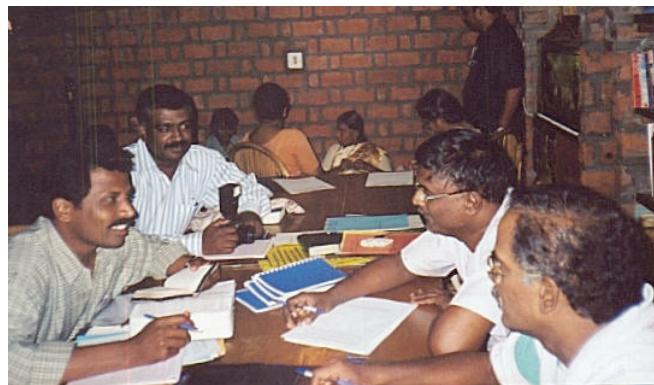




**SCRIPTURE UNION
INTERNATIONAL**

**WORD AND
WORLD:
resources
for developing
writers of SU Bible
guides**



SU International Bible Ministries Resources

WORD AND WORLD

Resources for developing writers of SU Bible guides

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Acknowledgments and thanks

Every writers' workshop has taught me important lessons. I owe a debt of gratitude to every single person at every workshop, because each has helped me to read Scripture with new eyes. From Latvia to Lubumbashi, Manila to Mahabalipuram, people have helped me to understand Scripture in new ways.

But special thanks go to four people who in specific ways have helped me to engage with the Bible. Colin Matthews, who was head of Bible Ministries with SU England and Wales, encouraged a spirit of openness and honesty about Bible engagement that has been an inspiration to me ever since. John Lane, previously with SU Australia's Resources for Ministry, taught me about international co-operation and creativity, C B Samuel of Efcor India left me with an indelible understanding of how the poor have no difficulty in finding themselves and their story in the Bible and of how we can follow their lead, and Danilo Gay modelled the need for courage, depth and prayerfulness in all our Bible engagement.

Pauline Hoggarth, SUI Bible Ministries Co-ordinator, July 2004

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Dr Christopher Wright: 'Interpreting the Bible among the world religions'

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INTRODUCTION

'Readers who work and pray over the text, who interpret freely and responsibly, and who follow its itineraries of meaning, will be progressively transformed into the image of Him who is the ultimate object of the biblical witness. Those who stand in this dynamic way understand and *withstand*, and so fulfil their vocation as witnesses and martyrs to the Word.'

Kevin Vanhoozer

Over the last five years SU International has helped with workshops for writers of our Bible guides in almost all of our Regions: Africa (francophone and anglophone), the Americas, South Asia, East Asia, Europe and the Former Soviet Republics. These workshops have given us opportunities to develop resources for training, and to test them in different contexts.

This brief manual aims to bring these resources together and make them available on the SUI Extranet for Bible ministries staff around the world to make use of and adapt for their own context.

Pauline Hoggarth, SUI Bible Ministries Co-ordinator, would welcome corrections, suggestions and feedback from anyone using the materials and developing new ones. Please write to paulineh@su-international.org.

PLANNING A WORKSHOP FOR WRITERS OF SU BIBLE GUIDES

In most of our Regions, SU uses teams of volunteers to write the Bible guides that we publish to 'help people of all ages to meet God daily through the Bible and prayer.'

In some Regions (such as Africa) many thousands of people use our Bible guides. Even when circulations are not so big, we have a major responsibility to publish the **very best** resources we can. This means equipping our writers, whether they are volunteers or receive some kind of payment or honorarium, to do **excellent** work. We should be planning regular training programmes and encouraging writers to attend. I can't emphasise enough how important it is to maintain **high quality** in these publications.

Who should come to a writers' workshop?

Editors or Bible ministries co-ordinators should encourage *all* current writers to attend, as well as those people they would like to see coming on stream as new writers. It is crucial to foster new talent. Look out for people who are already communicators in print (Christian journalists, authors, people writing well in their church magazines). It is easier to train people to reflect theologically and handle Scripture well than it is to train them to be good communicators in print! Be aware that people who are used to preaching for an hour and using their faces and hands to express themselves often find it frustrating to be limited to 300 words or less. If this is a workshop for writers of **children's or youth Bible guides**, look for people with relevant experience. Everything in this manual applies to them but they will need additional training from children's / youth specialists.

Look for people who are eager to learn, open to the training process and willing to receive constructive critical feedback.

Look for people who are passionate about the Bible as a place of encounter with God, but who *also* take a lively interest in every aspect of life – men and women who are in touch with their culture, read the newspapers, express themselves in interesting ways, have a gift with words, offer interesting insights.

