

The Ministry of Public Bible Reading

Reading God's word with
clarity, comprehension, conviction & confidence



Units 1 - 3



A training manual for public Bible reading
by Simon Camilleri

Unit 1: A Ministry, Not Just a Roster

Reflect: Fill in below what you think makes a good or bad Public Bible Reading?



What do you think is the effect of these two types of readings on a congregation?

What might be some of the causes that have led to a good or bad bible reading?

The purpose of this training material is to equip you in the Ministry of Public Bible Reading. You have just reflected on WHAT makes a good reading, but before we work through HOW to practically do it, we must first consider the WHY. Why is this ministry important? Why should you dedicate time and effort to grow in your ability to read the Bible publicly? Why does God’s word itself command us to “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture” (1 Timothy 4:13)?

The Biblical History of Public Bible Reading

The first record of the public reading of God’s word is found in *Exodus 24:4-7*, where Moses reads out the Book of the Covenant. This was part of the establishment of God’s special relationship with his Chosen people. Not long before his death, Moses instructed that every seven years, the priests should assemble all the people of Israel and read them the “Law” - the record of all of God’s promises, commands and great works of salvation.



Read Deuteronomy 31:9-13

- What is the stated purpose of this ongoing practice of publicly reading God’s word?

Directly after this, the Lord commissioned Joshua to take over from Moses and lead the people into the Promised Land. In *Joshua 8:34-35* we see that he carried on the tradition of Public Bible Reading as well. Sadly though, over the next several generations, this ongoing practice commanded by Moses, was neglected and eventually forgotten altogether. In fact, we do not have any record of God's word being read to God's people for hundreds of years, until the reign of King Josiah.



2 Kings 22:1-23:3 tells of how King Josiah's servants accidentally stumble upon the Book of the Law while completing an errand for the king in the temple. The royal secretary reads the book to the king, and after hearing the Law read for the first time, King Josiah is devastated. He tears his clothes in grief and repentance, as he learns all the ways that he and previous kings had been disobeying God (*2 Kings 22:11-13*).

Following this, the King gathered together *"all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the Lord."* (*2 Kings 23:2*) This was the first recorded Public Bible Reading in over 800 years and it re-established and reminded the people of their covenant with God.

Tragically, all the kings that followed Josiah rejected the covenant and neglected the reading of Scripture, returning once again to the idol worship that God's Law had strictly forbidden. This ultimately resulted in God judging Israel by allowing the Babylonians to destroy the temple and take the people into exile in Babylon.

After 70 years, God freed his people from exile and let them return to Israel and rebuild the temple. It is then, in *Nehemiah 8:1-9*, that we find our next recorded occasion of Public Bible Reading. All the people gather together and Ezra the priest spends several hours reading the Book of the Law to a generation who had never heard it before. With a repentant response similar to the King Josiah, we read that *"all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law."* (*Nehemiah 8:9*)

- *From all that we have seen throughout the Old Testament, why is it important that God's people regularly hear God's Word? What are the dangers to us as a community of faith if we neglect the practise of Public Bible Reading?*

From this point on we don't know how the practise of Public Bible Reading continued, but by the first century it was definitely a staple part of Jewish life. Each week, as God's people gathered in their synagogues, the Old Testament Scriptures were read publicly. Jesus himself participating in this practise in *Luke 4:16-20*. As the various books of the New Testament Scriptures were written, the expectation and instruction was that they were to be read out loud to the congregations they were being sent to (*Colossians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:27 & Revelation 1:3*).

And so finally, we come to the instruction given by the apostle Paul in *1 Timothy 4:13*. We see that the ongoing practise of Public Bible Reading is not simply an Old Testament tradition that we are supposed to maintain. It is a vital ministry of the church that New Testament Christians should but be devoted to, as much as preaching or teaching.

Read 1 Timothy 4:1-13 and consider the issues they were facing that lead up to Paul's instruction in v13.

