

Foreword

One of the most promising aspects of classical education is that it can help revive civil public discourse. It can ignite thoughtful, courteous conversations between people about what we value most.

Unfortunately, many of us nowadays are strutting our disputes like roosters fanning our feathers. In the words of philosopher Charles Taylor, we have become a culture of “mutual display.” Showing off our opinions and shutting down those with whom we disagree has become more important than respectfully trying to win their hearts and minds. And this lack of civil discourse surely damages our society. Without kindness and respect, communication deteriorates into altercation. Without honoring our common cultural bonds, our nation disintegrates into cliques that focus on their own self-interest.

I have strong opinions. You have strong opinions. How do we come to a place where we can communicate respectfully? I would argue that to do this, civil conversation must be part of a child’s comprehensive education. It must be taught at dinner tables and at bedsides before parents turn out the lights. It must be taught in schools of every kind—public, private, and religious—and it must be consistently modeled by teachers in their classrooms. It will take intentionality to counter the loud and crass voices that flood pop culture, the media, and the halls of government.

One way that ancient teachers prepared to entrust civil society to the next generation, and to help young people enter the public discourse, was to teach rhetoric. Rhetoric is imperfect, and it can be misused. Certainly the adage is true: “Whoever does not study rhetoric will be a victim of it.” On the other hand, because it requires evidence, clarity, and ethical behavior as the support structure of an argument, rhetoric can help to create the kind of sustained and careful thinking that is needed for properly understanding the problems of our day.

Here, in the thesis exercise, all the best of rhetoric finds its full expression. The thesis essay and the thesis speech are, with little competition, two of the best ways to train our young people in civil communication and principled critical thinking. To those ends this book is dedicated.

A Typical Teaching Week

These guidelines are intended to help bring some predictability to lesson planning.

Although the elements of grammar are important aspects of this course, its primary focus is writing and rhetoric. We recommend that you teach a simple, but rich, grammar curriculum in parallel with the lessons in *Writing & Rhetoric: Thesis Part 1*. By simple, we mean to suggest that you avoid a grammar program with a writing component. Two different writing methods would most likely work against each other and cause an imbalance in the school day. Instead, look for a grammar program that focuses on grammatical concepts, provides plenty of practice sentences, and encourages diagramming.

You may want to provide same-day grammar instruction several days a week, preferably separating Writing & Rhetoric from grammar study by an hour or two. Or, you may want to alternate weeks between a grammar program and Writing & Rhetoric. This requires some negotiation in your language arts program for the year. If you aim to do two Writing & Rhetoric books per school year, that would equal approximately twenty lessons. The introductory lessons (1–6) each can be completed in a week. The essay-writing lessons (7–10) each may take two or three weeks to complete. You will have to choose a grammar program with this consideration in mind.

Please note that multiple opportunities for practice are built into the Writing & Rhetoric series. If you find that your students have mastered a particular form of writing, you should feel free to skip some lessons. In this case, some teachers choose to present the literature from skipped lessons as part of their history or English lessons. Some teachers may also provide their students with practice in summarizing, critical thinking, and sentence manipulation by doing only the Tell It Back, Talk About It, and Copiousness sections from skipped lessons.

The following table illustrates some possible options for scheduling lessons. As always with Writing & Rhetoric, teachers have the freedom to pick and choose the lesson elements, schedule, and pace that suits the needs of their classrooms. You can even schedule each lesson over two weeks if your students need the extra time.

Lessons 1–6, Option 1

Day 1 ● Read lesson introduction ● Tell back (narrate or summarize) text (Tell It Back) ● Engage in Talk About It discussions	Day 2 ● Work on Write & Discuss exercise ● Begin Go Deeper if time allows
Day 3 ● Continue to work on Go Deeper	Day 4 (if needed) ● Finish Go Deeper

Lessons 1–6, Option 2

Day 1 ● Read part of lesson introduction, assign remainder for homework	Day 2 ● Tell back (narrate or summarize) text (Tell It Back) ● Engage in Talk About It discussions ● Work on Write & Discuss exercise	
Day 3 ● Begin Go Deeper	Day 4 ● Continue to work on Go Deeper	Day 5 (if needed) ● Finish Go Deeper

