

## An Introduction to the Trivium Method

- For Critical Thinking and Creative Problem Solving -

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*"For if you [the rulers] suffer your people to be ill-educated, and their manners to be corrupted from their infancy, and then punish them for those crimes to which their first education disposed them, what else is to be concluded from this, but that you first make thieves [outlaws] and then punish them."*

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- Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), *Utopia*, Book 1

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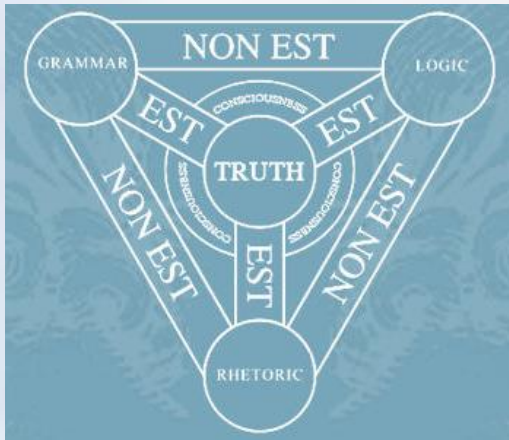
Today, we can witness the accumulated negative effects of having omitted the three steps of learning how to learn from our school curriculums. These three are:

- |                              |               |
|------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. General Grammar           | - The input   |
| 2. Formal Aristotelian Logic | - The process |
| 3. Classical Rhetoric        | - The output  |

And together they form the integrated, classical *Trivium*, which is a Latin word meaning "the place where three roads meet." Of course, those are the three metaphorical "roads" listed above, and they should be "traveled" in the specific order they have been given. However, to avoid confusion we will refer to them as *parts*, or *steps*, from here on. So, these steps, also form the first three of the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences. The last four parts are called the *Quadrivium*, and they are:

- |               |                               |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Arithmetic | - Or number                   |
| 2. Geometry   | - Or number in space          |
| 3. Music      | - Or number in time           |
| 4. Astronomy  | - Or number in space and time |
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In a Classical Primary and Secondary Education curriculum, the components of the Trivium are presented to students to train them in learning how to learn, and at the same time in how to think systematically in a logically valid way.



**IMPORTANT:** The Trivium is presented to, in the grammar stage, methodically gather raw, factual data into a coherent body of knowledge. Then, in the dialectic or logic stage, to gain understanding of that body by systematically eliminating all found contradictions within it. And, finally, in the rhetoric stage, to wisely express and utilize that valid knowledge and understanding in the real world.

## 1. Grammar - Knowledge of that which exists

1.1. Answers the four questions below of a subject.

- |        |                  |
|--------|------------------|
| Who?   | - The entities   |
| What?  | - The transpired |
| Where? | - The location   |
| When?  | - The time       |

## 2. Logic - Understanding of the interrelationships of that which exists

2.1 Answers the *Why* of a subject.

## 3. Rhetoric - Communication of Grammar and Logic

3.1 Provides the *How* of a subject.

Please remember that the order is important. And that the question “What?” especially should not be based on presupposition. For example: a man treating a woman poorly does not prove the existence of patriarchy, or that men in general oppress women. Why? Because the man might treat other men the same way. And some women might treat other women poorly in the exact same way. Ergo, more data is needed to reach a conclusion.

**GRAMMAR:** This step discovers and orders facts of reality, and includes basic, systematic Knowledge. It is not simply concerned with the rules developed and applied to the ordering of words and concepts, for verbal expression and communication, but it is our first contact with conscious order as such. This is the initial, self-conscious technique used in properly organize a body of knowledge, discursively or sequentially, from raw, factual data. And it is done for the purpose of gaining understanding, through logic, and thus, also organizing the individual human mind. It is the foundation upon which all other methods of organization and order are built.

*Special* grammar properly relates words to other words within a specified language like English, Russian, or Latin. *General* grammar relates words to objective reality, in any language, and applies to all subjects as the first set of building blocks to integrated, objective knowledge. And such a body of knowledge, which has been gathered and arranged under the rules of general grammar, can always be subjected to logic. Which will, in time, yield a full understanding But this is a separate intellectual procedure and falls under the next step of the Trivium.

**LOGIC:** This step develops the faculty of reason and establishes valid, non-contradictory, relationships among facts. It also yields basic, systematic understanding, and is a guide for thinking correctly, without logical fallacies. More concisely, it is the art of non-contradictory identification. The work of logic is proof. And proof consists of establishing the truth and validity of a concept, or a proposition, in correspondence with objective, factual reality. Something which is achieved by following a self-consistent chain of higher-level thought back down to foundational, primary concepts or axioms, meaning Existence, Consciousness, and Causality. It is a means of keeping us in touch with, and grounded in, objective reality in our search for valid knowledge and understanding. Logic brings the rhythm of the subjective thoughts of the mind, and the subsequent actions of the body, into harmony with the rhythm of the objective universe.