- *Why must we be devoted to the public reading of Scripture?*

The Vital Ministry of Public Bible Reading

All this leads us to see that if you serve as a Public Bible Reading - either as part of your Sunday church service or in some other capacity - you are involved in much more than simply a roster. This is a vital ministry that the Body of Christ can not do without. It is a ministry that we need to maintain, value, take seriously and invest in with each generation. And as we have seen in Biblical history, the community of faith suffers and is easily led astray when the ministry of Public Bible Reading is neglected.

God's people need God's word. As Paul writes in his second letter to Timothy, the Bible is "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:15-17)

Hopefully every aspect of your Sunday service is shaped by the Bible - whether it be the sermon, the songs, the supper or the Sunday School. However, Public Bible Reading is a unique ministry in the church. More than any other element of the service, it directly communicates the very word of God to God's people. As Scottish preacher W. E. Sangster wrote: "*Bible reading offers the widest scope for the enrichment of public worship and it is a great pity that the Scriptures are often so badly read... When the Book is well read and made to live for the people, it can do for them what sermons often fail to do: It can be the very voice of God to their souls.*"

Although most people in your congregation probably have at least one Bible at home, many of them will arrive on Sunday without having read it themselves. Some may not have heard God speaking to them through His word since they heard it publicly read a week earlier. Your public reading of Scripture on a Sunday is at the very least, one consistent time in the week when they will be fed by God's word. Never let yourself think that Public Bible Reading is simply a roster. It is a ministry. You should see it as an honour and a holy responsibility to be serving in this way.



The goal of this training resource is to equip you to publicly read the Bible with clarity, comprehension, conviction and confidence. But remember the reason why we are investing the time and effort to be equipped. It's got nothing to do with trying to sound impressive or more polished and professional. It's got everything to do with how important this ministry is to the life and health of the Body of Christ.

- *What might it look like when a church (or an individual) relates to Public Bible Reading as simply a roster to be filled, instead of a vital ministry?*
- *What practical things can both you and the leaders at your church do to treat the ministry of Public Bible Reading with the importance it deserves.*

NOTE: See Appendix 1: "Notes for Church Leaders" (pg ?), for suggestions of how the leadership can better value and support those on the Public Bible Reading Ministry Team.

Before We Begin...

The next series of units will be very practical and so before we begin, here are three things I advise you to do:

1. Choose a passage of Scripture.

This will be a passage that you will work on as you go through this training manual. Naturally, if you are preparing a passage for an upcoming service or event, then use that. If you need a passage, I have provided a few you can choose from at the back of this manual under Appendix 2.

3. Put your passage into a document.

Find your passage on a website such as www.BibleGateway.com, choosing the appropriate translation that you need. Remove all verse numbers and headings, and then copy and paste the text into a digital document and number the pages. At the end of Unit 1, you will find further instructions about how to format your text in this document to make it easy to read.



I encourage you to print out this document to use when doing your public Bible reading. I have explained my reasoning for this in the Q&A section on page 20.

3. Always read out loud.

As you prepare your reading you will read through your passage many, many times. Every time you do, unless it is practically impossible, make sure you read it out loud.

Interestingly, the practice of reading silently or “in your head” seems to have only become commonplace over the last three centuries. In Biblical times, text was written down with the expectation that it would be read out loud. Consider the eunuch in Acts 8:26-30, who was reading Scripture with no particular audience, and yet was reading out loud so that Phillip could hear which prophet he was reading from.

Repeatedly reading your passage out loud will benefit your preparation in five ways:

1. As you read out loud you will also hear the text. Over time, as you listen as well as read, the sound of the words will stick in your memory and you will grow a deep familiarity and comfortability with the passage.
2. As you listen to yourself read, you will become more familiar with your own voice. This will help you identify things about the way you read that you need to be aware of or may need to change.
3. When you read silently you don't notice words, names, locations and verses that are difficult to pronounce. Reading out loud helps you identify these words and practise them before your public reading.
4. Some ideas simply make more sense when read out loud. If your passage contains complex concepts, reading out loud will help you to comprehend the meaning of the text and naturally know which words to emphasise.
5. The most obvious reason to read out loud while preparing your reading, is because that's what you'll actually be doing on the day! So whenever you can, not only read out loud, but read it to someone as well.

