A sentence, on the other hand may contain a number of propositions. For instance, “in order to read the Bible carefully” is not a “complete sentence” but a proposition. It states the purpose of the preceding statement, “because tracing is one of the best methods to learn.” Note that “because tracing is one of the best methods to learn” is itself a proposition in the sentence that begins in with “We are going to learn tracing . . .”

1Most, if not all, of this material is based on what I have learned from Scott Hafemann and Tom Schreiner. Hafemann and Schreiner use the same tracing method (with a few, small differences). A more detailed discussion of tracing can be found in Schreiner’s, Interpreting the Pauline Epistles, Guides to New Testament Exegesis, ed. Scott McKnight (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990; see chapter 6, “Tracing the Argument,” 97-126.
The Key to learning tracing is to learn how to recognize propositions (P).

Q: How do you recognize propositions?
A: By the ways they relate together. Often the key to identifying a P is noticing words like “and” “but” “because” etc. Notice these conjunctions in the example argument. When tracing a NT text, conjunctions and other logical connectors play a vital role in dividing and connecting propositions.

Here is a basic explanation of how each P relates logically to form an argument.

- P1, “Listen” makes a statement. It serves to get the attention of the reader.
- P2 – “We are going to learn tracing.” P2 provides the “what” that you are expected to listen to. The argument really begins here.
- P3, “Because Tracing is one of the best methods to learn,” gives the reason why we are going to learn tracing. It provides the ground for the statement in P2.
- P4, “in order that. . .” supports P3 by stating the purpose of learning tracing.
- P5 “And Tracing is important to learn” gives another reason for leaning tracing.
- P6, “Because it teaches us to read arguments” gives the reason or the ground for why tracing is important to learn. P6 supports P5.
- P7, “by following the logic of the author” states the means by which tracing teaches us to read arguments. It supports P6, “. . .teaches us to read arguments.”
- P8 concludes the argument. It is the inference of the whole argument. In other words, all the preceding P’s support the assertion, “Therefore we should want to learn tracing.”

The method used in this simple example is the exact same method employed in tracing a biblical text. With practice, anyone who can understand the above example, can trace an argument in the Bible. That is not to say that every argument is as easy to follow as the example—arguments can be very complex and so require a great deal of time and thought, and often lots of effort before they become clear—but the time and effort put in to learning to trace is a very small price to pay in order to become better Bible readers and interpreters.

II. Linking Propositions: Following the logic of clauses in an argument.

Once an argument is divided into propositions, the next step is to link them together according to the logical flow of the argument. It must be remembered that although propositions are linked according to certain rules, it is not a completely objective exercise. Secondly, tracing is not the whole of exegesis. The student, therefore, must always beware of forcing a particular “logic” onto a proposition, and of thinking that once a text is traced, he or she “has it.”

Propositions are linked together by the ways they relate to one another. There are only two basic ways that propositions relate. A clause will be one of two types. It is extremely important to

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2 NB: Note that P1 does not “logically” fit the argument. Sometimes an argument contains an introductory comment that starts or introduces the argument but does not have a clear “logical” relationship to the rest. (e.g., the greetings in Paul’s letters—they are often difficult to trace because, as greetings, they introduce arguments and are not “part” of the augments. It is usually unnecessary to trace a greeting (Romans 1:1-7 is an exception).
understand how clauses work. Even though this may seem elementary, understanding the two types of clauses is fundamental to learning how to trace an argument.

The two types of clauses are:

1. Coordinate (independent)
2. Subordinate (dependent)

1. Coordinate propositions are independent clauses that are joined together by words like “and,” “but,” “or.” These clauses form compound sentences. Each clause is independent of the other. The way to tell if two or more clauses are coordinate, is to see if each can stand alone.

Examples

“This semester I am learning Tracing and I am learning Greek”
“This semester I am learning Tracing but I am not learning Hebrew”
“Next semester I will learn Greek or I will learn Hebrew”

*Each clause in the three examples is independent of the other clause in the sentence.

