

Writing at Colm Cille Club

At Colm Cille Club we follow a curriculum of classical education designed to cultivate wisdom and virtue by nourishing the soul on truth, goodness, and beauty.

According to the classical model of learning, the ability to use language is developed in the three arts of the Trivium: Grammar, Logic/Dialectics, and Rhetoric. These three arts are often correlated with three stages of development in students. These three stages are in turn reflected in our writing curriculum at Colm Cille Club.

Although students do not have formal writing instruction until fourth grade, our curriculum lays the foundation for writing skillfully from the very earliest years. This overview is designed to help parents to understand the philosophy behind our writing program, what we provide in class and through assignments, and the various necessary ways that parents support this process at home.

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The Grammar Stage: Grades K-3

- **Good books, poetry and scripture**
- **Memorization**
- **Narration, copy work, and dictation**

In the Grammar stage of learning, students acquire the building blocks of language. At Colm Cille Club, this process is centered in the memory work curriculum. Students memorize the words of scripture and excellent poetry. They study the stories of history through a book list packed with rich and engaging language. Finally, they learn the “facts” of language by memorizing the parts of speech.

What does this stage of writing look like in practical terms? During these years CCC families review the memory work with their children at home, encouraging them to achieve “gold” level mastery of poetry, scripture, and grammar. Additionally, families choose their own phonics and spelling curricula. (Some of the curricula CCC families use are listed below.)

Although writing is not taught formally on co-op day until fourth grade, families begin developing the child’s use of language at home, first orally, and gradually in writing. This is achieved through the processes of **narration, copy work, and dictation**. These processes are described (with some variations) in many Charlotte Mason and Classical homeschooling resources.

In the process of **narration**, the child listens to a story or passage and is asked to retell the story in his own words. The parent may write the child’s words as he speaks. If the child is able, he can then **copy** these words in his own handwriting. Finally, the parent slowly repeats the child’s words for him to write himself through **dictation**, with spelling or punctuation help provided as needed. These short exercises can be done using any story, but there are also curricula (listed below) which provide daily lessons and guidance.

There is no firm timetable for this process. Language and the fine motor skills necessary for writing develop at very different paces in different children.

Fourth Grade Writing

- **Literature discussion**
- **Summarizing and describing**
- **The paragraph: narrative, descriptive**
- **Rich language: vivid verbs, rich adjectives and adverbs**
- **Literary devices: Simile, metaphor, alliteration, repetition**
- **Poetry forms: Haiku, Limerick, Iambic Pentameter, Sonnet**

In fourth grade students begin formal writing class at CCC. Writing instruction and assignments are centered around a book list which is linked to our history cycle. Students read and discuss a book every two weeks (about fifteen in total during the year). These books are chosen for their excellent quality, and the reading level is advanced for many fourth graders. Families frequently read aloud or listen to audiobooks in addition to encouraging independent reading. This is both normal and encouraged. In fact, a parent reading aloud is one of the most valuable tools in building reading comprehension and vocabulary.

Students begin writing short paragraphs and essays on topics related to the reading. During fourth grade students work to develop precision in language through **summarizing and describing**. Assignments include narrative paragraphs summarizing a story and vivid, descriptive paragraphs about setting and characters. Students grow familiar with the elements of a story: setting, characters, and plot. They learn to identify stories' main themes, conflicts, and resolutions. Students study poetry from the memory work and may also write descriptive paragraphs about selections from the Art History curriculum.

It is normal for a child in fourth grade to be easily tired or frustrated by writing independently. All students of this age will require pre-writing assistance from a parent at home. This is a continuation of the process of narration: the parent helps the student organize and clarify their ideas orally through discussion, asking questions to draw out students who “don't know where to start,” and helping those who “retell at length” organize their thoughts.

Some students of this age will still require parents to “scribe” or write down their thoughts for copying. Others will be ready to write independently, but this process might still resemble dictation, with the parent reminding the child of the ideas discussed as he writes.

Most students will require help with spelling and punctuation for a polished paragraph or essay.