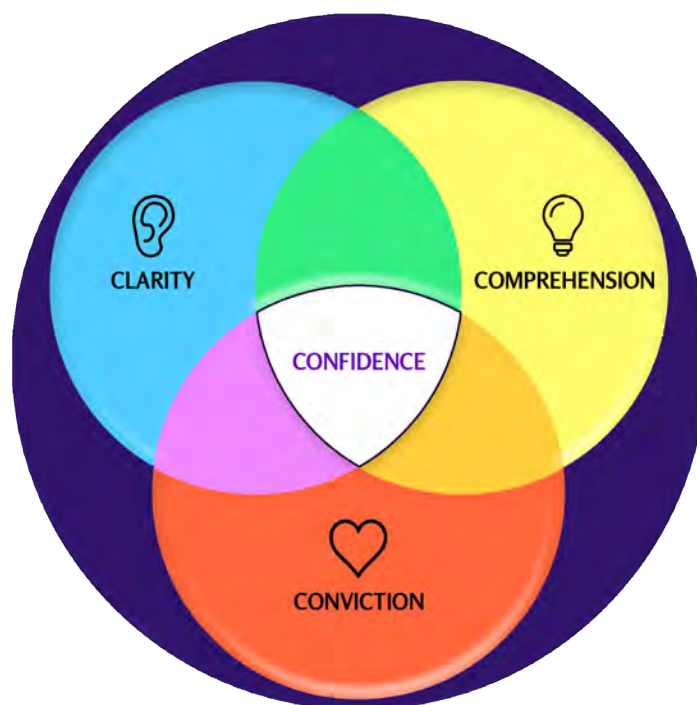
Unit 2: The Four Principles of Public Bible Reading

Now that we have established that public Bible reading is indeed a ministry, not just a roster, we will now explore the four key principles of this ministry.

In summary, public Bible reading is...

- A PRACTICAL ministry - to read with **CLARITY**.
- A PASTORAL ministry - to read with **COMPREHENSION**.
- A PERSONAL ministry - to read with **CONVICTION**.
- A PRAYERFUL ministry - to read with **CONFIDENCE**.

These four principles are expressed in the following diagram:



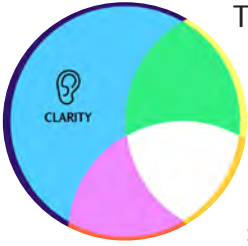
The goal of this manual is to help you grow in each of these principles and move towards the middle of the diagram - reading the Bible with clarity, comprehension and conviction. As you get closer to the centre, the aim is also that you will grow in reading with confidence. Not simply confidence in yourself and your ability to read the Bible publicly, but more importantly, confidence in God - that He will use His word to speak through you to His people.

The reason why these principles are presented as a venn diagram, is because the journey of growing as a public Bible reader is not a linear one. You most likely have strengths in one or more of these principles and find others more challenging. You can use this diagram to reflect on where you are as a public Bible reader and what areas you need to work on. You might currently place yourself in only one of the circles or in a portion where two of them overlap.

We will unpack each of these key principles in detail over the next four units, but at this stage, where do you think you currently are in your journey of public Bible reading? Draw a dot to reflect this on the diagram above.

Use the space around the diagram to write what you think are your strengths and weaknesses in more detail.

Unit 3: A Practical Ministry - To Read With Clarity



This principle is first for a reason. As public Bible readers, before anything else, we have a simple, practical job to do - we must read the passage we have been assigned in such a way that the congregation can hear and follow the words that we are saying. Whether they understand it intellectually or whether they are moved by it emotionally, are secondary concerns. If they don't actually clearly hear your words, then nothing else matters. You might as well be saying, "blah blah blah" or speaking a foreign language.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:7-11.

(Note: Paul here is writing about the issue of speaking in tongues without an interpreter, but the principles he uses are still relevant for us and can be applied to clarity in Bible reading as well.)

- List the problems that occur when our communication is unclear? What are the benefits of speaking clearly?

A clear instrument

Paul uses the analogy of a musical instrument to get us to think about the importance of speaking clearly. Think now about the musicians who play an instrument at your church each week (if your church has musicians). We all love a musician that plays with deep emotion and genuine passion, but if their instrument is out of tune it can ruin the whole experience. A committed member of the music ministry team spends time making sure their instrument is well prepared for playing on Sunday. They take care of their instrument, they clean it, they make sure it is in tune, they have their sheet music in a spot that is easy to read and most importantly, they practise.

For those involved in the ministry of public Bible reading our voice is our instrument. We should be inspired by the musicians at our church and spend the time preparing our instrument for reading the Bible with clarity.



To read with clarity, you need to be aware of the following four aspects of your voice:

SPEED

Reading too fast is probably the most common problem that Bible readers fall into. The text itself (especially when read from a "book" bible or a Bible app) gives no indication as to how fast to read and so when readers are nervous they can easily race through the passage without realising.

Firstly, many of us need to just slow down. It is of course possible to read too slow, but that problem is less common. The goal is to read at a measured and deliberate pace, giving the congregation time to clearly hear and process the words that we are saying.

Secondly, an excellent reader will not simply read slowly. They vary their speed as appropriate to communicate meaning and importance. Every line must be clear, but you can slightly increase the pace as you read through lists or less significant information, and then slow down when you come to a statement that you want your hearers to particularly pay attention to. Consider how you might do this for a passage like *Philippians 3:4-7*.

VOLUME

Although many churches use microphones, that doesn't mean you don't have to think about the volume of your voice. You should ask those who are serving on the tech team (if you have them) to make sure you are using the microphone effectively. For example, if you're standing too far away from the microphone on the lectern or if the microphone is not pointing towards your mouth, it can be difficult or even impossible to pick up your voice clearly.



If you have a naturally soft voice, that should not prevent you from speaking with the appropriate volume needed for public Bible reading. An increased volume is not about yelling or straining your vocal chords. It is achieved by taking deep breaths throughout your reading and using that breath to project your voice to the entire congregation. Speaking with an appropriately volumed voice will command attention and signal to those listening that you are speaking about something important and interesting. This may feel slightly unnatural at first, but it may not come across that way, especially for those people listening at the back.

Even if you feel you have a strong natural voice, you should make sure you take moments to breath throughout your reading. This is especially relevant as your reading comes to a close. Sometimes a reader can have used up the strength of their breath early on and peter out as they finish the passage so that their volume drops significantly. It is important that you finish in a strong, clear and decisive way.

Finally, as with the speed of your voice, you can also vary your volume as required. Sometimes Scripture will even give you blatant instruction for where using a particularly loud voice might be appropriate to faithfully represent the scene being described. *Consider these example: Judges 7:20, Luke 8:28, Mark 15:34 & Acts 2:14.*

ARTICULATION

Articulation is about speaking in such a way that the sound of each word is clear and distinct. It's opposite is mumbling or speaking in such a way that words blur together. This results in your speech being difficult to follow or understand. Like with everything, a reader can over articulate every single letter so that you sound ridiculous, but generally the encouragement is to articulate your words slightly more than you think you need to, especially when reading before a large congregation. It may feel unnatural to you at first, but for your hearers it will be clear and easy to understand.

Good articulation also allows you to enjoy the sound of words and phrases. That may seem like an odd thing to care about, but Scripture is filled with vivid poetry and rich language. Some translations capture this better than others, but there are lines of Scripture that are beautifully written and can be wonderful to say and hear.

Consider a verse like *“The day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand—a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness.”* (Joel 2:1-2). The imagery and weight of words like “gloom” and “blackness” are conveyed with particular power when spoken with clear articulation.

The point isn't to cartoonishly over-exaggerate your reading. Just open your mouth a little bit more than you are used to and put effort into moving your lips and tongue to read the words with clear articulation.