2. Subordinate propositions are clauses that relate together by one P making a statement (independent clause) and the other P supporting (dependent clause) it. These clauses may be joined together by a variety of words and logical relationships. Subordinate clauses form complex sentences. That is, a sentence in which an independent clause is supported by one or more other clause(s). The way to tell if a clause is subordinate is to see if it cannot stand alone. For instance: “Because I can trace” cannot stand alone – it depends on another clause.

Examples

“I am learning Tracing by taking this class”

*The second clause is subordinated to the first by the word “by.”
*It supports the first clause.

“I am learning Tracing because my teacher is making me do it.”

*The second clause is the reason, the support for the first.

“I will learn Tracing even if it kills me.”

* The second clause supports the first by giving a condition.

Note that clause order does not always determine which clause is dependent and which is independent.

Example: “If I learn tracing, I will be a better Bible reader.”

*Here the subordinate clause comes first. The independent clause, “I will be a better Bible reader is supported by the condition, “If I learn tracing.”

Once a student can divide an argument into propositions, and can recognize the difference between coordinate and subordinate clauses, he or she is ready to begin tracing the argument. Now it is time to learn the different kinds of coordinate and subordinate clauses. There are not that many, and anyone who can understand any language—including their own—already uses
these clauses in everyday speech. Learning to trace is really just learning to pay close attention to the way people, in our case the biblical authors, speak and write.

There are always some people who look at the tracing method and dismiss it because they think it is too mechanical, a waste of time, or just scholarly nonsense with which no “regular” person need bother. One may indeed arrive at these conclusions about tracing – but only after learning how to do it; otherwise, saying that tracing is nonsense is to make a nonsensical statement. It is like saying, “Spinach tastes horrible” without ever actually tasting spinach for yourself. Take the example from a story of two men discussing NT Greek: One man tells the other how much benefit he has gained from learning to read the NT in Greek. The other man begins making fun of “Greek scholars” and says, “Learning Greek is a waste of time, it won’t help you read the Bible any better than knowing English.” The first man, who had studied Greek and knew the benefits he gained by it, could hardly believe that someone would call Greek a waste of time. So after thinking about it for a second, he calmly responded by asking: “Did you arrive at that conclusion after learning Greek yourself?” The first man, of course, could not reply. The point is that until you have tried to learn and apply the principles of tracing, you do not yet know if it is a waste of time. The only way to know that, is to learn it. There are many people who believe that learning tracing transformed their Bible reading. If that result is even a possibility, isn’t it worth the time to find out for yourself? After all, shouldn’t we try everything we can in order to read and understand God’s word?
### Tracing Guide

