Classical Writing
- a return to ancient methods
Classical Writing

- a return to ancient methods

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Overview

Introduction
What is a Classical Education?
Goals for writing

How to Write Classically
Content
Elements of Writing
The Progymnasmata
Our Books
Poetry

Conclusion
Classical Education - AIM

A Pursuit of Virtue -
Truth, Beauty, Goodness

... And Humility
Classical Education —
The Contemplative life

Learning from the great thinkers of the past.

The Bible
The Great Books
Discernment
A Classical Education

emphasizes mastery of the disciplines of language

Through Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric.
Classical Pedagogy

The pedagogy of the classical world intones a three-note “mantra”.

- Theory
- Analysis & Imitation
- Practice
Classical Education is done

- one step at a time
- with daily drill
- building on previously learned skills
- patiently
Our Goal

Helping educators develop writers who can write well

- On any subject
- To any audience
- For any occasion
Classical Writing

Why?

1. Most students in American schools HATE writing.
2. Most students who use Classical Writing do not.

Because...

1. Content,
2. Structure, and
3. Style

are clearly and systematically taught.
The typical student needs practice, practice, and more practice!!!

Myth 1: “Great writers are born not made.”
Myth 2: “Just give them good literature to read, and they will write well.”
Myth 3: “It’s quality that counts, not quantity.”

The typical student needs practice, practice, and more practice!!!
Strong Emphasis on Stories

• The Bible is full of stories.
• Jesus spoke in parables.

• Stories enables us to
  - empathize deeply with the life of another person.
  - reflect on and explore values.
  - sense that there is more to life.
  - see the possibilities of unperceived dimensions of life.

... And furthermore ...
Stories are a fundamental part of the development of a moral and spiritual life.
Stories - building blocks of culture

- Iliad
- Aeneid
- Divine Comedy
- Aesop’s Fables
- Pilgrim’s Progress
- A Christmas Carol

- Each person on earth has a story to tell.
- Life is transmitted in the form of stories.
- History is a series of stories.
The student who has not mastered narrative writing (telling a story) cannot hope to go on to argumentative or persuasive writing.
A Strong Narrative Foundation

Work on basic story sequences
- Forwards
- Backwards
- Starting in the middle

Work on
- Writing dialogue
- Writing descriptions
- Elaborating on narratives

...... BEFORE we ever move into argumentation or any other types of essay writing.
A Strong Narrative Foundation

- The student needs to be able to describe what he wants to say clearly, and in as many ways as possible, before he enters into argumentation.

- We want to teach the student to seek to understand a subject, before we ask him to argue about it.

- The student who does not understand has nothing to argue about.
How

- The teacher picks a literary model each week.
- Students analyze it.
- Students imitate it.
What is a model?

A model is a piece of writing used for analysis and imitation.

- A famous speech
- A passage from a novel
- An essay by a famous author
- A passage from a play
- A poem
Which models do we analyze?

“It is from authors worthy of our study that we must draw our stock of words, the variety of our figures and our methods of composition. [...] It is expedient to imitate whatever has been invented with success. And it is a universal rule of life that we should wish to copy what we approve in others.”

~ Marcus Fabius Quintilianus: Institutio Oratoria X.ii.1-2, circa 35-100AD.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Literature</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd – 6th grade</td>
<td>Aesop’s Fables</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bible Stories</td>
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<td>Legends</td>
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<td>Biographies</td>
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<td>Myths</td>
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<td>Historical Accounts</td>
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<td>Fairy Tales</td>
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<td>Folk Tales</td>
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<td>Selections From Novels</td>
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<td>7th grade and up</td>
<td>Passages from literature</td>
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<td>Political speeches</td>
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<td>Dialogue and speeches from plays</td>
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<td>Essays on a topic</td>
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<td>Poetry</td>
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<td>Legal documents</td>
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<td>Newspaper clippings</td>
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</table>
### How to choose a model for analysis

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>If the model is long,</strong></td>
<td><strong>If the vocabulary is difficult,</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the vocabulary and the subject matter should be of medium difficulty at most.</td>
<td>the model should be short and the subject matter easy or at most of medium difficulty.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong></td>
<td><strong>If the subject matter is difficult,</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the model should be short, and the vocabulary no more than medium difficulty.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Models are already chosen for you in our student workbooks and student guides.