Fifth and Sixth Grade Writing

- **Literature discussion**
- **Precise and descriptive language**
- **The persuasive essay, thesis statement, and proofs**
- **Rich language: vivid verbs, rich adjectives and adverbs**
- **5th/6th Grade Literary Devices: rhetorical question, parallelism I & II, tricolon, VSS, epithet, assonance, consonance, antithesis, anthropomorphism, onomatopoeia**
- **Poetry forms: Haiku, Limerick, Iambic Pentameter, Sonnet**

In fifth and sixth grade the student begins moving into the next stage of learning, the Logic stage. No longer content to simply memorize and absorb, students in the middle grades want to understand *why*.

Writing class is again centered around the 4th-6th grade book list, poetry, and Art History. Students take short comprehension quizzes on the books read. Assignments - and sentences! - grow in length and complexity but continue to develop the students' **narrative and descriptive** writing skills. Students analyze stories more critically and seek to understand the motivations and choices of central characters.

In fifth and sixth grade writing students are also introduced to **persuasive writing**. They construct short essays refuting and affirming aspects of a story. Finally, the year ends with some playful creative writing. Students will study literary devices and poetic meter within the memory work, and practice using them as they write their own Haiku poems, Limericks, and Sonnets. They also write a short story set in the history time period studied that year.

Students still require pre-writing help from parents but develop the ability to write without assistance. Most students will still require help with spelling and punctuation for a polished paragraph or essay.

Seventh and Eighth Grade Writing

- **Literature Discussion**
- **Complex 9 paragraph essay**
- **Understanding and using ethos, pathos, and logos**
- **Understanding and avoiding logical fallacies (strawman arguments, circular arguments)**
- **Using textual quotes to support arguments**
- **Literary devices: allusion, anadiplosis, anaphora, apostrophe, anthimeria, cacophony, diacope, epistrophe, epizeuxis, euphemism, euphony, hyperbole, juxtaposition, litotes, merism, metonymy, personification, polyptoton, polysyndeton, sibilance, synecdoche (+ caesura, end-stopped, enjambment)**
- **Poetry forms and meter: dactylic hexameter (Ancient year); sonnets (Medieval & Renaissance); World War I poetry (Modern year)**

In seventh and eighth grade students continue internalizing the rules of Logic as they move closer to the Rhetoric stage of the Trivium. The Rhetoric stage, when the student begins to “speak and write with force and originality,” is usually associated with the high school years.

The seventh and eighth grade writing curriculum alternates between a year of persuasive essay writing, using *The Lost Tools of Writing* curriculum, and a year of literary analysis. Both courses are paired with a challenging book list.

The Lost Tools of Writing, develops persuasive essay writing. The curriculum teaches 9 essays through which the student practices Invention (coming up with ideas), Arrangement (ordering ideas), and Elocution (expressing ideas appropriately).

The LTOW teaches students how to think through both sides of a question, choose a thesis, and articulate proofs for the thesis. Students create ANI charts listing Affirmative, Negative, and Interesting points related to the **thesis**, or “whether statement.” Students learn to sort and group these ANI points into proofs and organize their thoughts into an outline. The outline is then turned into a very basic essay. Although the early essays can be clunky and inelegant, the essays become longer and more elegant, and the writing process becomes more independent.

The year of literary analysis encourages students to think and write critically, thoughtfully, and reflectively about what they are reading. Up to this point, they may have read principally for the story. As they move from being entertained by children’s fiction to appreciating the art of literature, they will develop the vocabulary to describe and the ability to analyse what they are

reading. Writing assignments will cover topics such as plot and setting, character motivation and development, setting, themes, tone and mood, comparison and contrast, language and devices.

Seventh and eighth grade students still benefit immensely from parental oversight and input at home, both in organization and mechanics. It is recommended that parents review a first draft of students' work a day or two before the assignment is due.

Why the Book List?

The Book Lists are a core part of the Colm Cille program. Books are chosen for three different age ranges (K-3, 4-6, 7-8), in a three year historical cycle (Ancient, Medieval, Modern). The titles are either age-appropriate versions of important historical works (*Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, *Canterbury Tales*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), or historical fiction – stories about children or young adults experiencing a particular historical moment (*The Golden Goblet*, *The Emperor's Winding Sheet*, *When the Siren Wailed*).