Lessons 7–10, Option 1^A

Day 1 ● Read lesson introduction ● Tell back (narrate or summarize) text (Tell It Back) ● Annotate text if time allows, or assign for homework (Tell It Back) ● Engage in Talk About It discussions	Day 2 ● Work on readings and follow-up exercises (lesson 9) or Writing Time exercises (lessons 7–8, 10)	
Day 3 ● Continue to work on readings and exercises or Writing Time exercises	Day 4 ● Engage in Speak It exercises ● Continue to work on readings and exercises or Writing Time exercises	Day 5 ● Work through Revise It section

Lessons 7–10, Option 2

Day 1 ● Read part of lesson introduction, assign remainder for homework ● Assign annotations for homework (Tell It Back)	Day 2 ● Tell back (narrate or summarize) text (Tell It Back) ● Engage in Talk About It discussions ● Work on readings and follow-up exercises (lesson 9) or Writing Time exercises (lessons 7–8, 10)	
Day 3 ● Continue to work on readings and exercises or Writing Time exercises	Day 4 ● Engage in Speak It exercises ● Continue to work on readings and exercises or Writing Time exercises	Day 5 ● Work through Revise It section

^AThere will be some exceptions to these schedules in lessons 9 and 10 based on variations in their format. Teachers will need to adjust the schedule accordingly for those lessons.

Day One

1. The teacher models fluency by reading the introductory text aloud while students follow along silently. If the lesson introduction contains a longer reading, such as a short story or a biography, teachers may read part of the selection in class as a “teaser” and assign the remainder for homework, or simply assign the entire reading for homework.
2. Tell It Back and Talk About It should immediately follow the reading of the text, while the text is still fresh in the students’ minds. (In lesson 9 there are multiple Tell It Back and Talk About It sections that follow each reading. They should be completed at whatever pace the class goes through the readings. There is no Tell It Back or Talk About It work for lesson 10.) Annotation can be an important aid to memory for longer readings, and it is included under Tell It Back in certain lessons in this book as part of the reading process. If time allows, students can complete their annotations in class, or annotation can be assigned for homework. If the lesson reading is assigned as homework (see previous step), annotation also can be assigned for homework and teachers can engage students with Tell It Back and Talk About It the following day.

Narration, the process of “telling back,” can be done in a variety of ways. Pairs of students can retell the text to each other, or selected individuals can narrate orally to the entire class. Solo students can tell back the text into a recording device or to an instructor. Students in middle or high school are capable of written summary narrations, which is the focus in this book. Summary writing should be completed individually and then can be shared with the class as desired. At this age, narrative summaries, outlines, and dramatic reenactments can be done with skill.

The process of narration is intended to improve comprehension and long-term memory. Please note that oral narration, often emphasized for younger students, can still be useful for older students, particularly those who struggle with writing. If you prefer longer, in-depth oral narration to the written summary narrations in this book, please consider these tips:

- Avoid rereading a passage to students. Let them rely on the strength of their memories. Students will pay more attention if they know they will hear a passage only once and be expected to tell it back.
- Remember that oral narrations are typically detailed retellings in chronological order, complete with names, events, and rich vocabulary words.
- Ask other students to assist if the narrator falters in his or her retelling. Be sure, however, to give enough quiet space for the narrator to think clearly about what he or she has just heard. Don’t be hasty to jump in and “rescue” a narrator.

Annotation can help a student easily locate vocabulary words, proper nouns, and important concepts for drafting essays.

Talk About It is designed to help students analyze the meaning of their reading and to see analogous situations, both in the world and in their own lives. This book also includes several opportunities for picture analysis.

Days Two and Three

1. If some or all of the lesson reading was assigned for homework on day 1, Tell It Back and Talk About It can be completed on day 2. If only annotations were completed as homework, the teacher might engage students in conversations about the important ideas they underlined or the questions they jotted down in the margins.
2. In lessons 1–6, students will encounter the Write & Discuss exercise in which short writing assignments precede class discussions. Writing is always an excellent way to improve the quality of participation in any academic conversation. By giving students time to consider their answers on paper, teachers will find that even quiet and reticent students are more likely to engage in the discussion. Following Write & Discuss, students work with the text through the Go Deeper exercises. Go Deeper is all about practicing important skills essential to each lesson.