Look for people from different denominations, women as well as men, younger people as well as older.

It is especially important to invest in training of writers of our Bible guides in **vernacular languages**. Make sure that you have present at the workshop those who have experience of writing for the Bible guides *and* who can speak and read the vernacular languages and can therefore help evaluate quality.



In your information / invitation about the workshop make clear the purpose of the workshop. Especially make clear that this workshop is NOT aimed at editors, but at writers. Editing skills are a separate category (though of course there is overlap).

The workshop timetable

It is essential to allow time at a workshop **actually to write comments** on Bible passages. Theory must be put into practice! The ideal minimum is five days. This allows time for plenty of discussion and plenty of practical work. In five days every member of the group should be able to produce a completed comment, share it with others and receive helpful feedback from group members and from the course leader(s). If you are working with a group of writers of vernacular Bible guides, you will need to leave extra time for translation back and forth.

A sample timetable is included among the resources in this manual (Resource Sheet 1).

Make sure you plan a workshop is good time, so that people can set time aside to attend. It is a good idea to have a residential event so that people can interact over meals and in the evenings. Sometimes writers appreciate having single rooms because they are working intensively and like some peace and quiet at the end of each day.

The workshop ‘spirit’

Aim to create an atmosphere of enjoyment, encouragement, humour and trust. Allow plenty of time for members of the group to get to know each other through ‘ice-breaker’ activities on the first day or evening, and through the morning times of Bible reflection, prayer and worship. It’s very important to build a **sense of trust** so that people will be willing to read their work to one another and receive constructive criticism and questions as well as compliments and affirmation.

It’s also very important to help writers to recognise that **writing is spiritual work** and that **prayer should be the mainspring of all they do**. Leave plenty of time in the workshop for prayer. Help writers to see that God is creative and gives us gifts of creativity (Exodus 35:30-35). Writers work with words and themes just as a painter

works with colours and shapes. God's Holy Spirit helps us to write, interacting with our prayer and creativity and God's call to us to pastor readers through engagement with Scripture. But prepare them to understand that good writing and communicating is not easy; it will almost certainly involve struggle and effort if we are to do good work.

Give your writers copies of letters from appreciative readers to encourage them. Use critical letters also to draw attention to how *not* to write. Encourage them to understand the responsibility they have, and the privilege, of communicating with many thousands (or hundreds) of readers.

What to write comments on?

In some workshops we have asked people to write comments on the syllabus for the coming year and have tried to make use of these in the Bible guides. Sometimes we have simply used sample passages from a range of Bible books. It is helpful to enable a group to work on material from different kinds of Bible literature so that they understand that different skills and approaches are needed for writing on a psalm, for example, or a New Testament letter.

It may be a good idea to take to the workshop relevant commentaries, Bible dictionaries etc, although it is important to encourage writers not to use these until they have done their own work on the Bible text.

The development of the workshop process

Below we set out a pattern for workshops that we have tested many times and found to be effective. This follows the sample timetable found on Resource Sheet 1. You will need to experiment and work out a good pattern for your own context. As you develop skills in leading this kind of workshop you will help your writers to make connections between one kind of training activity and another. For example, when you discuss the principles of interpretation in the sheet called 'Discovering the Bible' you can point out how some of the group, using Resource Sheet 3, perhaps shared a negative experience of preaching that didn't help them to experience the Bible as a mirror of real life; it remained only at the level of the 'window' and the 'work of art'.

Opening session - welcome and getting-to-know-you activities. For example, give out sheets of coloured paper and ask everyone to use the piece of paper in some creative way to express how they are feeling at the start of the workshop. Share in pairs or small groups. Never force people to share in the big group, especially on the first day.



Session 1: The Bible and Us. Use Resource Sheet No 3 to help people to think about their own experience of the Bible – good and not so good. The aim is to help them to understand that we all bring our own experience of engaging with the Bible, as well as our particular 'worldview', to our work as writers. We need to be aware of this and alert to our own particular emphases and prejudices. Show them that sympathetic, interesting writing can help readers to have good experiences of the Bible, and that superficial, careless writing that is dishonest about the difficulties of reading the Bible or that makes no connections with real life can put readers off engaging with Scripture, just as we have sometimes been put off! Allow plenty of time for people to tell their own stories and share experiences.

At this stage it is also a good idea to remind people of SU's *Aims, Belief and Working Principles* as they apply to our Bible Ministries (Resource Sheet 2). Encourage them to talk about what they find most challenging about these.