These books are selected for:

- High-quality writing and vocabulary
- Historical settings and detail
- Interesting and compelling plots
- Virtuous heroes and heroines

Reading these books imparts a vast range of historical information in a vivid and memorable format. It strengthens students' reading skills by regular and sustained practice. It develops the habit of picking up a previously unknown story and sticking with it – often becoming engrossed in it. It strengthens their writing skills by exposing them to polished writing. Students subconsciously absorb correct sentence structure, literary devices, and advanced vocabulary.

Discussing these books introduces the students to the pleasure of sharing their opinions, defending their points of view, and listening considerately to others. Children's ability to communicate orally develops well ahead of their ability to communicate in writing. These conversations allow them to work through their own impressions and ideas before they put pen to paper, as well as learning from the opinions of others.

Writing about these books is the natural continuation of this process. One of the great complaints of beginner writers is, "I don't know what to say!" By writing about the Book Lists, students are provided with material for their writing. They come to class bubbling over with opinions to share, eager to persuade their classmates to see it their way. Requiring them to write on the subject encourages them to examine how well-founded their opinions are (Logic), and express these opinions as well as they can (the beginnings of Rhetoric).

The books provide varied and interesting material for a variety of writing assignments. Students start with the simple book report narrative, learning how to string related sentences together to

make paragraphs. Process paragraphs describe the steps in making wire into beads in an Egyptian goldsmith's workshop, how to shear a sheep in the Tudor Cotswolds, or how to pan for gold in the American West.

Why the Persuasive Essay?

The Lost Tools of Writing persuasive essay is a sophisticated format that requires the student to catch the attention of the reader, define the span of the question, propose a thesis and support it with three separate proofs (each supported by three sub-proofs), consider and refute the counter-arguments to their thesis, and close with a reflection on the wider importance of their thesis.

This essay is an exercise not only in writing, but also in thinking clearly and coherently. Students learn that, before they can decide whether Hero should have married Claudio, or Eliza Doolittle Henry Higgins, they need to define what marriage is. In order to find nine separate sub-proofs to support a thesis, they must examine issues deeply, and from all angles (why did the hero do that? What resulted from it? Who was affected by it?) Students realize the importance of the words they use; to say the villain is mean and nasty and bad is simply repetitious, but to say that he is violent, selfish, and greedy, and to give examples of each, proves his villainy.

Dorothy Sayers, in her 1947 lecture on the Lost Tools of Learning, argued that the Logic stage of education should begin “when the capacity for abstract thought begins to manifest itself”. She characterizes this stage as “the Pert” and reflects that at this age, children’s “natural argumentativeness may just as well be canalised to good purpose as allowed to run away into the sands”. Middle schoolers love to argue and debate, and Colm Cille’s Book List gives them ample and worthy material to practice on.

Why Literary Devices?

Teaching literary devices gives students tools to use in their own writing, and also enables them to recognize and appreciate what makes the poetry and prose that they have read and memorized so powerful.

A Word About Revision

It is important that your child expects to do more than one draft of her writing assignment. The first and best feedback your child will receive about her writing will be from you! The CCC writing teacher will also provide feedback, but since we meet only one day per week, your child will benefit immensely from working with you as their writing tutor.

Some tips on revision:

1. Make all the revisions their revisions. Resist writing on their papers or typing for them. This is especially true as they grow older.
2. Make them find their own technical errors. Say, “I see three comma errors. Can you find them?”
3. Encourage cohesion. Help them remove or change things that stray off topic.
4. Encourage variety. Sentences should vary in length and structure. For example, they shouldn’t all start with the subject then the verb, or with a prepositional phrase.
5. Encourage strong vocabulary. Clear meaning should be conveyed first through choosing precise and descriptive nouns and verbs, then through the judicious use of adjectives and adverbs.