**Part 2: Symbols and Definitions**

_by Brian Vickers_

This may look slightly mechanical, but remember it is merely a simple way to identify propositions. It is important to study this chart. The “Key Words” given in the fourth column are not exhaustive lists, but just some typical examples. There are other kinds of propositions not listed in this chart, but these are the basic propositions. While the symbols may be new, these are the kinds of statements you make and understand every day of your life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>SYMBOL</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
<th>KEY WORDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Series</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Each proposition makes a contribution to whole</td>
<td>and, moreover, furthermore, likewise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Each proposition is a further step toward a climax</td>
<td>then, and, moreover, furthermore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Each proposition expresses an opposite possibility arising from a situation</td>
<td>but, while, or, on the other hand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action-Manner</td>
<td>Ac - Mn</td>
<td>Statement of an action and statement which tells more explicitly what is involved in carrying out action</td>
<td>by, in that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Cf</td>
<td>Statement expressing an action and one making that action clearer by showing what it is like</td>
<td>as, just as, even as, as… so, so also, like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative-Positive</td>
<td>-/+</td>
<td>Two alternative statements, one of the statements is denied by the other statement</td>
<td>but, not… but, though, although</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea-Explanation</td>
<td>Id - Exp</td>
<td>Proposition stating a whole and one or more which sets forth the parts of the whole, or clarifies the meaning of the proposition</td>
<td>that is, for <strong>Often no specific key words</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question-Answer</td>
<td>Q - A</td>
<td>A question and the answer to the question</td>
<td>Question words: what, when, how</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Statement and the argument or basis/reason for which it stands (a ground clause always supports). Not the “main point”</td>
<td>because, for, since</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inference</td>
<td>∴</td>
<td>A statement that is preceded by its supporting statement (upside down ground clause). Unlike a ground clause, an inference can be a main point</td>
<td>therefore, thus, wherefore, consequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-Result</td>
<td>Ac - Res</td>
<td>An action and another action that comes automatically as a result</td>
<td>so that, that, with the result that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-Purpose</td>
<td>Ac - Pur</td>
<td>An action and another action that is intended as a result</td>
<td>in order that, that, lest, to the end that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional</td>
<td>If - Th</td>
<td>Like Action-Result, but the causing action is only possible or potential</td>
<td>if… then, if, except</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporal</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Proposition and the occasion when it will occur</td>
<td>when, whenever, after, before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locative</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>Relationship between the main proposition and the place where it can be true</td>
<td>where, wherever, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilateral</td>
<td>BL</td>
<td>A bilateral proposition supports two other propositions, one preceding and one following</td>
<td><em>See key words for Ground &amp; Inference</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support by Contrary Statement</td>
<td>Concessive</td>
<td>Csv</td>
<td>The relationship between a main clause and a contrary statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation-Response</td>
<td>Sit-R</td>
<td>A statement of response to a situation or action. Sit-R is most often found in narrative discourses.</td>
<td><strong>No specific key words</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linking Propositions – Examples

I. Coordinate Relationships between Propositions (Do Not Support)

1. Series:

Matthew 7:8

S - a. Everyone who asks receives
   b. and he who seeks finds
   c. and to him who knocks it will be opened

2. Progression:

Romans 8:30

P - a. Those whom he predestined he called
   b. and those he called also justified
   c. and those whom he justified he also glorified

*Note: It is often difficult to make a distinction between a series and a progression since “and” is often the connecting word in both. If the propositions are moving toward a climax, then it is a progression; if it is simply supplying more information it is a series.

3. Alternative:

Acts 28:24

A - a. Some were convinced
   b. while others disbelieved
II. Subordinate Relationships between Propositions (Supportive)

A. Support by Restatement

1. Action-Manner

*Romans 3:28*

- Ac  
  a. For we maintain that a man is justified

- Mn  
  b. by faith apart from the works of the Law

2. Comparison

*Ephesians 5:1*

- Cf  
  a. and walk in love

- Cf  
  b. just as Christ also loved you

3. Negative-Positive

*Ephesians 5:17*

- a. Do not be foolish

- +  
  b. but understand what the will of the Lord is

*Note: It is often difficult to distinguish between an Alternative and Negative-Positive. Ask yourself if one proposition is making a contrast with the other proposition, or if one proposition is denied, while the other is enforced (as in the example from Ephesians 5:17).

4. Idea-Explanation

*Genesis 27:36*

- Id  
  a. Jacob supplanted me these two times

- Exp  
  b. he took away my birthright

- S  
  c. and now he has taken away my blessing

*Note: Idea-Explanation is very often used to link larger sections of a discourse. You will not find it quite so often linking two propositions as in the example above. Identifying an Idea-Explanation will come with practice.

*Also: Notice that the Series in “b” and “c” was connected before being linked with “a”. The series in “b” and “c” is the explanation of the idea in “a”. It is very important to look for the small connections first, and then link up larger units.*
5. Question-Answer

Romans 4:3

Q  

a. What does the Scripture say?

A  S/P

b. Abraham believed God

c. and it was reckoned to him as righteousness

*Note: Again, the Series was connected before the Q-A. The whole series in “b” and “c” is the answer to the question in “a”.

B. Support by Distinct Statement

1. Ground

Matthew 5:4

a. Blessed are the poor in Spirit

G  b. for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven

*Note: The Ground clause comes after the proposition it supports. Proposition “b” gives the reason for “a”.