Session 2: The world in which we write. Use some current newspaper headlines to help the group to engage with the realities of our world today. Christians are asked to be 'in the world but not of the world'. We are affected by events around us and by the prevailing culture – social, educational, economical, political, religious. In small groups ask people to answer the question, 'What is our world (that is, the child / youth / adult culture for which we are writing) like?' You can supply newspapers, magazines etc that can help the group to build up a picture of their society – secular and Christian. Each group then feeds back and you build the information and insights into a large chart on blackboard or flipcharts. Allow plenty of time for this. You may need to allow two sessions. In some workshops we have encouraged the group to go into the local community and interview people about their concerns, their joys and sorrows, families, work, wealth and poverty, justice issues, what they think of the Christian church, what they understand of God. The aim of all this is to get your writers to understand at a deep level that when they write, their task is to help people to understand **how God's Word addresses issues of real life** and equips us to live in ways that reflect God's character and values. 'What will be the value of the Bible in the day of judgement apart from transformations of character it has produced?' wrote William Booth.



Session 3: Listening to the Word, listening to our world. At the start of the workshop we strongly recommend an experience of **Scripture listening**, using either a reader from the group or one of the *Faith Comes by Hearing* tapes. You can usually obtain these from your local Bible Society. If you have chosen a shorter Bible book for people to write comments on, let the group listen to the whole book (eg Colossians or Ruth or Daniel).

In small groups, ask them to make an initial response to what they have heard. Specifically ask them (1) to share what immediately impacted them as they listened to the reading and (2) suggest what this text might have to say to us today in our culture – remind them of the work they have just done on building up a picture of their culture, their world. You could give out a simple worksheet for this. Point out that this, essentially, is what they do when they set out to write for the Bible guide. They listen carefully to God's Word and simultaneously, listen carefully to their world.



Session 4: Word and world practical work.

Use Resource Sheet 4 to give people an immediate further experience of this 'dual listening'. At this stage choose a range of short and relatively easy Bible passages for people to work on, at first individually and then sharing their discoveries in small groups. They will not find this exercise easy! You will need to be patient. In the left-hand column, ask people to write down words or phrases that sum up what is happening in the Bible passage, what it's about: eg conflict between 2 people, pressure from the crowd, someone wants healing, expression of joy, frustration at God's silence etc etc. In the right hand column, in parallel, ask them to write down anything that comes



into their mind from today's world as they read the Bible passage: eg what we can give thanks for, issues of asylum seekers, people out of work, accusations against the church, relationships between old and young, passion for sport, old people living alone more and more today, the challenge to be generous, today's mood of anxiety etc etc. In the bottom section ask them to write down the main theme if they were to write a comment on this Bible passage. Try always to encourage people not to write in vague, general terms, but to be specific and concrete.



Session 5: Developing hermeneutical (interpretational) skills 1. From this first practical engagement with the Bible (listening to it, being aware of how it impacts, considering what it might mean to us today), and the 'Two Worlds' exercise, move the group back to theory - to the crucial skill, for an effective Bible guide writer, of **interpreting the Bible text with care and respect and opening up its implications for daily living today** in Africa, Europe, Latin America, Asia etc. Use Resource Sheet No.5 to introduce basic hermeneutical principles in a way that is easy to remember. As you introduce these 3 'lenses' through which we discover the Bible, give plenty of examples from Scripture and encourage writers to understand at a deep level that **humility** is a vital attitude when we come to Scripture and seek to understand it. Dr Christopher Wright's article, on which Resource Sheet 5 is based, is included at the back of the manual and will help you to develop this session.

Follow up the theoretical session with further work on Bible passages in small groups. Choose several different kinds of Bible passage and ask people to explore them from the point of view of the 'window', the 'work of art' and the 'mirror'. Feed back from small groups. You are now doing the same work as you did with the 'Two Worlds' worksheet, but from a slightly different point of view. You may need to spread this over 2 sessions.



Session 6: Developing our writing skills. At this stage you can start to introduce some work on writing skills. You can do this in several different ways. You may invite a local writer to talk about the requirements for good writing. You can use materials on writing skills that may be produced locally. Media Associates International may produce resources in your country for writer training. Their website can be found on www.littworld.org which also gives information about MAI's training courses. You can also use Resource Sheet 6 that suggests 8 keys for good writing. You can explain these and help the group to understand them by means of good and bad examples (perhaps taken from the SU Bible guides in your own country, but be tactful about this!).

Proper punctuation is often a skill that writers lack. You can give them some helpful and entertaining exercises in punctuating a passage from which you have removed all punctuation marks.