**RHETORIC:** This step applies knowledge and understanding and expressively includes Wisdom. Or, in other words, this step consists of systematically useable knowledge and understanding that allows us to explore and find the proper choice of methods for coherently expressing our conclusions. And, naturally, those would be the conclusions reached through grammar and logic, on any subject whether it be in writing or verbal argumentation. The announcement of those conclusions is called a statement of rationale. The set of instructions deduced from the rationale, for the purpose of application of those conclusions, in the real world is called a statement of protocols.

**THE SYSTEM:**

1. Discovering and arranging a body of Knowledge under general grammar.
2. Fully Understanding that Knowledge under formal logic.
3. Wisely expressing that Knowledge and Understanding under classical rhetoric.

The above are three distinctly different but interrelated disciplines which yield Objective, Verifiable Truth, when applied as an integrated unit.

**MOVING FORWARD WITH THE TRIVIUM METHOD**

When we have become conversant with this three-fold procedural pattern, we are then capable of teaching ourselves how to learn any established subject. And it can be done with minimal guidance from an instructor or facilitator. The subjects can range from the Quadrivium to physics, chemistry, history, or philosophy. In fact, it becomes possible to fully grasp any propositional topic one is motivated to focus upon. For example, current sociological and political issues, newly developing scientific hypotheses, or historical and literary analyses. In other words, through the process of learning how to learn, one learns how to critically and creatively think for oneself - and that sums up the process in short.

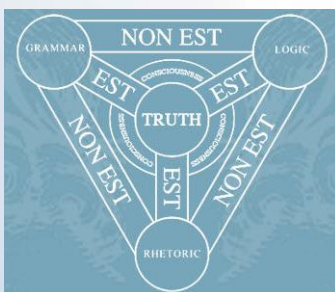
The first step to thinking systematically is learning the elements of a proposition, or subject, in order to critically define a problem or an opportunity. This is done in the grammar and logic stages. Once defined, we use our creative thought capacity to solve the problem or find ways to take advantage of the opportunity. The classical rhetorical step accomplishes this task.



Following the above-given steps makes us a first-hand, independent thinker rather than a second-hand, dependent thinker. In not relying on our own organized thoughts we easily develop low self-esteem. And as a second-hand thinker, we risk having our minds filled the ideas and opinions of various so-called authorities. This could be the mass media and its advertising, professionals, and politicians, some of whom may be unscrupulous; officials, both benign and despotic, in schools and in the workplace. The first-hand mode, using the Trivium's three steps of organizing, is, in fact, the way the human mind naturally orders itself for effective thinking. The problem is that this process is aggressively discouraged by various entrenched factions in society, those self-perceived and self-proclaimed guardians of convention. To state the process in its simplest form, the three steps in order answer the five questions that begin a 'W.' Plus, how to identify knowledge and how it is interrelated in the context of its surroundings, producing objective and verifiable understanding:

A major reason the one-roomed school house of the past, where all students were taught by one instructor and upperclassmen, was successful was that it used the Trivium Method of Education. And the same is true for the homeschooling movement that is now gaining traction.

Success, in this context, is in producing appropriately critical, creative, self-sufficient individuals who become equipped to attract intellectual abundance into their lives. As well as that which naturally follows from it, which is material abundance. Although in moderation, not in excess.

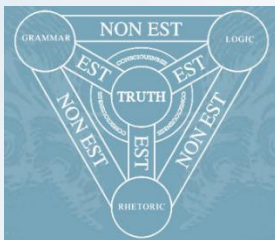


**IMPORTANT:** If a person has not been exposed to the Trivium method, it is difficult to communicate to them the serenity-of-mind and self-assurance that this competence provides. To have the ability to appropriately validate one's own thinking, as well as the thinking and doctrines of others, brings a kind of spiritual abundance that must be experienced.

No amount of personal counseling or therapy can generate the self-esteem of having the ability to orient ourselves in body and mind in the world. And we do this through what is our most distinguishing attribute: that of our own rational thinking applied in a systematic manner. And the steps of the Trivium are the foundation of a system to do just that, and it produces an intuitive means to learn new material. Not only during periods devoted to formal instruction, but over an entire lifetime.

As the study and practice of music allow the hands to intuitively and immediately produce melody on a piano, for instance, so the study and practice of the Trivium produce intuitive and immediate critical and creative thought.