In lessons 7, 8, and 10, students will work through the Writing Time section, which includes copiousness and the thesis exercises themselves. You will probably want to take multiple days for this step.

Lesson 9 contains readings and comprehension exercises that will help students complete the thesis essay in lesson 10.

Day Four

1. Students may need the fourth day (or more) to complete the Go Deeper and Writing Time exercises (or the readings and exercises in lesson 9).

In lessons 7, 8, and 10, if students complete the first draft of their thesis essays by day 3, we recommend that they take a breather from writing while they work on their speaking skills. Keeping a day between essay completion and revision helps students to look at their work with fresh eyes. However, teachers may find it valuable to pair students together to read their essays out loud and give each other ideas for revision. A rubric is included at the back of the book as an aid to partner feedback or grading by teachers.

2. The Speak It section creates opportunities for students to memorize, recite, discuss and debate, and read dramatically. Please consider using a recording device whenever it suits the situation. When using electronics, students should listen to their recordings to get an idea of what sounds right and what needs to be improved. Have students read the elocution instructions at the back of the book to help them work on skill in delivery. Speak It does not appear in lessons 1–6 and 9, and no work is required on day 4 for those lessons.

Day Five

At this level, students will continue to work toward a foundation in revision. The Revise It section provides basic exercises that develop students' skills in revision and proofreading. Revise It also provides a list that covers some of the most important steps toward improving an essay. Most students can do moderate self-editing at this age and provide thoughtful feedback to each other. However, teachers are still the best source for giving editorial feedback and requesting rewrites. Revise It does not appear in lessons 1–6 and 9, and no work is required on day 5 for those lessons.

Introduction to Students

You may not realize it, but you’ve just walked into a gym. No, no—of course not the kind of gym where you pump iron. You won’t be doing biceps curls, leg presses, and barbell lifts here! What I mean is that you’ve entered a writing gym. This is the place for you to do your sentence curls, your critical-thinking presses, and your composition lifts. It goes without saying that the more you lift weights, the stronger your muscles become. Similarly, the more you work out with pencil, pen, and keyboard, the stronger your writing muscles become.

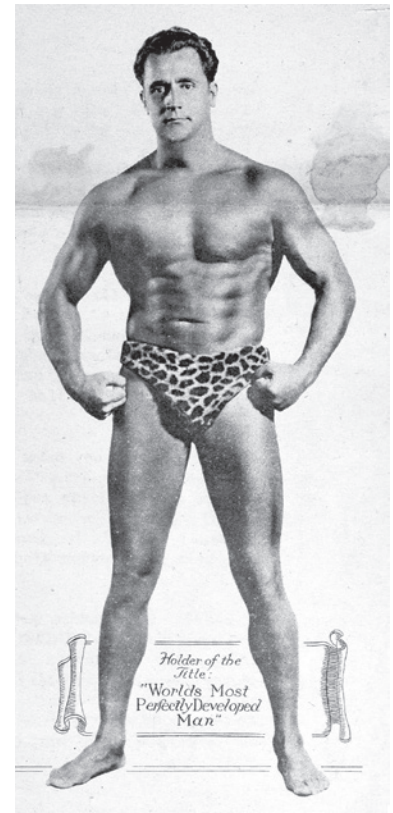
If you’ve been with us for a while, you know that these writing exercises are called the *progymnasmata*. They’ve been around for over 2,000 years, but nobody knows how ancient they really are.¹ They were created in the Greek-speaking part of the Roman Empire and they were used by schools to train the best writers and teachers in all of Rome. You can see most of the word “gymnasium” in *progymnasmata*, which means “preliminary exercises.”

Milo of Kroton knew the value of weight training some 2,500 years ago. He was a famous athlete who grew up in the Greek colony of Kroton, which was located in southern Italy. When he was just a kid, Milo decided that he could build his muscles by pumping beef . . . literally! He would walk around with a baby calf in his arms and lift that calf above his head. As the calf grew heavier, Milo kept lifting it. And as that calf grew into a full-sized bull, he still lifted it daily and his muscles grew stronger. No wonder Milo won six Olympic titles for wrestling! It was relatively easy to throw a man down when he could lug a bull around. That’s what the legends tell us, anyway.