Session 7: Developing hermeneutical (interpretational) skills 2. Introduce the group to SU's Statement of Hermeneutical Principles – either the full version or the simplified version – and to the checklist that will help them to know if they are putting these Principles into practice (Resource Sheets 7, 8 and 9). Help them to see how each point of these Principles relates to the idea of the window, the work of art and the mirror on Resource Sheet 4. Allow plenty of time for questions and try to illustrate with plenty of examples.



Session 8: Facing the blank page. One of the hardest things about writing for SU Bible guides (as any writing) is facing the first moment of looking at the blank page or the blank computer screen. We have therefore developed several models that can help people. Writers need to realise that it is rarely a good idea to sit and chew their pen, thinking about their opening sentence. It is best to start out by brainstorming ideas for the comment, having already read and re-read the Bible passage and prayed and meditated on its significance for our readers today – and first of all, of course, for ourselves.

The first model is called the ‘Coffee Filter’ (Resource Sheet 10). In the top section you scribble notes as ideas come into your head, both on the Bible passage and on its implications for us today. This is often a very liberating and creative process. Out of these mixed ideas, the key thoughts will come, enabled by prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit in us. These key thoughts should be written down in the second section of the filter. You should prepare blank versions of the ‘Coffee Filter’ (ie without the text in them) and ask people to work on a Bible passage with its help.

Remind your writers that Resource Sheet 4 (The Two Worlds...) can also be used in a similar way to do the background thinking before they write their opening sentence.



Session 9: Starting to write 1. At this stage you are halfway through the workshop and it is time to start people on their task of writing a complete comment. You should have writers’ guidelines for the Bible guides in your Region or country. Spend time going through these with the group and making sure everyone understands them. Underline especially **the importance of honouring deadlines and of keeping to the correct word count.** Also make clear to writers that, as the editor, (if you are the editor) you will respect their writing, but that the editor’s decision is final. (A workshop for editors needs a separate manual.)



In this session, writers should start their preliminary reading, prayer and thought. Underline that NOBODY should start actually to write his/her comment yet. It is crucial that writers learn to do the proper groundwork. This is one of the greatest challenges. You will discover that a good number will immediately write their comment, without proper reflection or checking by the group. Occasionally, someone will write something very good but these are usually the more experienced writers. We reckon that it will take a minimum of three hours to write a good comment, and that is after reading and praying and chewing over the passage and seeing what the commentaries may say.



Session 10: Starting to write 2: Continue as in Session 9.



Session 11: The challenge of excellence. Use Resource Sheet 11 to help people to think through the issues of doing a really good job. As they write their comments, encourage them to use this checklist and the one on Resource Sheet 9 to evaluate the quality of their work.



Sessions 12-15: Writing our notes. You and other trainers will need to be available to writers during this time to help and support them. Sometimes they will be completely stuck for a way forward. It is essential that you do a good deal of thinking yourself on the

Bible passages they are working with. Try not to impose your own ideas but to ask questions that will open up ways forward for them. Encourage, inspire and prod them gently to work well and seriously.

Encourage writers not to leave their ‘application’ tacked on to the end of their comment, but to integrate into their comment right from the opening words what this Bible passage may mean for us today. Teach them the helpful use of good questions, but remind them that questions are often a lazy person’s way of ‘applying’ the text. **Train them to write in such a way that readers go back to the Bible text as they read the comment.**



Sessions 16-19: Reading and evaluating our work. These are crucial sessions when each writer reads his/her work to the rest of the group. Sometimes translation may be needed. Ensure that there is enough time for every single writer to present their work and have full feedback from trainers and the rest of the group. When you comment on someone’s writing, make sure that you always start with something positive and encouraging before moving on to something that may need improving. Try to build in time so that everyone can actually polish their work and incorporate the constructive criticism that has been made.



Session 20: ‘Round-up’ and handing out of additional resource materials. Resource sheets 12,13 and 14 are additional materials that can help people to dialogue with the Bible text and ask questions of it in a helpful way. Resource Sheet 14 offers some necessary ‘enhancements’ to the rather mechanical process of classic inductive Bible study.

You may also want to use this session to gather all the comments together and pray over them, the writers and future readers of the Bible guides.

If there is time on the evening of the last day, encourage people to speak about their experiences of the workshop, pray for each other and for issues of concern, and spend time in worship to the Lord.

Acknowledgements: The article by Dr Christopher Wright, ‘Interpreting the Bible among the world religions’ is reproduced from *Themelios* Vol 25:3 by kind permission of Dr Wright and the publishers. We would encourage SU Bible Ministries staff to consider receiving *Themelios*. Information can be found on www.uccf.org.uk/themelios. The material on resource Sheet 14, ‘Enhancements to inductive Bible study’ is reproduced by kind permission of the National Bible Study Task Force of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA.