

## Developing Standards and Specifications for Bible Study Materials

In recent years, the American Bible Society has done extensive research to examine the concerns of three communities which interact with the biblical text—global, denominational, and learning. This research explored how materials can be developed to facilitate Bible study, how new technologies can support additional ways to access and interact with biblical texts, and how we, as humans, process information, learn, and remember. The result of this research will help the American Bible Society and other groups structure the way they produce, market, and evaluate Bible study helps.

At the “Learning in the Age of New Media: Text, Sound, and Image” conference (September 2000), all participants received a set of standards and specifications which incorporated findings from this and other conferences. Thirty-five participants reviewed the standards document and provided feedback. All comments were carefully reviewed and incorporated into a revised document, the result of which is the following list of standards and specifications.

These standards and specifications include concerns for audience, content, quality of the materials, areas for use, learning theory, educational processes and strategies, and tutorial helps. Each standard represents a goal. The specifications of each standard indicate how that standard might be met in actual production. Some specifications may appear under two or more standards in order to prompt the developer of the Bible study material to mold that specification uniquely to that standard.

The following standards and specifications represent the current development of such an endeavor.

### **Standard 1 Bible study materials that are faithful to the mission statement of the American Bible Society**

*The mission of the American Bible Society is to make the Bible available to every person in a language and form each can understand and afford, so that all people may experience its life-changing message.*

#### **Specifications: Bible study materials that...**

- 1.1 are presented in a variety of present and future formats
- 1.2 can be used in a variety of settings ranging from individual study to study within small and large groups in faith communities
- 1.3 are affordable in order to assure the widest distribution
- 1.4 are developed for different age groups to meet developmental needs

### **Standard 2 Bible study materials that are based on current biblical scholarship and research**

#### **Specifications: Bible study materials that...**

- 2.1 provide Bible stories, information, resources, and activities that are descriptive in nature
- 2.2 can be used by other publishers and Bible societies

- 2.3 promote usage by a wide variety of faith communities, including denominations
- 2.4 will enable Christian faith communities to dialogue on points of departure and foster a global conversation
- 2.5 promote usage by an individual who has no faith community and/or who wishes to engage in private Bible study

**Standard 3 Bible study materials that present diversity regarding race, gender, and age**

**Specifications: Bible study materials that...**

- 3.1 provide visuals and text that are inclusive of diverse groups based on race, gender, and age
- 3.2 provide visuals and text that provide a balance of ethnic groups, male/female, young/old, and able-bodied/physically challenged persons
- 3.3 promote good interpersonal relationships, understanding among diverse groups, and appreciation for differences

**Standard 4 Bible study materials that build a community of learners through social interaction**

**Specifications: Bible study materials that...**

- 4.1 provide resources that link a variety of faith communities
- 4.2 recognize that learning has a “social context”
- 4.3 provide a variety of resources and strategies that require learners to be interactive with technology resources, peers, household members, neighborhood resources, intergenerational resources, small groups, and faith communities
- 4.4 can be used in the home, Sunday/Sabbath school, summer church school, shelters, community centers, juvenile detention centers, foster care facilities, academic settings, and other diverse places
- 4.5 require individuals and groups to dialogue, and to share responses and information with each other
- 4.6 help learners evaluate their own viewpoints in light of response from others

**Standard 5 Bible study materials that challenge learners while insuring success and achievement of their goals**

**Specifications: Bible study materials that...**

- 5.1 require learners to process and respond to content

- 5.2 provide a format that allows learners to set goals and ask questions
- 5.3 present tasks that learners can accomplish either individually, with peers, in small groups, or other support communities
- 5.4 have built-in feedback and tutorial helps
- 5.5 provide guidance in moving from one level of inquiry and learning to another
- 5.6 incorporate a variety of ways for learners to enter the activity and understand the content
- 5.7 link to websites for additional support

**Standard 6 Bible study materials that meet the cognitive developmental level of the learners**

**Specifications: Bible study materials that...**

- 6.1 are based on research that identifies appropriate strategies and activities for different learning levels
- 6.2 use appropriate vocabulary and concepts for the developmental level
- 6.3 are sensitive to the complexity of the tasks required of the learners
- 6.4 give directions in a clear, sequential format
- 6.5 provide a range of learning options to enable learners to choose an appropriate level of complexity

