Progress of revelation🡪historical development(slavery,polygamy)

10 stages to the process of interpretation.

* **UNLESS THERE IS EVIDENCE TO THE CONTRARY, ASSUME ...**

**BENEFIT OF THE  
DOUBT** Unless there is evidence of untrustworthiness, every author is given the benefit of the doubt on veracity, accuracy, etc.

**REASONABLY  
INTELLIGENT** The author is ***reasonably*** intelligent.  He is neither a genius nor an idiot.

**REASONABLY  
EDUCATED** The author is reasonably educated ***by the standards of his time, place, occupation, and station in life***.

**REASONABLY  
KNOWS TOPIC** ***By the standards of his time, place, occupation, and station in life***, the author is ***reasonably*** knowledgeable about his topic.

**REASONABLY  
WORLDLY** ***By the standards of his time, place, occupation, and station in life***, the author is ***reasonably*** knowledgeable about how people act, what motivates them, etc.

**REASONABLY  
INFORMED** ***By the standards of his time, place, occupation, and station in life***, the author is ***reasonably*** knowledgeable about science, literature, religion, politics, community activities, etc.

**REASONABLY  
NORMAL** Just because the author lived in ancient Egypt or Greece or Rome or Israel doesn't mean he lacked wisdom, intelligence, reasoning, common sense, curiosity, a sense of humor, or healthy skepticism!

**REASONABLY  
ACCURATE** The author is neither excessively sloppy nor excessively accurate in his recital of information.

**NOT TOTALLY  
NEUTRAL** It is virtually impossible to write about something without leaning toward a particular viewpoint.

**REASONABLY  
TRUSTWORTHY** A person with an interest in the outcome of an event can still present an accurate account!  Consider:

* Does the author seem to present the facts "warts and all"?
* Does he admit weaknesses in his case?
* Does he try to respond to his opponents' ***arguments***?
* Does he try to distract the reader with personal attacks on his opponents that have nothing to do with their arguments?

**REASONABLY  
ERROR-FREE** The author has not made any blatant errors in interpreting or reporting information.  He made ***reasonable*** efforts to verify and report information but did not get ***ridiculous*** about it.

**NOT LYING** ***By definition***, a "lie" is a statement which the author represents as being true although he believes it to be false. No matter how blatant or how stupid it is, an ***error*** is ***not*** a ***lie***.

**INTERNALLY CONSISTENT** The author didn't intend to contradict himself and in fact did not contradict himself -- even though, at first glance, there is an apparent contradiction.

**HARMONIOUS INTERPRETATION** 1.  A section of a document can be interpreted two ways.  
2.  One interpretation contradicts another part of the document or another of the author's writings.  
3.  The other interpretation is consistent with other text.  
4.  ***Both*** interpretations are fairly reasonable.

The interpretation that produces consistency should be used ***even if*** it is ***less*** likely or ***less*** reasonable.

**CONSISTENT IN  
TRUTHFULNESS** If a person has a reputation for exaggeration or lying, ***all*** statements from that person are of doubtful reliability, even those that sound okay.

On the other hand, if a person is shown to be reliable in most things, he is assumed to be reliable even when it can't be proven.

**CONSISTENT IN  
PHILOSOPHY** A trustworthy person does not constantly change his views.  If an author has presented a particular viewpoint in previous writings, he probably still holds those views.

**ACTIONS WILL BE  
CONSISTENT** If an author's ***actions*** are contrary to his ***words***, the reliability of his words is questionable.

**WON'T LIGHTLY  
ACT AGAINST OWN  
SELF-INTEREST** The author would not act against his own interest without good reason.  If he makes a statement that is likely to expose him to ostracism, ridicule, public scorn, humiliation, contempt, pain, imprisonment, or death, the statement is likely to be true.

**CHARACTER BY  
ASSOCIATION** You can tell a lot about the author's character by the company he keeps, the reliability of his sources, etc.

**THINGS PROCEED  
NORMALLY** Actions, events, etc., follow their normal course.

**LAWS OF NATURE  
STAY CONSISTENT** Under similar conditions, the laws of nature remain consistent.

**REASONABLE  
ASSUMPTIONS OKAY** The reader can make reasonable assumptions consistent with logic, common sense, and known circumstances.  (An assumption is not based on the text, e.g., a person gets hungry and sleepy every day.)