As it is the method of knowing a subject, rather than only the study of a subject, it is truly the most fundamental preparation for leading a successful life. A gift every child, adolescent, and adult should be presented with, and that we should all learn, to elevate us to the dignity of self-determination.



**IMPORTANT:** It is stressed that the Trivium forms a habitual and methodological pattern-of-mind of *how* to think, not *what* to think. It gives our minds an ever-improving map, which corresponds to the terrain, and is always improving itself; for the purposes of our survival and satisfaction in life.

As an added bonus, this is a serene pursuit. Because this is a method devoted to the ‘how’ of thinking, it is not controversial. It is in the topics of ‘what’ to think, like religion, literature, philosophy, and modern science; that controversy reigns.

The problem is, “General Education” has not been the focus of the contemporary schooling establishment but, rather, social engineering. It is a vile form of miseducation that has been going on for much too long.

After adopting the Prussian Education method in America, in the middle to late-19th century, this fault in educating our nation, from the perspective of the general citizenry, was compounded by applying the dangerous tenets of the Pragmatic Philosophy devised by William James and John Dewey. The "party line" is that children need to be surrounded by their peers in order to socialize properly in preparing them for life. Socialization is a natural process to people, it need not be taught to them; or, more to the point, programmed in them.

Children need to be around family, neighbors, and a few close, genuine friends when younger; and participants in social, civic, and charitable organizations in adolescence. The friends and organizations just described have their time and place in a young person's life, they are not all-consuming intrusions as modern primary and secondary schooling establishments try to make themselves.

There are self-serving, domineering social entities which perceive a gain from having us presented with only the protocols of a field of study. And having the rationale of that field of study withheld from us. The knowledge of the rationale of subjects for understanding and the protocols for the expression, or application, of those subjects comprises what is addressed in a "General Education."

The "rationale" provides the all-important understanding as to why a subject or proposition is integrated and self-intelligible by presenting the entire thought process, the validated arguments, behind the rationale's conclusions. The "protocol" is a set of instructions, spawned by the consolidated understanding of the rationale, with which to manifest an expressed outcome.

By presenting only protocols, outcome-based education is the openly stated goal of public schooling, not general, understanding-based education. Therefore it is, in reality, mind control or "programming." Our country is populated by the products of this policy, people who have been presented with only protocols, and who have simply committed those protocols to memory. These "products" are designed to be obedient soldiers, pliable employees, imprudent consumers of goods and services, and otherwise uncritical servants of established corporate and statist interests.

In not being trained to think critically and creatively, students are programmed in reading and thinking only to the level of abiding by instructions. Such as those coming from a procedural manual or from "on high," issued by so-called authorities.

Unfortunately, this is a mind-numbing way of acting which becomes insidiously habituated. To be under the rule of taskmasters; to be dictated as to what to think by others or via the media; to labor under the illusion of being a well-informed individual; to become a stillborn adult, a life-long adolescent, these are the results of our century-old institution. The ideal of self-determination is trampled mercilessly and in its place grows self-alienation.

Today, we are aggressively indoctrinated not to think. Meaning we are being programmed to go against our very nature. So, is it any wonder most of us live in a constant state of low-level fear? Or that we may feel anxiously disoriented, as if in an ocean of chaos? Without the ability to judge what are appropriate and beneficial goods and values, such feelings are easily developed. We cannot long live or maintain health without our primary means of survival, the exercise of our rational thought.

If we are trained in the use of the Trivium Method, not only can we learn topics on our own. But we can also deduce particular rationale from particular protocols and, of course, the inverse. We can also develop intellectual and value judgment of a high order. Through the efficient attainment of knowledge and understanding, our intellectual capacities are awakened. We will be comfortable at all levels of intellect, lower, higher, and subtle. We can look at the world, or anything else, with clarity and discernment.

Then we can act accordingly and with assurance. Said simply, we can thrive in the living of life. One of the several tests to show if we have reached this awakened state of education is when we can thoroughly and critically entertain various ideas without necessarily embracing them. That is, we come into possession of a truly open mind, and we free ourselves from our own opinions and prejudices.

Because of the universality of its application, the Trivium, as it has for at least the last six millennia, provides its adherents with effectiveness in responding to most questions and situations encountered in life.

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## ESSENTIAL TERMS

**1. Existence:** Every entity, action, attribute, and relationship that is, was, or ever will be.

1.1 This definition describes every noun, adjective, verb, etc. in the English language.

1.1.1 It encompasses all word-related concepts in objective reality.

**2. Identity:** That which an existent is; the sum total of its attributes or characteristics.

2.1 As opposed to that which does not exist, the arbitrary and insubstantial.

**3. Consciousness:** The faculty of awareness of that which exists.

3.1 Questions, meaning "thinking" is the sign of consciousness in human beings.

3.1.1 Descartes questioning his existence results in "Cogito ergo sum," which means I think therefore I am. This can be further explained as "Existence exists, I observe existence with my five senses and think about it. Therefore I am conscious of my existence."