More helpful tips on editing/revising for teachers and moms:

<https://www.simplyconvivial.com/2016/tutor-writing/>

4th Grade Literary Devices: simile, metaphor, alliteration, repetition

Alliteration: repeated use of a letter at the beginning of words

“The scorpion is as black as soot/He dearly loves to bite/He is a most unpleasant brute/To find in bed at night”

“Down on the garden green”

“For you the flag is flung”

Simile: explicit comparison using “like” or “as”

“The scorpion is black as soot”

“My holes were empty like a cup”

“I’m as mad as a hatter”

Metaphor: implicit comparison without using “like” or “as”

“White sheep, white sheep/On a blue hill”

“Hope is the thing with feathers/That perches in the soul/And sings the tune”

Repetition: repeated use of a word

“But O heart! heart! Heart!”

“Of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of his name”

“They danced by the light of the moon, the moon, the moon/

They danced by the light of the moon”

5th/6th Grade Literary Devices: rhetorical question, parallelism I & II, tricolon, VSS, epithet, assonance, consonance, antithesis, anthropomorphism

Rhetorical question: question asked for effect, not expecting an answer, or answered by the writer.

“Who has seen the wind?”

“How do you like to go up in a swing?”

“What can I give him/Poor as I am?”

“What immortal hand or eye/Could frame thy fearful symmetry?”

Parallelism I: repetition of a type of word (eg, adjectives, verbs, nouns)

“Poor little timid furry man”

“Through the blinds and the windows and bars”

“The woods are lovely, dark, and deep”

“That glittered and winked in the dark”

Parallelism II: repetition of the structure of a whole phrase, clause or sentence

“Some for the gentlemen/Some for the dames”

“Up in the air and over the wall”

“The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed”

“Else how can he keep up his tail perpendicular/Or spread out his whiskers/Or cherish his pride?”

“The city mouse lives in a house/The garden mouse lives in a bower”

“Who has seen the wind? Neither I nor you/But when the leaves hang trembling/The wind is passing by/

Who has seen the wind? Neither you nor I/But when the trees bow down their heads/The wind is passing through”

Tricolon: a parallelism of three, ideally with a twist or variation in the third: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

“His ineffable effable/ Effanineffable”

“We few, we happy few, we band of brothers”

“So soft, so calm, yet eloquent”

VSS: very short sentence. It works.

“I’m nobody”

“Don’t tell!”

“Nothing beside remains.”

Epithet: characterizing word or phrase accompanying or replacing the name of a person or thing. Grey-eyed Athena, Wise Penelope, Pious Aeneas, Iron Lady

“Slimy skin”, “Pollywog”, “Ugly James”

“Ozymandias, King of Kings”

Assonance: repetition of vowel sounds within words

“like a wolf on the fold”

“And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold/And the sheen of their spears ..”

Consonance: repetition of consonant sounds within words

“What immortal hand or eye could frame thy fearful symmetry?” (repeated m sounds)

“Right through the line they broke/Cossack and Russian/reeled from the sabre stroke” (repeated r sounds)

Antithesis: parallel in form, contrasting in meaning.

“Like the leaves of the forest when the summer is green/That host with their banners at sunset were seen/

Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown/That host on the morrow lay withered and strown”

Onomatopoeia: a word that phonetically imitates or suggests what it names

“Only the busy beetle/tap-tapping in the wall/

“Only from the forest/The screech-owl’s call”

Anthropomorphism: the attribution of human characteristics, emotions, and behaviors to animals or other non-human things

“The Frog is justly sensitive to epithets like these”

“When you notice a cat in profound meditation/The reason, I tell you, is always the same/His mind is engaged in a rapt contemplation”

“Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling/Your ring?” Said the Piggy, “I will”

7th/8th Grade Literary Devices: allusion, anadiplosis, anaphora, apostrophe, anthimeria, cacophony, diacope, epistrophe, epizeuxis, euphemism, euphony, hyperbole, juxtaposition, litotes, merism, metonymy, personification, polyptoton, polysyndeton, sibilance, synecdoche (+ caesura, end-stopped, enjambment)

Allusion: unexplained reference to someone or something outside the text

“Into the valley of death/Rode the six hundred” (Psalm 23)

“I will arise and go now” (Genesis, Parable of the Prodigal Son)

“Did He who made the lamb make thee?”