Instead of lugging around a growing bull, you have been writing compositions that grow in difficulty. Writing exercises such as these *progymnasmata* build from simple forms to more complex, and from concrete ideas to more abstract. In this series, you’ve written fables, narratives, chreias, refutations, confirmations, commonplaces, encomia, vituperations, comparisons, descriptions, impersonations, and now—ta dah!—at long last you’ve reached thesis. Thesis is the last stage of rippin’ those writing muscles before you get to formal rhetoric! You could say that it’s the supreme workout.

If this is your first time to join us in the gym, there’s no better exercise to get started with than thesis. It brings together the four modes of writing and discourse—narration, description, exposition, and persuasion—and it strengthens your ability to make an argument, organize your thoughts, and supply evidence. Thesis works every one of your writing muscles! You’ve got two books ahead to learn all about thesis writing and why this essay form is so important to your life and your ability to communicate personally and professionally. Consider these books to be your personal trainers.

OK, so come on now, let’s get those muscles working! Let’s break a sweat. Let’s make ’em burn!



▲ This is me, the author. Actually, this is Charles Atlas, the famous twentieth-century strongman. However, you can bet my writing muscles are every bit as developed.

"The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" circa 1935. Image courtesy of Wellcome Images, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%22The_World%27s_Most_Perfectly_Developed_Man%22_Wellcome_L0027452.jpg.

1. The oldest surviving text of the *progymnasmata* dates back to the first century and was written by a teacher of rhetoric named Aelius Theon of Alexandria.

Introduction

Two thousand-plus years ago, the Greeks developed a system of persuasive speaking known as rhetoric. The Romans fell in love with rhetoric because it both was practical for the real world and served the need of training orators in their growing republic. In order to prepare their students for oration, the Romans invented a complementary system of persuasive writing known as the *progymnasmata*: *pro-* meaning “preliminary” and *gymnas* meaning “exercises.” The *progymnasmata* were the primary method used in Graeco-Roman schools to teach young people the elements of rhetoric. This happened in a grammar school (called a *grammaticus*) sometime around the age of ten for upper-class students.

There are several ancient “*progymns*” still in existence. The most influential *progymns* were by Hermogenes of Tarsus, who lived in the second century, and by Aphthonius of Antioch, who lived during the fourth century just as the western Roman Empire was collapsing. Even after the great cities of Rome lay in ruins, the *progym* continued as the primary method for teaching writing during the Middle Ages and even into early modern times.

The Writing & Rhetoric series is based on the *progymnasmata* of ancient Rome. This method assumes that students learn best by reading excellent examples of literature and by growing their writing skills through imitation. It is incremental, meaning that it goes from simpler exercises to more complex exercises, and it moves from the concrete to the abstract. One of the beauties of the *progym* is that it grows with the student through the stages of childhood development that are dubbed by modern classical educators as the “trivium,” a term borrowed from medieval education.¹ These exercises effectively take a young writer from the grammar phase through the logic phase and finally to the rhetoric phase.

In a democracy such as Athens or a republic such as Rome, rhetoric was a powerful way to enter into public conversations. In the words of Yale rhetorician Charles Sears Baldwin, “Rhetoric is conceived by Aristotle as the art of giving effectiveness to the truth.” He adds that “the true theory of rhetoric is the energizing of knowledge, the bringing of truth to bear upon men. . . .” Rhetoric thus had an intentional public purpose, that is, to persuade people to embrace truth and its corollaries: goodness and beauty. It was designed to enjoin right behavior by holding up to public scrutiny examples of virtue and wickedness. Of course, the person using rhetoric was also supposed to be virtuous—above all honest and just.

There is an urgency and a real purpose to rhetoric. It was never meant to be empty forms of speaking and composition. It was never meant to be only eloquence and skill of delivery. It was certainly never meant to be manipulative sound bites and commercials made to benefit an unscrupulous political or economic class. Rather, it was intended for every citizen as a means to engage articulately with the urgent ideas of the day. As the old saying goes, “Whoever does not learn rhetoric will be a victim of it.”

1. In medieval times, the trivium was originally the lower division of the seven liberal arts. For the modern idea that these studies correspond to childhood development, please refer to Dorothy Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*.