**REASONABLE  
INFERENCES OKAY** The reader can draw reasonable inferences from the text and known information.  (An inference is partially based on the text.)

**MUST PROVE  
UNUSUAL** The burden of proof rests on the person alleging something out of the ordinary, not on the person claiming the ordinary.

**GENERALIZATION  
IS NOT ERROR** A reasonable generalization is not a lie or an error, even if it uses phrases like "all" or "every."

**APPROXIMATION  
IS NOT ERROR** A reasonable approximation is not a lie or an error ***unless it purports to be more accurate than it is***. (E.g., "our income last year was $75,321.62" gives the impression you counted to the penny, not the nearest thousand.)

**SIMPLIFICATION  
IS NOT ERROR** A reasonable simplification is not a lie or an error.

**SARCASM, ETC.  
IS NOT ERROR** Sarcasm, obviously blatant exaggeration, for emphasis, etc., is not error. ("They call me 'Elephant' because I work for peanuts.")

**WORDS HAVE  
USUAL MEANING** Words have their usual meaning.  If we start saying "It ***says*** '...' but it really must ***mean*** '...'", we are ignoring what the author wrote and substituting our own text.

**GRAMMAR HAS  
USUAL MEANING** As with wording, we are not free to "force" an unusual interpretation on a standard grammatical construction.  "***And***" means ***both***.  It does ***not*** mean "at least one."  "***Or***" means "at least one"!

**UNCOMMON  
GRAMMAR HAS  SPECIAL MEANING** If the author uses an uncommon grammatical construction it probably was intentional, either for emphasis or special clarity.

**PUNCTUATION HAS  
ITS USUAL MEANING** Punctuation has its normal meaning, e.g., commas separate. ***Note -- in Biblical times punctuation was not used.***

**IDIOMS HAVE  
THEIR USUAL  
 MEANING** Every language has ***idioms*** -- phrases whose meaning is different from the words, e.g. in English "a knight in shining armor" ***means*** "a virtuous hero."  The Spanish equivalent is "un principe azul", which, ***literally*** means "a blue prince."

**SOME WORDS  
MAY BE  JARGON** ***Every*** field has its ***jargon***.  There are two types of jargon:

1. Words or phrases unique to that field, e.g., a legal ***writ***
2. Common words or phrases that have a special meaning in that field, e.g., in criminal law a "not guilty" verdict ***means*** "the government failed to prove its case ***beyond a reasonable doubt***."

**USE OF JARGON  
DEPENDS ON THE  
TARGET READER** Whether a word was used as jargon depends on the intended audience. If the author is writing to specialists, he probably meant the word as jargon.  He probably avoided jargon for a general audience.

**DIFFERENT VIEW  
IS NOT ERROR** Just because someone has a different view or interpretation does not automatically mean that person is wrong.

**AIMS AT AVERAGE  
TARGET MEMBER** The author is writing for the average reader ***of his type of material***, not someone who is super educated, super informed, super analytical, super critical, super skeptical, or looking only for weak points or only for strong points.

**SUFFICIENT, NOT  
EXHAUSTIVE** The author attempts to present ***enough*** evidence and arguments to convey his point, not ***all*** the evidence and arguments.

**HAS PARTICULAR  
AUDIENCE IN MIND** The author is writing for a particular audience.  No one tries to write an article on nuclear physics for both physics professors and second grade students!

**TRIED TO BE  
UNDERSTOOD** The author was trying to write something his readers would understand. (Of course, this frequently is not the case in wordy legal documents such as insurance and loan agreements!)

**OCCAM'S RAZOR** When choosing between two alternative solutions to a problem, ***all other things being equal***, if the simple solution works as well as the complicated solution, the simple solution is probably the correct alternative.

* **Moses** was raised as Pharaoh's son and trained in ***the best university in the world at the time.***  In today's world he would be the equivalent of a Rhodes Scholar.
* **Joseph** became ***prime minister of Egypt***, the greatest country in the world at the time, ***on the basis of ability***, not by birth or political connections.
* **Daniel** was specially selected and educated by the Babylonian government because he was considered among "the cream of the crop."
* **Paul** studied rabbinical law and theology under Gamaliel, the leading rabbinical teacher of his time.  On the basis of his writings, Paul obviously was a ***brilliant*** theologian with a gift for being able to explain complex theological concepts clearly.