Anadiplosis: a word or group of words located at the end of one clause or sentence is repeated at or near the beginning of the following clause or sentence.

“How do you like to go up in a swing/Up in the air so blue?”

“And I shall have some peace there/For peace comes dropping low/Dropping from the veils of the morning”

Anaphora: repetition of words at the beginning of successive sentences or clauses

“Flash’d all their sabres bare/Flash’d as they turn’d in air”

“Cannon to right of them/Cannon to left of them/Cannon in front of them”

“Theirs not to reason why/Theirs not to make reply/Theirs but to do or die”

“What the hammer? What the chain?”

Anthimeria: using one part of speech as another (a noun as a verb, an adjective as adverb)

“Till I can see so wide”

“The spreading wide my narrow Hands/To gather Paradise”

Apostrophe: a speaker addresses a third party (may be an absent person, an inanimate object, or an abstract concept)

“Rhodora! If the sages ask thee why”

“Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!”

Cacophony: harsh sounds

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!/The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!/Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun/The frumious Bandersnatch!”

Diacope: word or phrase repeated after a brief interruption

“Oh, Captain! My Captain!”

“And every fair from fair sometime declines”

“We few, we happy few”

Epistrophe: repetition of words at the end of successive sentences or phrases

“fallen cold and dead”

“Kyrie eleison/Christe eleison/Kyrie eleison”

“Laudamus te/benedicimus te/adoramus te/glorificamus te”

Epizeuxis: word or phrase repeated in immediate succession with no intervening words

“Oh Heart! Heart! Heart!”

“I’m sure-sure-sure”

“half a league, half a league, half a league”

“Snow on snow/snow on snow”

Euphemism: a milder term to describe a harsher concept

“Now let thy servant depart in peace”

“For he today that sheds his blood with me”

“The Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast/And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed”

Euphony: pleasing sounds

“I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore”

Hyperbole: exaggeration for effect

“All the world wondered”

“Continuous as the stars that shine/and twinkle on the milky way”

“Crispin Crispian shall ne’er go by/From this day to the ending of the world”

Juxtaposition: placing two things side by side to emphasize the difference

“Spreading wide my narrow hands”

“A stable place sufficed/The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ”

“Up in the air and down”

Litotes: Affirming something by denying the opposite.

“But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride”

“The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown”

“the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword”

Merism: naming all the parts instead of the whole.

“Cannon to right of them, Cannon to left of them, Cannon in front of them ...”

“Heaven and earth shall flee away”

“Stormed at with shot and shell/While horse and hero fell”

“And all that’s best of dark and bright”

“This charm is wasted on the earth and sky”

Metonymy: an object or concept referred to not by its own name, but instead by the name of something closely associated with it.

“And though the last lights off the black West went”

(West is a metonymy for sunset)

“Why do men then now not reckon his rod?”

(rod is a metonymy for God’s authority)

Personification: assigns human qualities and attributes to inanimate objects

“Tell them, dear, that, if eyes were made for seeing/Then beauty is its own excuse for being”

“Tossing their heads in sprightly dance”

“When the stars threw down their spears/And watered heaven with their tears”

Polyptoton: repetition of words derived from same root

“So long lives this, and this gives life to thee”

“Which alters when it alteration finds/

“Or bends with the remover to remove”

“This day shall gentle his condition/And gentlemen in England now-a-bed”

Polysyndeton: co-ordinating conjunctions used in quick succession

“Rivers and trees and cattle and all”

“The Dog and the Plough and the Hunter, and all/And the star of the sailor and Mars”

Sibilance: a hissing sound created within a group of words through the repetition of "s" sounds

“Continuous as the stars that shine”

“Ten thousand saw I at a glance/Tossing their heads in sprightly dance”

“Whose woods these are I think I know”

“Of cloudless climes and starry skies”

Synecdoche: One part stands for the whole.