But the innovative teacher may also scrap our models and choose his or her own models.
Writing classically is

... an art to be learned, step by step.
... something we learn from those who went before us.
... an activity with rules and guiding principles.
A piece of writing consists of

**Content** – what you want to say.

**Arrangement** – in which order you say it.

**Style** – the tone and grandeur with which you say it.
The most important component in writing is **Content**

Content is expressed in words
Words are
The Building Blocks of Writing

- Compositions
- Paragraphs
- Sentences
- Words
Words, Sentences, and Paragraphs

- **Structure**
  - How they are put together

- **Classification**
  - What roles do they play

- **Semantics**
  - What we mean
Words are composed of:

- Syllables
- Letters
Structure – Classification - Semantics

Sentences are composed of

- Phrase
- Clause
- Interjection

- Word
Paragraphs are composed of:

- Complex-compound sentence
  - Complex sentence
  - Compound sentence
- Simple sentence
Structure – Classification – Semantics

-roles words play

Words
- Nouns
- Verbs
- Adjectives
- Adverbs
- Prepositions
- Interjections
- Pronouns
- Conjunctions
Structure – Classification – Semantics

-roles sentences play

Declarative

Exclamatory

Sentences

Interrogative

Imperative
Structure – Classification - Semantics

Roles
Paragraphs play

- Narrative
- Example
- Comparison
- Testimony
- Conclusion
- Introduction
- Opposite
- Cause
- Summary/Paraphrase

- Paragraphs play

- Narrative

- Example

- Comparison

- Testimony

- Conclusion

- Introduction

- Opposite

- Cause

- Summary/Paraphrase
### Structure – Classification - Semantics

#### The meaning of a word

- Definition
- Usage
- Etymology
- Word Lore
## Structure – Classification - Semantics

### The meaning of a word
- Definition
- Usage
- Etymology
- Word Lore

### The meaning of a sentence
- Literal Meaning
- Logical Proposition
- Figurative Meaning
Structure – Classification – Semantics

The meaning of a word
- Definition
- Usage
- Etymology
- Word Lore

The meaning of a sentence
- Literal Meaning
- Logical Proposition
- Figurative Meaning

The meaning of a paragraph

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Rhetoric</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ceremonial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judicial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deliberative</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Issue</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Where</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>When</td>
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<tr>
<td>How</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Why</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Digressive</td>
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</table>

Point – Change beliefs or actions
Pro-gym-NAS-mata

- ... are a series of ancient Greek writing exercises.
- The exercises increase in length and complexity.
- Each exercise isolates one concept to learn at a time.
- Each exercise has a fixed outline and fixed content, which helps the student to focus on the task of WRITING.
The Progymnasmata

- begin with retelling short narratives.
- move on to basic expository writing.

- move on to evaluating an account of something that happened.
  - is this story possible, plausible, clear, beneficial etc.
  - assess credibility and clarity.

- move on to writing detailed description, character analysis, and argumentation regarding political and legal issues.

... at each level, new material is introduced in such a way that the student is very comfortable stretching and learning to absorb this new skill, while constantly using his old familiar skills.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Writing Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd – 4th</td>
<td>Short narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th – 6th</td>
<td>Longer, more complex narratives (backwards and in media res)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th – 8th</td>
<td>5 paragraph essays - Expository essays (Explaining an issue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Argumentative essays (Legal: is or isn’t this clear, right, good..)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Descriptive and argumentative essays (Praising or blaming a character)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th - 12th</td>
<td>Persuasive essays (Logical examination of a matter)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Classical Writing

Each Level Consists of

- Core Book
- Student Workbooks or Student Guides
- Instructor’s Guides (grades 3-6)
# Daily Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theory or Analysis &amp; Imitation</strong></td>
<td>Daily Lesson</td>
<td>Daily Lesson</td>
<td>Daily Lesson</td>
<td>Daily Lesson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing Project</strong></td>
<td>Writing Project step I</td>
<td>Writing Project step II</td>
<td>Writing Project step III</td>
<td>Writing Project step IV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3rd - 4th grade: Aesop

Imitation Concepts:
- Dialogue and Description
- Synonyms
- Copywork and Dictation

Analysis Concepts:
- Reading and Spelling Analysis
- Basic Story Analysis
- Sentence Mechanics
- Eight Parts of Speech

Writing Project Concepts:
- Outlining
- Retelling a Story
- Adding Description and Dialogue
- Basic Editing
5th - 6th grade: Homer

**Analysis concepts:**
- Vocabulary Study
- Details in Outlines
- Types of Paragraphs
- Literary Analysis
- Parsing

**Imitation concepts:**
- Dictation
- Diagramming, parsing, and working with sentences
- 4 Types of Paraphrasing

**Writing Project concepts:**
- Rhetorical Canons
- Retelling a Narrative in Different Chronological Arrangements
- Summary Sentences
- Editing Macroscopically and Microscopically
7th – 8th grade and up: Diogenes

Analysis and Imitation concepts:
5 canons of rhetoric
rhetorical situation
judicial, ceremonial, and deliberative
maxim theory and analysis
ethos, logos, and pathos
types of paragraphs

Writing Project concepts:
Standard Outlines
Paragraph writing
Writing thesis statements
Writing introductions and conclusions
Modern 5 paragraph essay
Expository writing

Analyze and imitate whole classical speeches or essays (Seneca, Franklin, Shakespeare, Churchill, Erasmus, etc.)
Why Maxim?