The best preparation for rhetoric is still the *progymnasmata*, the preliminary exercises. In this book you will find these exercises creatively updated to meet the needs of modern children. We have embraced the method both as it was used for Roman youth and as it develops the skills demanded by contemporary education.

- It teaches the four modes of discourse—narration, exposition, description, and argumentation—while at the same time blending them for maximum persuasive impact.
- It is incremental, moving from easier forms to harder forms. The level of challenge is appropriate for students as they mature with the program.
- It uses “living” stories, from ancient to modern, and is not stuck in any particular time period. Rather, it follows a timeline of history so that the stories can be integrated with history lessons.
- Its stories engage the imagination and also spark a desire in young people to imitate them. In this way, Writing & Rhetoric avoids the “blank-page syndrome” that can paralyze many nascent writers by giving students a model from which to write.
- It promotes virtue by lifting up clear-cut examples of good and bad character.
- It fosters the joy of learning by providing opportunities for creative self-expression as well as classroom fun.
- It uses speaking to enhance the development of persuasive writing.
- It teaches students to recognize and use the three persuasive appeals to an audience: pathos, ethos, and logos.
- It provides opportunities for students to learn from other students’ work as well as to present their own work.

As educators, I think we need to admit that teaching writing is difficult. This is because writing makes big demands on cognitive function and, for many young writers, can easily become overwhelming. Our brains need to simultaneously

- utilize motor skills
- process vocabulary
- sequence and organize ideas
- employ grammatical concepts
- and draw upon a reservoir of good writing—hopefully the reservoir exists—as a template for new writing

That’s a tall order. Also, writing contains a subjective element. It’s not as clear-cut as math. And when you add argumentation to the mix, you have a very complex process indeed. To be properly educated, every person needs to be able to make and understand arguments.

It is from this list of complexities that a desire for a relatively easy-to-implement curriculum was born. While the task of teaching writing is difficult, it is my sincere belief that reconnecting the tree of modern composition to its classical roots in rhetoric will refresh the entire process. Regardless of your personal writing history, I trust that these books will provide a happy and rewarding experience for your students.



The *Progym* and the Practice of Modern Writing

Although the *progym* are an ancient method of approaching writing, they are extraordinarily relevant today. This is because modern composition developed from the *progym*. Modern writing borrows heavily from many of the *progym*'s various exercises. For example, modern stories are essentially unchanged from the ancient fable and narrative forms. Modern expository essays contain elements from the ancient commonplace, encomium/vituperation, and other *progym* exercises. Persuasive essays of today are basically the same as the ancient thesis exercises, although often (unfortunately) missing the robust challenge of antithesis. In this series, you can expect your students to grow in all forms of modern composition—narrative, expository, descriptive, and persuasive—while at the same time developing unique rhetorical muscle.

The *progym* cover many elements of a standard English and Language Arts curriculum. In *Thesis Part 1* these include:²

- experiencing both the reading of a story (sight) and listening to it (hearing)
- identifying a variety of genres, including description, history, short story, biography, and autobiography
- determining the meaning of words and phrases, including figures of speech, as they are used in a text
- increasing knowledge of vocabulary by considering word meaning, word order, and transitions
- analyzing text that is organized in sequential or chronological order
- demonstrating an understanding of texts by annotating, summarizing, and paraphrasing in ways that maintain meaning and logical order within a text
- gathering relevant information from multiple sources, and annotating sources
- drawing evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research
- articulating an understanding of ideas or images communicated by the literary work
- establishing a central idea or topic
- composing a topic sentence and creating an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped into coherent paragraphs to support the writer's purpose
- supporting claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources, facts, and details
- writing informative (explanatory) and descriptive texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly

2. This list was derived from the Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Title 19, Part II, Chapter 110: Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for English Language Arts and Reading (<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter110/index.html>), the Core Knowledge Foundation's Core Knowledge Sequence: Content and Skill Guidelines for Grades K-8 (http://www.coreknowledge.org/mimik/mimik_uploads/documents/480/CKFSequence_Rev.pdf), the English-Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/elacontentstnds.pdf>), the English Language Arts Standards of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>), the English/Language Arts Standards Grade 6, Indiana Department of Education (<http://www.doe.in.gov/standards/englishlanguage-arts>), and the English Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools, Grade 7 (http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2010/stds_all_english.pdf).

