For this first part, we will be focusing closely on what the text says. You should have approximately eight to ten double spaced pages if you follow the steps below.

1. INITIAL EXPERIENCE
   • Spend some time “living with” your text. Prayerfully read it through several times. Take notes: what strikes you? What inspires you? What disturbs you? What questions do you have? Simply note those questions at this point: don’t attempt to explain what the text means. Include these notes, but in no more than one page.

2. TRANSLATIONS
   • Consult five different English translations of your passage and list all significant differences you find. Among the five there should be at least one relatively literal translation (e.g. New American Standard Bible), one relatively dynamic translation (e.g. Today’s English Version, New Century Version), one that shoots for the middle (NRSV, NIV, ESV), and one other (e.g. New King James Version, New Jerusalem Bible). Paraphrases like The Message or The Living Bible will be significantly different; only consult them after you have looked closely at four or five others. English translations of the Bible can be found in the reference section of the SPU library, and are widely available online.
   • Where the translations agree, it suggests that the underlying Hebrew is fairly straightforward and there are no major discrepancies in the textual tradition. Variation suggests that the Hebrew isn’t as easily interpreted into English. It is also possible, of course, that the theological concerns of the translator have had an effect on the translation.
   • Also, be sure to note also where the English translations structure your pericope differently. The verse numbers are fixed, but paragraph breaks are determined and subject headings are added by contemporary editors. Do the translations present your pericope differently?
   • Write up your findings: (1) List off all the major differences found among the translations; (2) include some comment on the potential significance of each difference. That is, how might the differences affect interpretation? This should fill at least one page of writing.

2. RHETORICAL CRITICISM/CLOSE READING
   • You may want to use one translation as your primary one, or, you may choose to conflate them, but print out a version of your text. Then, closely examine its rhetorical design. Use various pencils or pens to highlight reoccurring words and phrases. Identify any literary structures such as chiasms or envelopes. Also identify any literary devices like metaphors/similes, paradoxes, irony, etc. Turn in your notes.
   • Create an outline of your text on a separate page. If you are working with a legal text, you will probably want to break the passage down into meaningful sub-units, noting where the legal topics shift (if they do), and how one moves into the other. You might want to give each section a separate heading (e.g. law about marriage; law about war, etc.) If you are working with a narrative, consider outlining it as if it were stage directions for a play. Notice things like setting, speech, action. In all of this work, pay attention to how the form of the text relates to its content.

3. WORD STUDY
   • List off all the words in your passage that seem significant to you, along with a sentence or two explaining why it is you think that word might be worthy of investigation. Here are some suggestions for determining which words in a passage are “significant” enough to merit investigation:
     o Any word that appears to be important in your passage but seems ambiguous or unclear, especially those that can have more than one meaning.
     o Any word that is repeated in your pericope. Check synonyms, too!
     o Any word that gets translated in different ways in the English versions.
     o Any word that appears in your passage but turns out to be a rare word in the OT as a whole. This is especially the case if your word is a hapax legomena, i.e. it occurs only once in the OT.
     o Any word that you think you already know because it is a common OT or Christian word.
   After you’ve generated your list and explained your choices (approximately one page?), do parts 3a and 3b.

3a. CONCORDANCES
• Choose one significant word from your passage and submit it to a complete concordance study. Start with the Blue Letter Bible (but don’t stop there! You will need to go to the library, and look in paper books!): Look up your pericope on the website and click the “tools” icon to the left of the verse. Find the word you want to search, and click on the number between the English and Hebrew words (the Strong’s reference number). Look at your word in a Strong’s concordance, and compare it with a Goodrick-Kohlenberger.
  o Use the “Index of Strong —> Goodrick/Kohlenberger numbers” beginning on p. 1813 of The NIV exhaustive concordance (REF BS425 .G62 1990): The Hebrew English concordance to the Old Testament with the New International Version (REF BS1121 .K65 1998), and note the reference numbers in each.
  o Note any differences you see between the systems and their use of the word.
• Those of you who know Hebrew can use Lisowsky (REF BS1121 .L55 1993) or Mandelkern (REF BS1121 .M3 1925)
• The key thing to keep in mind when reading concordance results is that words find their meaning primarily from the way they are used in context. Usage ultimately determines meaning; meaning does not always determine usage. So, when you look at the way the word is used in the passages unearthed in your concordance, look to see if there are words, themes, synonyms, genres, or specific contexts regularly associated with your word (you must of course look at the larger context and not just the immediate verse in which the word is found). Perform your search in concentric circles: first analyze uses of the word in the book you’re studying, then expand to look at the way this word is used in the entire Pentateuch, then finally to the entire Old Testament. While you’re primarily looking to see how the word is used, it is also worth noting how often the word is used: is it common, or rare? If it is rare, you’ll want to investigate what accounts for its use by this writer. Of course, when the word is used numerous times it would take forever to analyze the usage in every context. If this is the case, at least get a good look at how the word is used in your text and how it is used in the particular book (e.g. Genesis) where your text is found.
• Describe your findings in at least one full page, concluding with any thoughts you have about how the study helps you understand your word in context.

3b. DICTIONARIES/ENCYCLOPEDIAS/WORDBOOKS
• Choose one additional significant word from your list and investigate both of them using three Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, lexicons, or theological wordbooks (one must be Hebrew-based). Use the following options:
  o Hebrew-based:
    • Theological Wordbook of the OT. Ed. Harris, et al. 2 vols. 1980. REF BS440 .T49
    • Theological Lexicon of the OT. Ed. Jenni et al. 3 vols. REF BS440 .T4813 1997
    • Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.15 vols. REF BS440 .B5713
  o English-based:
• More advice:
  o Do not go to the English based dictionaries without having discovered the underlying Hebrew of the word you’re exploring! This is crucial for at least two important reasons: (1) sometimes a translation will add a word in English that isn’t there in the Hebrew in order to improve the sense for us, and (2) sometimes the underlying Hebrew word can be translated in multiple ways, so you could conceivably studying one possible meaning of the Hebrew term, and not the full sense of what is implied in the text.
  o This should go without saying, but you should keep digging through the sources (dictionaries/encyclopedias/wordbooks) until you find three that offer up something on your word. If you’re having any trouble finding resources for your word, contact me or Steve Perisho in the library.
• Write a summary of your findings referencing all three of your sources throughout and including full bibliographic data at the end (e.g. Sanders, James A. “Hermeneutics,” Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: Supplement, ed. Keith Crim, New York: Abingdon, 1976, pp. 404-406).
• End with a few comments (a substantial paragraph) about how the dictionary/wordbook study affected your understanding of the pericope.