PRONUNCIATION

Pronunciation is not just about saying words clearly, but also saying them correctly. Scripture contains concepts and words that you may not commonly find elsewhere (like “atonement” or “righteousness”). It also refers to places and people that come from cultures that existed thousands of years ago, in a part of the world that may be quite different from your own. Because of this you will come across names that seem strange and difficult to say (like “Caesarea Philippi” or the longest word in the Bible, “Mahershalalhashbaz.”). Finally, as the Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek and Jesus spoke Aramaic, you will even come across verses where the original language is used (like when Jesus says “Ephphatha” or “Eloi Eloi Lama Sabachthani”).

Preparation is the key to addressing words that are difficult to pronounce. As we have already said, if you are practicing your reading out loud you will come across these words before you get up to read and you will have time to address them. Nothing reveals a Bible reader’s lack of preparedness more than them constantly stumbling over the pronunciation of words they clearly are encountering for the first time.

Four things to do when you don’t know the correct pronunciation of a word:

1. Ask the preacher.

If you are reading the Bible before a sermon based on that passage, ask the preacher how they will be pronouncing that word. At least you will then have consistency between the reading and the sermon.

2. Look it up online.

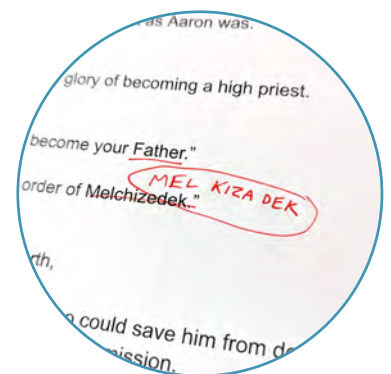
A website like www.biblegateway.com or even YouTube will have audiobook recordings of the passage which will give you an indication as to the pronunciation of the tricky word in your reading. Be aware though, some pronunciations are region-specific. For example, in Australia and England names like “Habakkuk” and “Isaiah” are often pronounced differently to how they are in the United States. So if possible, find an audiobook that comes from your region.

3. Pick one and move on.

When all else fails, give it your best shot. Choose a pronunciation that seems correct and most importantly, say it that way confidently and consistently throughout the reading. Remember, we don’t actually have any recordings of how these words were originally pronounced, so as long as people know which word you are referring to in the text and you are saying it in the same way the preacher does, it’s not actually that important. What is important, is that these tricky words don’t become a distraction for the congregation. This is why stumbling over these words is such a problem. It breaks up the flow of the passage and draws everyone’s attention to the sound of a word which may not be important to the meaning of the passage. So don’t let it be a distraction to you or to your congregation. In your preparation, just settle on a pronunciation, and then during your reading, say it that way and move on.

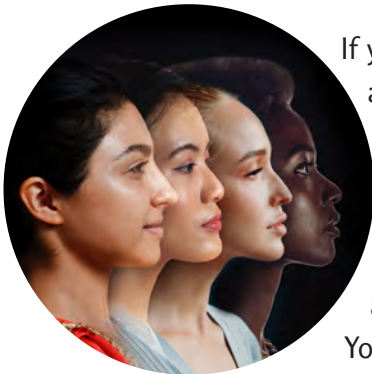
4. Write phonetic notes.

Once you have decided how best to pronounce a word, write notes for yourself on the print out of your passage. You can even re-write the word phonetically so that you use the correct pronunciation. This is helpful so you don’t have to try to remember the correct pronunciation when you get up to read. Remember, no one will be able to see the sheet of paper where, for example, you have written “Mel-kiza-dek” instead of “Melchizedek”. All they will hear is your correct pronunciation.



A note on accents

It is a wonderful thing to have a church full of people from a variety of nations and languages. It reflects the beautiful diversity displayed in God's Kingdom (*Revelation 7:9*). But it can create some challenges when it comes to pronunciation and clarity.



If you are from a culture that is a minority in your congregation or if you are simply aware that you have a strong accent (even if it is of the region that your church is based in), then you should consider that your pronunciation of words may make your Bible reading unclear for people who are not used to that accent.

This is actually a difficult thing to be aware of, just by listening to yourself, as we are always comfortable with our own voice and naturally we can understand ourselves. You may not even be aware that you have an accent that could be unclear to others.

Mentioning someone's accent can be a sensitive topic, so don't expect others to raise this issue with you if they can not fully understand you. Christians generally want to be welcoming and accommodating and so out of politeness, they will not bring it up. You need to actively give people permission to do so.