**Standard 7 Bible study materials that address the multiple ways learners engage texts, activities, and strategies**

**Specifications: Bible study materials that...**

- 7.1 provide linguistic activities (reading and writing)
- 7.2 provide logical/mathematical activities (graphs, matrix building, sequencing, ordering, and creating timelines)
- 7.3 provide musical activities (music to set mood, to signal a switch in activities, to learn content or carry a message, and to create musical scores to match biblical texts)
- 7.4 provide opportunities for bodily/kinesthetic (activities away from the computer, etc. which may include drama, discussions, role play, games, and group meetings)
- 7.5 provide special activities (map reading, creating and using graphic organizers, drawing, artistic expression, and use of symbols)
- 7.6 provide activities connected to the natural world (plants, animals, seasons, and resources)

- 7.7 provide opportunities for both intrapersonal processes (alone) and interpersonal processes (with others)
- 7.8 move learners from receiving information to sharing and discussing information to meditating on the information and then acting on the information
- 7.9 require reflection such as response journals, quiet meditation, and prayers

**Standard 8 Bible study materials and technology tools that provide opportunities for learners to construct their own knowledge in response to the biblical text**

**Specifications: Bible study materials that...**

- 8.1 recognize that learning happens within the context of the community where a learner encounters information
- 8.2 provide experiences and activities that require learners to explore, inquire, and investigate in order to make meaning
- 8.3 provide strategies and activities that require engagement through problem solving, questioning, information gathering, inquiry, and reflective thinking that results in cognitive dissonance and resolution and that leads to personal knowledge of new information
- 8.4 provide forums for posing questions and finding answers
- 8.5 recognize that knowledge is emergent and not static
- 8.6 provide opportunities for open-ended inquiry and questioning:
  - ask questions which require inference, analysis, summarizing, and evaluation
  - avoid “fill in the blank” exercises
- 8.7 incorporate strategies and activities for interaction with peers, adults, households, community groups, study partners, church schools, technology resources, and other communities of interpreters
- 8.8 provide a balance between attending to information and processing information
- 8.9 provide tools for thinking reflectively about, processing, and articulating what has been learned
- 8.10 allow and promote a variety of ways for learners to represent their understanding of concepts, information, and stories
- 8.11 provide prompts, questions, and activities that connect with what learners already know

- 8.12 acknowledge that learners construct knowledge at different levels of understanding based on their personal experience
- 8.13 allow learners to respond from multiple perspectives based on personal experience, culture, and faith communities
- 8.14 incorporate strategies and activities that allow time for thinking about making sense of the information

**Standard 9 Bible study materials that foster experiences and strategies that help learners grasp and remember information**

**Specifications: Bible study materials that...**

- 9.1 include clear depiction of emotions in visuals and provide opportunities for responses
- 9.2 elicit an emotional response from learners
- 9.3 include music, activities, visuals, scenarios, and strategies that invite learners to engage the content
- 9.4 provide time and structure for rehearsal and repetition of activities and concepts
- 9.5 provide visual clues and cues that indicate geographic location
- 9.6 require developmentally appropriate reshaping and reorganizing of information through analysis, synthesis, evaluation, metaphor, visuals, music, symbols, comparing and contrasting with others
- 9.7 link to multiple interpretations to engage learners in critically reflecting on how personal interpretation may also be “universal”

**Standard 10 Bible study materials that provide strategies for critical thinking in the meaning-making process**

**Specifications: Bible study materials that...**

- 10.1 provide structures within the materials for moving implicit knowledge to explicit knowledge
- 10.2 provide opportunities for using critical thinking skills in the appropriate contexts
- 10.3 provide materials that engage learners in critical thinking cognitive skills and sub-skills:
  - Interpretation  
*Categorization*  
*Decoding sentences*  
*Clarifying meaning*
  - Analysis  
*Examining ideas*

*Identifying arguments*  
*Analyzing arguments*

- Evaluation  
*Assessing claims*  
*Assessing arguments*
- Inference  
*Querying evidence*  
*Conjecturing alternatives*  
*Drawing conclusions*
- Explanation  
*Stating results*  
*Justifying procedures*  
*Presenting arguments*
- Self-Regulation  
*Self-examination*  
*Self-correction* (Peter Facione, 2000)