- developing the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples
- providing a concluding statement or section that follows from the topic presented
- using precise language and domain-specific vocabulary
- using appropriate transitions to clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts
- producing clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience
- avoiding plagiarism through summary
- with some guidance and support from peers and adults, developing and strengthening writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach
- using technology as an aid to revision and oration
- using pictures and photos to analyze and interpret the past
- participating civilly and productively in group discussions

While these standards are certainly worthwhile and are addressed in this curriculum, the *progym* derive their real strength from the incremental and thorough development of each form of writing. The Writing & Rhetoric series does not skip from form to form and leave the others behind. Rather, it builds a solid foundation of mastery by blending the forms. For example, no expository essay can truly be effective without description. No persuasive essay can be convincing without narrative. All good narrative writing requires description, and all good persuasive writing requires expository elements. Not only do the *progym* demand strong organization and implement many of the elements of modern language arts, but they also retain all of the power of classical rhetoric.

Here is how the *progym* develop each stage of modern composition:

1. Fable—Narrative
2. Narrative—Narrative with descriptive elements
3. Chreia & Proverb—Expository essay with narrative, descriptive, and persuasive elements
4. Refutation & Confirmation—Persuasive essay with narrative, descriptive, and expository elements
5. Commonplace—Persuasive essay with narrative, descriptive, and expository elements
6. Encomium & Vituperation—Persuasive essay with narrative, descriptive, and expository elements
7. Comparison—Comparative essay with narrative, descriptive, and expository elements
8. Description & Impersonation—Descriptive essay with narrative, expository, persuasive, and comparative elements
9. Thesis Part 1—Persuasive essay with narrative, descriptive, expository, and comparative elements
10. Thesis Part 2—Persuasive speech with narrative, descriptive, expository, and comparative elements, as well as the three rhetorical appeals
11. Declamation—Persuasive essay or speech that marshals all the elements of the *progym* and brings them to bear upon judicial matters

As you can see, the *progym* move quickly to establish the importance of one form to another.

Objectives for *Thesis Part 1*

The following are some of the major objectives for the exercises found in each section of this book:

Reading

1. Expose students to narrative, autobiographical, and philosophical writing.
2. Model fluent reading for students and give them practice reading diverse texts.
3. Aid student reading and recall by teaching techniques for annotation.
4. Facilitate student interaction with well-written texts through discussions and exercises in evaluation and critical thinking.

Writing

1. Enhance research skills by giving students multiple texts to read and having them summarize and create a topic from the material.
2. Support the development of invention (inventing topics and ideas to write about).
3. Grow awareness of different types of audiences along with the purpose of the author.
4. Introduce a wide variety of essay “hooks” to help capture audience attention.
5. Encourage students to map (prewrite) their information before they write a paragraph.
6. Strengthen descriptive capabilities with an emphasis on specific, vivid words and sensorial language.
7. Support students in writing thesis essays focused on literary and thematic analysis, as well as on answering the speculative question, “What is beauty?” These essays include the development of an awareness of transitions, tone, and writing style.
8. Practice writing theses, topic sentences, and antitheses.
9. Improve conclusions so that they extend and enhance the original thesis.
10. Strengthen the skill of deriving information from texts and organizing and summarizing it in expository paragraphs.
11. Continue the development of revision, proofreading, and joint critiquing.
12. Grow awareness of the stylistic vices of redundancy, padding, mixing formal and informal language, dangling modifiers, and faulty predication.
13. Increase understanding of formal and informal language.
14. Reinforce grammatical concepts.

Related Concepts

1. Aid in the development of vocabulary and analysis of language.
2. Strengthen students’ power of observation.
3. Reinforce the ability to summarize and paraphrase, as well as to amplify through description, for greater rhetorical flexibility.
4. Strengthen working memory through recitation (*memoria*), thus improving storage of information and rhetorical power.
5. Increase understanding of the flexibility and copiousness of language by practicing sentence variety.

Speaking

1. Strengthen students’ oratory skills by providing opportunities for public speaking and for working on delivery—volume, pacing, and inflection.
2. Practice tone and inflection by means of dramatic reading.
3. Encourage students to see the relationship between writing and speaking as they consider their ideas orally and to use oration as an aid to the process of revision.