If you think this may be relevant to you, ask someone directly about your public Bible reading. Tell them that you want their frank, honest feedback about your accent, your pronunciation and how it affects your clarity. Remember, your goal is to serve the congregation by reading God's word so that people can hear it clearly. So encourage them to hold nothing back and thank them for their response.

As you become aware of problems, there may be things you can do to adapt the way you say certain words to make it easier for the congregation to understand you. Sometimes though, you can't do much about your accent. In that case, it is still good to be aware of it. Consider how you might at least improve your articulation and make sure you don't read too fast. If there are particularly problematic words, underline them in your reading and do your best to read them clearly and with appropriate expression, so their meaning is not lost. We will cover more about how to communicate meaning through your reading over the next two units.

Summary of Unit 3

Fill in the gaps. Answers at the bottom of the page.

- A. Public Bible reading is a P _____ ministry.
- B. The goal is to read with C _____.
- C. Reading with clarity is important so that the congregation can H ___ the words that we are saying.
- D. To read with clarity we must be aware of four aspects of our voice:
 - 1. S _____
 - 2. V _____
 - 3. A _____
 - 4. P _____

Answers: A = PRACTICAL, B = CLARITY, C = HEAR, D 1 = HEAR, D 2 = SPEED, 2 = VOLUME, 3 = ARTICULATION, 4 = PRONUNCIATION

Unit 3: Clarity Exercises

Exercise #1: Knowing your voice

Find or create a recording of yourself reading the Bible. You could use your phone to record yourself reading the passage you will be working on. If your church records their services for livestreaming, you could also find a week that you read the Bible and watch that.



Take note of how you speak, particularly focusing on the principle of CLARITY. Assess the four aspects of your voice and write notes in the boxes below. Include both things you do well and areas that you need to work on. If there is a particular problem in one aspect, be honest about how it effects the clarity of your reading. Try thinking of practical steps you can take to continue improving in each area.

If you working on this with other people, get into groups of two or three and take turns reading your passages to each other and giving constructive feedback.

SPEED

VOLUME

ARTICULATION

PRONUNCIATION

Exercise #2: Preparing your voice

As a public Bible reader, your voice is your instrument and that involves several parts of your body. Here are three helpful hints to make sure your instrument is “in tune” and ready to go.

- **Drink lots of water.** Avoid very cold or hot drinks. Room temperature or slightly warm water is best. Your vocal cords work best when they are well lubricated, but drinking doesn’t wet them directly (thank goodness, otherwise you’d choke!). They stay lubricated by your body being well hydrated.
- **Warm-up your instrument.** Your tongue, lips and face are just as important as your vocal cords when it comes to speaking with clear articulation and expression. So find a moment in private (maybe even just on the drive to church) to give your face a rigorous massage and do some vocal exercises. “Scrunch and Stretch” is a fun exercise involving scrunching up your face as tight as you can and then opening up your eyes and mouth as wide as you can stretch them. Do this multiple times and it will loosen up your facial muscles. You can also use the phrase as a tongue-twister. Try repeating “scrunch and stretch” ten times with over-exaggerated facial movements. You might feel a bit silly, but it’s a great warm-up!
- **Breath.** As you are warming-up, take big breaths to expand your lung capacity. To calm your nerves, pause and take a deep breath just before you speak. Lastly, remember to breath deeply throughout your reading to give you the volume you need. Speech is breath! You can’t read at all, let alone read well, without it.

Exercise #3: Knowing your passage

The best way to ensure you will read your passage with clarity is simply to read it and read it and read it. The more times you read and hear yourself read your passage, the more familiar you will be with it. The sound of the words and the rhythm of the phrases will become like an old friend, and when you get up to public read them they will roll off your tongue with ease.

So right now, read your passage out loud at least three times. Make note of any words or phrases that you stumble over or you find difficult to say comfortably. If you have days or even weeks to prepare, make sure you read it multiple times as part of your preparation, and as always, read out loud unless it is impossible to do so.