2. Inference

1 Peter 4:7

a. The end of all things is at hand

∴  b. therefore be sensible

c. and sober in prayer

*Note: An Inference is like an upside-down Ground clause. That is, the supporting proposition (“a” in the example) comes before the supported inference in “b” and “c”.

3. Action-Result

Matthew 8:24

Ac  
a. There arose a great storm in the sea

Res Ac

b. so that the boat was being swamped

Mn

c. by the waves

*Note: The Action-Manner in “b” and “c” is connected first. If “a” and “b” were connected first, then connected to “c”, then “by the waves” would be the “manner” by which not only the boat was swamped but also by which the storm arose – which is obviously impossible. Make sure to read all the propositions in a discourse before connecting them.
4. Action-Purpose

*Note: Action-Result and Action-Purpose may look very similar since the connecting words may often be very similar. The way to distinguish them is to remember that in an Action-Result the consequence or result accompanies the action, like a boat being swamped as a result of a storm. In an Action-Purpose once action is intended to come as a result of another action. Still, even with the distinction it can be difficult to tell the difference. It will come with practice.*

1 Peter 5:6

\[ \text{Ac} \quad \text{Pur} \]

a. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God
b. so that he may lift you up

5. Conditional

*Note: In a Conditional clause, the “if” part of the clause supports the “then” part of the clause. The “if” gives the condition for how the other statement is fulfilled.*

Galatians 5:18

\[ \text{If} \quad \text{Th} \]

a. If you are led by the Spirit
b. (then) you are not under the Law

6. Temporal

*Note: Bilaterals are more frequently found at the paragraph level, not with an individual verse. In this made up example proposition “b” functions as the ground for “a”. Proposition “c” is an inference drawn from “b”. Hence, proposition “b” functions as the support for both “a” and “c”.*

Matthew 6:16

\[ \text{T} \]

a. When you fast
b. do not look gloomy

7. Locative

Matthew 18:20

\[ \text{L} \]

a. Where two or three are gathered together in my name
b. there I am in their midst

8. Bilateral

\[ \text{a. May God be praised} \]

\[ \text{BL} \]

b. He is good
c. Praise him forever
B. Support by Contrary Statement

1. Concessive

*Hebrews 5:8*

\[
\text{Csv} \\
\text{a. Although he was a Son} \\
b. he learned obedience from what he suffered
\]

*Note: The Concessive clause supports the main clause because it highlights the strength of the main clause which stands despite the obstacle of the concessive clause.

2. Situation-Response

*Matthew 23:37*

\[
\text{Sit} \\
\text{Cf} \\
\text{R} \\
a. How often would I have gathered your children together \\
b. as a hen gathers her brood under her wings \\
c. and you would not
\]

*Note: Situation-Response appears mostly in narrative (like in the Gospels) and occasionally in the Epistles when a writer is recounting events.*
Summary Outline of Relationship Between Propositions

I. Coordinate Relationships
   1. Series (S)
   2. Progression (P)
   3. Alternative (A)

II. Subordinate Relationships
   A. Support by Restatement
      1. Action-Manner (Ac-Mn)
      2. Comparison (Cf)
      3. Negative-Positive (-/+)
      4. Idea-Explanation (Id/Exp)
      5. Question-Answer (Q/A)
   B. Support by Distinct Statement
      1. Ground (G)
      2. Inference (∴)
      3. Action-Result (Ac-Res)
      4. Action-Purpose (Ac-Pur)
      5. Conditional (If/Th)
      6. Temporal (T)
      7. Locative (L)
      8. Bilateral (BL)
   C. Support by Contrary Statement
      1. Concessive (Csv)
      2. Situation-Response (Sit-R)
Romans 2:6-11

6. a. Who (God) will render to every man according to his deeds:

   How to…

7. a. to those who by persevering in doing good
   b. seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;

8. a. but to those who are selfishly ambitious
   b. and do not obey the truth,
   c. but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

9. a. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil,
   b. of the Jew first and also of the Greek,

10. a. but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good,
    b. to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

11. a. For there is no partiality with God.