“What immortal hand or eye could frame thy fearful symmetry?”

“Though rosy lips and cheeks/Within his bending sickle’s compass come”

“Here might the red-bird come his plumes to cool”

Caesura: a pause that occurs within a line of poetry, usually marked by some form of punctuation

“Stand in the desert ... Near them, on the sand”

“Don’t tell! They’d advertise – you know!”

“One, two! One, two! And through and through”

End-stopped: A line of poetry in which a sentence or phrase comes to a conclusion at the end of the line.

“Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”

“The world is charged with the grandeur of God.”

Enjambment: the continuation of a sentence or clause across a line break

“Let me not to the marriage of true minds/Admit impediments. Love is not Love/”

“It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil/Crushed.”

Curricula which support teaching writing at home

Spelling and Phonics:

All About Reading

All About Spelling

Grades K-3 Grammar/Language:

First Language Lessons, Susan Wise Bauer

Writing with Ease, Susan Wise Bauer

Writing and Rhetoric, Classical Academic Press (starts in 3rd grade, Lauren and Melinda incorporating some elements into 4-6 writing, Level 1 is a great prep for third graders)

The Brave Writer, Julie Bogart, gentle and encouraging approach, there is a book or you can take online classes that are 4-6 weeks long and asynchronous. Good for some fun summer accountability.

Primary Language Lessons (Charlotte Mason)

4-6th Grade Grammar/Language:

Junior Analytical Grammar, R. R. Finley, 1997. Workbook, teacher's book, review books. Spiral approach. *Canale, McGibbon, O'Brien*

Analytical Grammar, R.R. Finley, 1996. Workbook, teacher's book, review books. Thorough, covers diagramming. Can be taught all in one year (eg, 8th grade), or over three years (6th, 7th, 8th). *Canale, McGibbon, O'Brien*

Building Christian English (levels 4-8), Rod & Staff, 1970s. Worksheets available separately, though they do not cover every lesson. Otherwise writing intensive, so good for a cheerful & willing writer or for doing exercises orally. Separate test booklet available. 119 substantial lessons. Covers oral reports and compositions as well as grammar. Good for an advanced student, or selective use. *McGibbon*

First Language Lessons for the Well-Trained Mind, Level 3 (grades 2-4), Level 4 (grades 3-6), J. Wise & S. Buffington, 2007. Work book & scripted teacher's book. Diagramming, lots of repeating/memorizing grammar definitions, punctuation, contractions, etc. 90 lessons plus 21 extra (letter-writing, dictionary skills, oral usage). *Tozzi*

Language of God for Little Folks, levels C, D, and E, Christian Heritage Curriculum, 2007. 118 page workbook, brief instruction given at the beginning of each page. Simple, low commitment, covers the basics. *Tozzi*

Seton – English 4-8 for Young Catholics. Text book & workbook combined, introduces diagramming, clear & easy to use, beautifully illustrated, uses Church history & lives of saints as teaching material. *Vicenzino, Meyer*

Easy Grammar Grade 6, Wanda C. Phillips, 2006. Workbook, text/answerbook, and separate test booklet. No diagramming, but thoroughly covers the elements necessary to diagram. Brief teaching time followed by time for students to practice concepts on their own. *Tozzi, Napolitano*

Easy Grammar Plus (8th grade), Wanda C. Phillips, 2007. Workbook, text/answer book, and separate test booklet. Lots of repetition to enforce concepts, but done in workbook (underline/circle/etc), so good for reluctant writers. Less detailed than the older courses (Building Christian English, Warriner, Lepanto), but covers everything necessary for AP English Language ... *Tozzi*

Lepanto (Voyages) Grammar 7, Lepanto Press, 1962. 400 pages of (small print) detailed, challenging grammar. No workbook, teacher's answer book strongly recommended. Good for a cheerful writer or oral use. *Tozzi*

Warriner's Grammar, First Course (Grade 7), Second Course (Grade 8), Harcourt, 1977. Clear, comprehensive, traditional grammar. No workbooks. *McGibbon*