## **Standard 11 Bible study materials that build a disposition towards critical thinking**

### **Specifications: Bible study materials that...**

- 11.1 promote the use of critical thinking skills that enable learners to develop “habits of mind” and a disposition to think about texts, concepts, ideas, and information. This disposition can be understood in terms of seven habits of mind:
- *Truth-seeking*—courageously desiring the best knowledge in any context, even if such knowledge fails to support or may undermine one’s preconceptions, beliefs, or self-interests
  - *Open-mindedness*—tolerating divergent views and self-monitoring for possible bias
  - *Analyticity*—demanding the application of reason and evidence, alert to problematic situations, inclined to anticipate consequences
  - *Systematicity*—valuing organization, focus, and diligence to approach problems at all levels of complexity
  - *Critical thinking/self-confidence*—trusting of one’s own reasoning skills and seeing oneself as a good thinker
  - *Inquisitiveness*—being curious and eager to acquire knowledge and learn explanations even when the applications of that information are not immediately apparent
  - *Cognitive maturity*—(i) prudence in making, suspending, or revising judgment; (ii) an awareness that multiple solutions can

be acceptable; and (iii) an appreciation of the need to reach closure even in the absence of complete knowledge. (Peter Facione, 2000)

11.2 include three elements which should be present in each disposition:

- *Ability*—the capabilities and skills required to follow through on the behavior

Example: Systematicity—teach the skill(s) needed to perform the task. Activities may include teaching the construction of a chart, how to answer a question well, how to develop a graphic organizer, or how to write a journal entry

- *Sensitivity*—alertness to appropriate occasions for exhibiting the behavior

Example: Find ways to help learners be alert to thinking opportunities that require a systematic approach. When is employment of the strategy appropriate? Instructor can model, provide simulations, provide a think-aloud demonstration to a systematic process, or note other situations which call for systematicity.

- *Inclination*—the tendency to behave in a certain way

Example: After learning the skill and being sensitive to when its use might be employed, the next step is actually to use it. (Shari Tishman, Eileen Jay, and David N. Perkins, “Teaching Thinking Dispositions: From Transmission to Enculturation,” *Theory into Practice* 32 [1993]: 147-153)

## **Standard 12 Technology tools that provide for and support active learning**

### **Specifications: Employ technology tools that...**

- 12.1 design and provide rich resources for learner exploration, e.g., vivid stories with text and graphics, developmentally appropriate backup resources such as dictionaries and maps, interactive timelines, figures to manipulate, games that teach content, journals with prompts, and resources for parents and teachers to use in direct instruction
- 12.2 encourage the use of technologies as tools to learn with and not from
- 12.3 provide activities that require active manipulation of objects and use of current technology tools
- 12.4 provide prompts for reflection on what has been learned

- 12.5 provide helps and tutorials to enable learners to solve problems and puzzles which they encounter
- 12.6 design lesson structures which require learners to interact throughout the lesson
- 12.7 require learners to articulate goals, describe what they are doing, analyze the decisions they are making, and identify the strategies they are using
- 12.8 provide techniques or methods which engage learners and require cognitive learning strategies and critical thinking skills
- 12.9 provide ways for learners to access needed information and to use the new information in extension projects which may include real world problems
- 12.10 provide ways for learners to connect to other learning communities for discussions, building consensus, and answering questions
- 12.11 provide ways for learners to apply the new information in extension projects that may include solving problems in different settings

**Standard 13 Bible study materials that promote critical viewing**

**Specifications: Employ visual materials that...**

- 13.1 help learners gain information
- 13.2 require learners to respond thoughtfully, creatively, and critically to visual messages
- 13.3 require learners to be involved in problem solving and inquiry
- 13.4 present a variety of visual resources: narratives, charts, diagrams, timelines, illustrations, paintings, photographs, graphic organizers, clip art, maps, and symbols
- 13.5 support the interpretation of text and audio
- 13.6 enhance interpretation through the use of diagrams, drawings, charts, and pictures
- 13.7 provide opportunities for learners to produce their own visual aids as part of the learning process

**Standard 14 Bible study materials that will provide resources to aid teachers, parents, pastors, Bible study leaders, and others in the use of the materials**

**Specifications: Provide Bible study guides that...**

- 14.1 support the standards set forth in Standards 1 through 13
- 14.2 provide clearly written directions that would anticipate and circumvent possible misunderstandings

14.3 are available in print, online, or as part of a program package