An essay consists of:

- Content (developing explanations)
- Structure (outline and order of presentation)
- Style (tone, word choice, paragraph consistency)

A known maxim allows the student to think of explanations with ease, so he can focus on the structure and style of his beginning essay writing.
Slow and steady wins the race. ~ Aesop

1. Quote the saying
2. Praise the author
3. Paraphrase the saying
4. Thesis Statement
5. Why is it good to heed this maxim?
6. What happens if you do not heed this maxim?
7. Give a comparison to a life situation
8. Tell a narrative that illustrates the concept
9. Quote a testimony from a sage
10. Brief epilogue

... this outline is taught one step at a time.
Confirmation and Refutation

Retell narratives with a slant
state why it is clear
state why it is plausible
state why it is possible
state why it is consistent with known facts
state why it is appropriate or beneficial

Commonplace

Amplifying evils attached to a certain behavior
or institution or concept

Theory Work

3 appeals: ethos, pathos, logos
Stasis theory
Sentence level logic
Canon of invention, arrangement, and style
Five parts of a classical oration
Figures of speech
10th grade - Plutarch

– Praise (Encomium) or Blame (Invective) of persons, places, and events

Describe person’s origin: people, country, ancestors, parents
Describe upbringing: education, artistic background, training in law
Describe person’s deeds: excellences of mind, body, fortune
Make comparison to another famous person
Conclude with exhortation to your hearers to emulate (or not) this person, or a prayer.
Examine a political or speculative question

Begin with an exordium
Narratio (background for issue)
Confirm arguments (proof)
Refute opposition
Conclude
• As important and time consuming as writing

  • Macroscopic editing
  • Microscopic editing

• All techniques learned in theory lessons are applied to word, sentence, and paragraph improvement in editing.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Header</strong></th>
<th><strong>Check to see if...</strong></th>
<th><strong>Check</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Title</td>
<td>... the maxim is quoted as the title or right after the title?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Encomium</td>
<td>... the writing project includes a short biographical statement of the author and a praise of the author’s wisdom?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Paraphrase</td>
<td>... the maxim is explained/paraphrased in the first paragraph?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cause</td>
<td>... the Cause lead-in sentence is used.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>... the Cause explains what a person who heeds the maxim might be like, or what might happen to such a person.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Opposite</td>
<td>... the Opposite lead-in sentence is used.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>... the Opposite explains what a person who does not heed the maxim might be like, or what might happen to such a person.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Comparison</td>
<td>... the comparison is strongly related to the maxim and is coherent and clear.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Example</td>
<td>... the narrative example relates to and sheds light on the point in the maxim. Is it coherent and complete?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Testimony</td>
<td>... the testimony is related to the maxim.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Epilogue</td>
<td>... the brief conclusion exhorts the reader to admire and heed the maxim.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Conclusion

1. Our aim is the pursuit of virtue
   - The contemplative life

2. Great writing is learned through Analysis & Imitation of great writers.

3. Writing in the early years is best taught through narratives.
“Poetry is the highest form of art, in that it is conceived in the depths of the mind and is dependent only on words to create beauty.”

~ Fowler (1924)
5th grade and up: Poetry

- Reading and understanding poetry.
- Meter and feet
- Figures of speech
- Stanza forms
- Imitation of poetry

Nursery rhymes and children’s songs, Child’s Garden of Verses, Hymns, Stevenson, Luther, Tennyson, Beowulf, Arthurian Legend, Wordsworth, Stevenson, Shakespeare, Byron, Tolkien, Gilbert & Sullivan, Grahame, Chaucer, Marlowe, Spenser, Petrarch, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope
Much of the world’s greatest literature was written in poetic form:

Psalms, Iliad, Odyssey, Aeneid, Beowulf, Divine Comedy, Canterbury Tales, Morte D’Arthur, Fairie Queene, Shakespeare’s Sonnets, and Paradise Lost.

Poetry is the gateway to the Great Books.
Thank you!

Visit our Message Boards at
www.classicalwriting.com