**4. Validation:** The process of establishing an ideology's relation to reality or existence.

**5. Law of Causality:** An entity must act in accord with its nature. This is a corollary to "Identity" mentioned above.

**6. Logic:** The art of non-contradictory identification.

6.1 The method by which we can validly think for ourselves.

Authors can use the Trivium method to aid in their writing. Because in its most fundamental form, Systematic Wisdom is the art of efficiently passing thoughts from one person to another. And it is not any thought, but validated and logically sound thought, which is the essence of any coherent communication.

Please note that the internet can be a valuable adjunct to the concepts presented above. A simple word search on any of the technical terms in this document should suffice to bring any further clarification that is needed. So as to allow the implementation of a useful rhetorical dissertation.

## **A SUMMARY OF WISDOM OR RHETORIC**

1. The work of Wisdom is the coherently expressed communication of Knowledge and Understanding. It leads to higher levels of knowledge and understanding: the knowing of Knowledge and the understanding of Understanding.
2. The effect of Wisdom is to demonstrate the usefulness of Knowledge and Understanding. That is, it is to display the insight, the thought process, in an article of persuasion or in the formulation of an outcome.
3. Through the skilled use of rhetoric, all planned human activity can be communicated and directed. This is a two-edged sword. Rhetoric or Wisdom can be directed to beneficial or to malevolent goals.

Let us end by reviewing some of the personal benefits which are inherent in the Trivium Method. The following will be most efficiently and effectively realized by using the Trivium to train the mind for critical and creative thinking:

1. The path to a challenging, productive livelihood can be intelligently defined.
2. Sound physical health, a judicious ethical standard, a high level of self-esteem and the sense of well-being can be optimized.
3. Rewarding personal relationships will manifest through the cultivation of beneficial ethics and well-being.
4. The astuteness to best discern the issues, meaning the quality of information, regarding security will be developed.

Even though this document is coming to a close, this is only the beginning. An adherent of the Method can acquire elevated levels of penetrating insight which would otherwise not be available. Through that insight, he can also self-teach the contents of a propositional argument or of an entire, formalized subject of knowledge if he chooses to bring his -likewise -heightened focus to doing so.

When a culture's government, education systems, and news media are not corrupt, the constant need for "fact checking" is not as critical as it is during the periods of dis-information and propaganda like that which we are currently experiencing.

The Trivium is the premier method for independent fact checking, and the next two benefits of insight are results of its use:

1. We become truly educated in that we can thoroughly entertain any idea without necessarily embracing it.
2. Traveling somewhat in another direction, we become free from the prison of our own prejudicial opinions, we obtain a truly open mind.

Because the Trivium introduces equilibrium and balance to the relationship between subjective thought and objective reality, we can, in fact, develop new and original propositional arguments and entire bodies of knowledge as competently as those respected people who have preceded us.

## **AN INTRODUCTION TO LOGICAL FALLACIES**

Unfortunately there exists a host of logical fallacies. For example formal, propositional, quantification, and syllogistic fallacies. Below, a few informal fallacies are listed to provide a general sense of what we mean when we speak of these things. The reader is, however, strongly encouraged to pursue further studies in this area as it really is a part of the Trivium Method. Informal fallacies are arguments that are fallacious for reasons that are not structural or formal. Which means the content of the argument needs examination to find the problem.

**Argumentum ad hominem:** Argument against the person

When the person making a claim is attacked, instead of the claim itself.

**Argumentum ad ignorantiam:** Argument from ignorance

When a claim is assumed to be true because it has not been, or cannot be, proven false.

**Argumentum ad lapidem:** Appeal to the stone

When a claim is dismissed as absurd without any demonstration as to why that is the case.

**Argumentum ad passiones:** Appeal to emotion

When an argument is made based on emotions instead of valid reasoning.

**Argumentum ad verecundiam:** Appeal to authority

When a claim is held as true because the authority of the one making it.

**Circulus in demonstrando:** Circular reasoning

When the conclusion is used a premise, can also be called assuming the conclusion.

**Nonsequitur:** It does not follow

When a conclusion does not follow the premise, meaning there is a logical gap.

**Onus probandi:** Shifting the burden of proof

When a claim is held as true unless its opponents prove it wrong.

**Petitio principia:** Begging the question

When the conclusion of the argument is more or less part of the premise.

**Argumentum ad populum:** Appeal to widespread belief

When a claim is held as true because many people believe it to be true.