

Classical Education | An overview of the Developmental Stages

Classical education depends on a three-part process of training the mind. This classical pattern is called the trivium | **Grammar. Logic. Rhetoric.**

Grades 1-4 | Grammar | The early years of school are spent absorbing facts, systematically laying the foundations for advanced study.

The first years of schooling are called the “grammar stage” — not because you spend four years doing English, but because these are the years in which the building blocks for all other learning are laid, just as grammar is the foundation for language.

In the elementary school years the mind is ready to absorb information. Rules of phonics and spelling, rules of grammar, poems, the vocabulary of foreign languages, the stories of history and literature, descriptions of plants and animals and the human body, the facts of mathematics — the list goes on.

Grades 5-8 | Logic | In the middle grades, students learn to think through arguments.

By fifth grade, a child’s mind begins to think more analytically. Middle-school students are less interested in finding out facts than in asking “Why?”

The second phase of the classical education is a time when the child begins to pay attention to cause and effect, to the relationships between different fields of knowledge relate, to the way facts fit together into a logical framework

Grades 9-12 | Rhetoric | In the high school years, students learn to express themselves.

A student is ready for the Logic Stage when the capacity for abstract thought begins to mature.

The final phase of a classical education builds on the first two. At this point, the high school student learns to write and speak with force and originality.

The Trivium | The developmental stages of a classical education are more than simply a pattern of learning.

Classical education is language-focused; learning is accomplished through words, written and spoken, rather than through images (pictures, videos, and television).

Language-learning and image-learning require very different habits of thought. Language requires the mind to work harder; in reading, the brain is forced to translate a symbol (words on the page) into a concept. Faced with the written page, the mind is required to roll its sleeves up and get to work. Images, such as those on videos and television, allow the mind to be passive.

To the classical mind, all knowledge is interrelated. Astronomy (for example) isn’t studied in isolation; it’s learned along with the history of scientific discovery, which leads into the church’s relationship to science and from there to the intricacies of medieval church history.