A particularly helpful practise (especially if you are working on a very large passage) is to listen to a recording of your reading over and over. I describe this as “marinating” in the word, as you let it soak in over several days. This is not for studying the text in detail, but it will help you become very comfortable and familiar with your passage.

Exercise #4: Preparing your passage

The written text that you will read from is something that only you will see, and so it should be formatted in such a way that is best suited for your public Bible reading. The way the words look on the page should reflect the flow and the structure of the passage, showing breaks in the spots you naturally want to pause. The text should also be easy to read and follow without having to look up close. Basically, if you want your spoken words to be clear, then the written words have to be clear as well.

Here is a step by step method to break up and format a passage of Scripture in preparation for public reading.

STEP ONE:

Find your passage on a Bible website such as www.biblegateway.com. Remove the chapter and verse numbers as well as the headings in the website settings. Then select the text and copy and paste it into a document. Remove all the formatting, so that it is just a raw slab of text. At this stage it will look like this (I am using Genesis 1:1-5 as an example):

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

Note: For this example, the font is small. In your document, I recommend using a large font (at least 12 or 13).

STEP TWO:

Read through the text and press Enter at the beginning of every new sentence so it starts on a new line.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.
God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.
God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.”
And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

STEP THREE:

If there are long sentences that do not fit on one line, break them up in a natural spot. If it is helpful, you can then align the second half of the line to the right of the page so that your eye flows from the beginning of the line to the end.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep,
and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

God saw that the light was good,
and he separated the light from the darkness.

God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.”

And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

You can even break up shorter sentences into parts and put each part on a separate line. This can help you see the distinct thoughts and communicate them clearly. You can see that I did that above with the line, “God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.”

STEP FOUR:

Further break up the thoughts and add lines between them to group them and make each point visually stand out.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep,
and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

God saw that the light was good,
and he separated the light from the darkness.

God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.”

And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

STEP FIVE:

Finally, add whatever other cues and notes that might be helpful to your reading. Here are some suggestions:

- Underline, italicize or capitalise key words to remind you to emphasise them.
- Bold words or phrases that are re-occurring or have some important relationship to each other.
- Add an ellipsis or even write (pause) in spots that you feel it would be helpful.
- If you come across words or names that are difficult to pronounce, you could re-write them phonetically.
- Over the next two units, you will learn about how to read with both comprehension and conviction. You can always add further notes on the document as a guide to remind yourself how you want to read each part.

Think again of the musicians at your church. When you hear them play, you just hear their instrument. Unbeknown to the congregation, the musician may be reading off of sheet music with a whole range of complex symbols, formatting and notes to guide them. There are indications where to pause, how fast to play and which parts to play soft or loud. Your printed reading doesn't have to be that complex. The point is that you should feel free to format your passage in a way that is most useful to you and to your reading.

To remind you, here is what the passage looked like when you first put it into the document:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

And here it is with completed formatting (with a few little extra elements as mentioned in the suggestions from step five).

In the beginning... **God** created the heavens and the earth.

Now the earth was formless and empty... darkness was over the surface of the deep,
and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said... “LET THERE BE LIGHT!”

and... there was light.

God saw that the light was **good**,
and he *separated* the light from the darkness.

God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “*night*.”

And there was evening... and there was morning... the first day.

Hopefully you can see how the text in the second box would help a reader produce a much clearer and more expressive reading than the first box.

Naturally, your formatting may look quite different to the one shown above. The goal of this exercise is not to give you strict rules about how you must format your text for public reading. Quite the opposite. The printout is your personal instrument’s “sheet music”. It should represent your style and voice, and most importantly, the particular passage of Scripture you are preparing. The goal of this exercise is simply to help you see the potential of how you can format a page of text to help you read with greater clarity, comprehension and conviction.



Now, you try it!

If you haven’t already, put the passage you are working on into a document. Then go through the five steps in this exercise to format it in such a way that makes it clearer to read and follow, both for yourself and for others.

Once you have finished formatting the passage, practise reading it out loud several times and see how it helps. Continue refining the formatting as necessary. Also, read it out loud to someone and ask them for feedback.