



The Seven Liberal Arts

*Wisdom has built her house,
She has hewn out her seven pillars;
She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine;
She has also set her table;
She has sent out her maidens, she calls
From the tops of the heights of the city:
"Whoever is naïve, let him turn in here!"*

Proverbs 9:1-4a

The Seven Liberal Arts

Imagine for a moment that you have been invited to dinner at the home of an acquaintance. You have heard that your host is a wonderful cook, so you say yes eagerly and look forward to the day with anticipation.

At last the evening arrives, and you stride quickly to the door and knock. You are curious and hungry and a little timid. Any hesitation is soon swept away, as the door opens and you are surrounded by light, laughter, and inviting smells.

Each course of the meal reveals something new about your host: he carefully selected the mushrooms for the golden mushroom soup, picked the greens for the salad that morning, raised the steer for the prime rib, and combined just the right apple varieties for a mouth-watering pie. You leave not only with your stomach filled, but your heart as well, for you now know your host not as a mere acquaintance, but a creative, loving friend of great depth.

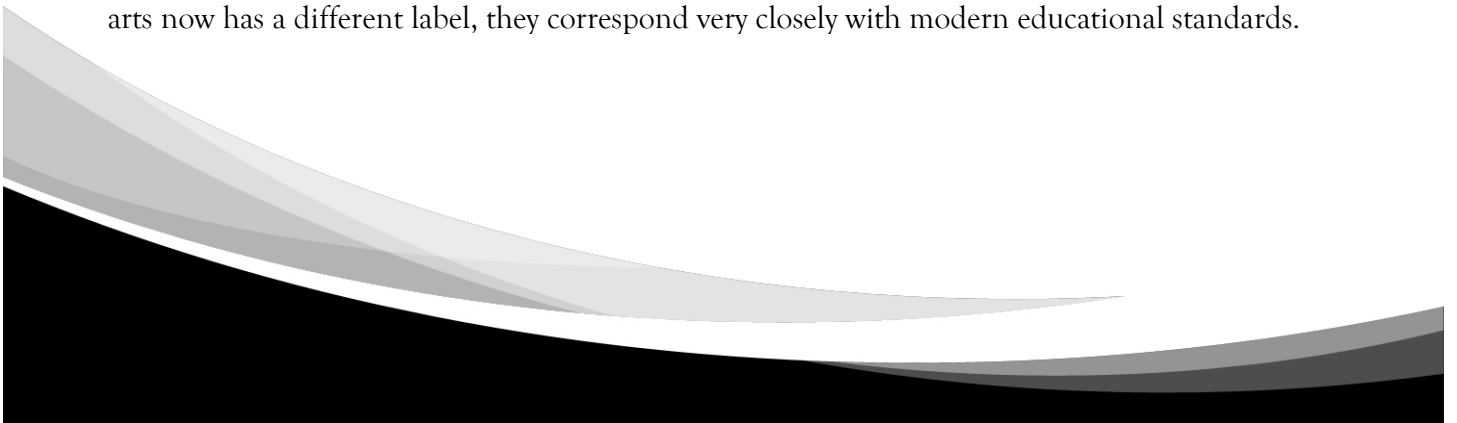
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Have you ever thought of education as an invitation to a banquet for the mind and soul, providing insights into our Host's very Being? Christ Covenant School invites students to use the seven liberal arts to dine upon the truth, goodness, and beauty of the Lord as He reveals Himself. These seven arts are as seven courses of a meal that complement one another and nourish the soul on the wonder of the Lord in His creative, awesome breadth and depth. Our desire is to have the students feed regularly on these things, resulting in a growth in wisdom and virtue that flows out of gratitude to the Lord.

The teaching of the seven liberal arts reached its zenith in the medieval university system. These arts were a means to train future leaders, giving them the needed skills to conduct studies in areas such as math and science, law, medicine, philosophy, and theology.

Historically, the Liberal Arts were divided into the **Trivium** ("the three roads") and the **Quadrivium** ("the four roads"). Keep in mind that these skills are not "subjects" themselves (although they can be studied as such), but all seven skills apply to any "subject" that one chooses to study. They are the skills of the learner, not the content itself; they relate to how we think about reality, both in word and number.

Today, these "arts" would be termed "modes" of learning. Although each of these seven arts now has a different label, they correspond very closely with modern educational standards.



The Trivium

The **Trivium** teaches a student to handle words wisely and virtuously by developing in him three concurrent habits or skills: grammar, logic, and rhetoric.

The skills acquired through the studies of **grammar** are the skills of the wordsmith. The student becomes increasingly skillful at acquiring the basic definitions, ideas, concepts, and symbols of any discipline before him.

Example of the skill of grammar in action: “The parts of a flower include the pistil and stamen.” Grammar is learning through connections.

The skill of **logic** comes along to organize and sequence the concepts being learned into a meaningful whole. Students learn to form arguments, seek proof for asserted views, recognize fallacious arguments, and bring various sources of grammatical material together into an ordered, unified whole.

Example of the skill of logic in action: “Knowing what a pistil does and what a stamen does for a flower, I can then surmise that the pistil and stamen help the flower reproduce.” Logic is learning through reasoning.

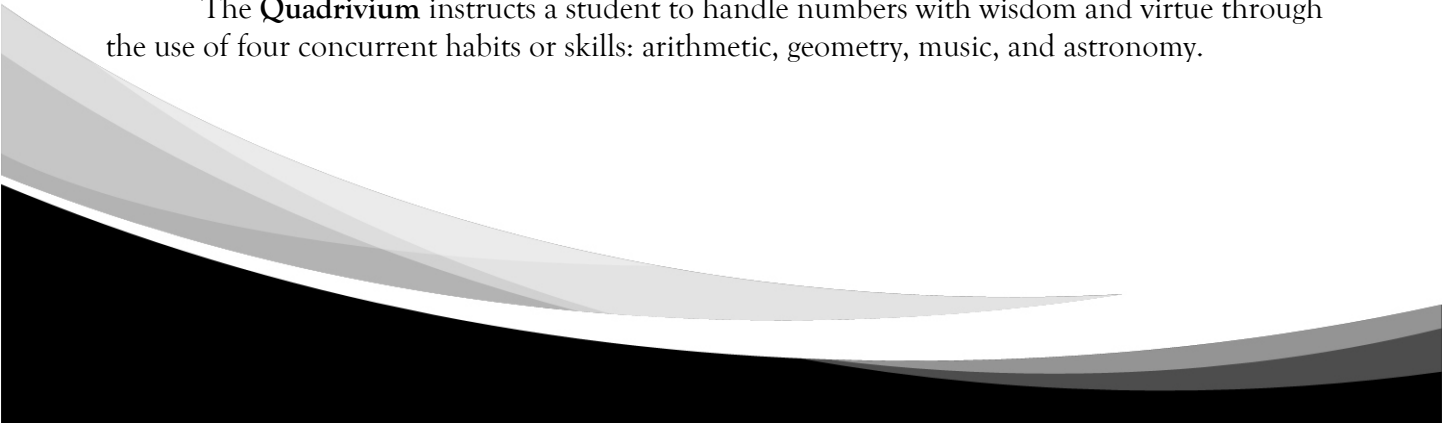
Once the facts have been organized into ordered ideas, the art of **rhetoric** communicates these ideas to others. The skills used in rhetoric are invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Anything that can be communicated must make use of these integrated elements to a greater or lesser degree. Students learn to appreciate the beauty of apt words whether speaking, listening, or conversing.

Example of the skill of rhetoric in action: the student of a flower is able to explain its processes of reproduction to someone else. Rhetoric is learning through eloquent communication.

Though some classical schools have given more attention to the verbal than to the mathematical arts, a full pursuit of all seven liberal arts will provide the trained student with an aptitude for the pursuit of any area of study in which he may wish to engage.

The Quadrivium

The **Quadrivium** instructs a student to handle numbers with wisdom and virtue through the use of four concurrent habits or skills: arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy.



Arithmetic enables the student to develop the ability to use meaningful symbols according to established rules.

Example of the skill of arithmetic in action: “The average of ten and forty is twenty-five.” Arithmetic is learning through number sense.

In **geometry**, the student begins by studying the relationships of lines, angles, and figures to each other. There is a beautiful, orderly progression to geometric propositions (proofs); organizing mathematical concepts in much the same way that logic and rhetoric do with verbal thought.

Example of the skill of geometry in action: “Given a pair of congruent triangles, one with side lengths 5 in and 6 in, the other 4 in and 6 in, find the perimeter of one of them.” Geometry is learning through analysis, organization, and relationships.

In music, there is a beauty perceived, not only of hearing, but also of understanding the ratios and proportions that organize a musical work and give a glimpse of the Designer’s order and integration.

Music gives mental, proportional “shape” to the sounds we hear.

Example of the skill of music in action: “The student of the skill of music will know how much higher a note will sound than an open string if the string is shortened by half.” Music is learning through application, comparison, and contrast.

The study of astronomy (not the “subject,” but the skill) encourages us to consider the regularity with which created bodies move in their God-ordained orbits. From the waltz of planetary bodies on the grand scale to the submicroscopic ballet of the atom, this mathematical art challenges the student to join sense perception with the soul-impression of the Creator’s perfection.

Example of the skill of astronomy in action: “The student of the skill of astronomy explains Newton’s First Law of Motion as it applies to a golf ball on a tee about to be driven. Astronomy is learning through synthesis, systems and organisms.

It is our desire that by feasting regularly on these seven liberal arts, our students will grow in wisdom and virtue as they come to know the truth, goodness, and beauty of our Host as revealed in His word and in His creation. As in Proverbs above, we long to see them calling along with Wisdom to our lost and fallen world, “Whoever is naïve, let him turn in here!”

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