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# Languages & Grammar

As Taught in Great Hearts Academies

New Faculty Orientation - July 2016

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## Philosophy undergirding the GH pedagogy

### I. What's our understanding of and general approach to languages?

- The study of language is primarily training in the *habit of grammar*, in the four operations of language: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.
- Secondly, the study of language is the *science of grammar*, or analysis: classifying, describing, parsing, diagramming, declining and conjugating.
- The science of grammar can only be fruitfully taught to students who have some facility with the habit of grammar.
- The study of the science of grammar is necessary to attain the highest skill in the habit of grammar.
- While we neglect none of the four operations of language, we focus our teaching upon reading and writing in English, upon reading in Latin and Greek, and upon speaking and listening in the first years of modern foreign language study. By the third and fourth years in modern foreign languages, the emphasis is more evenly placed on all four skills. In none of the languages should analysis be the focus of instruction.
- Fine literature is the highest expression of language, and the ability to read and delight in it is the capstone of education in language.
- Instruction in the modern foreign languages is entirely immersive, no matter what is being taught.



### II. How does the study of languages fit into a liberal arts education?

- Man is the *zōon logon echon*, the “verbal animal” (Aristotle). As such, language is the absolutely fundamental, essential liberal art of the human being.
- While English or any language can be studied illiberally – i.e. “business English,” “Spanish for the tourist,” or “Latin and Greek roots for SAT prep” – we teach all language liberally, for the cultivation of the mind.
- To study any of the academic subjects in English is to better learn the use of English. Every teacher-- of science, math, art, history, PE etc.-- is also an English teacher.

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### III. Why do we study languages at Great Hearts?

- The native tongue must be polished and refined; our “natural” language must be educated.
- Education in language requires education in at least one foreign language. The study of one language yields insights into others. A complete education in the Western tradition requires the study of Latin.
- Every language has modes of expression that are beautiful, graceful, and elegant. An educated person knows how to recognize and employ these modes.



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# Curricular Guidelines to Teach Students to Know and Understand, Practice, and Love Language

## I. What curricular choices has GH made based on the notes above? Is there a path/progression in the discipline of the languages?

- The modern foreign language sequence begins with building basic conversational skills in the language, along with a study of the basic grammatical structures. Gradually more complex structures and language features are introduced.
- Once the students have a basic mastery of the grammar and essential vocabulary of the language, they begin to read authentic literature (not primarily pedagogically-produced texts).
- Writing is practiced first through grammar exercises in which students write the structures that they have learned to understand and say.
- Once the students have a broader understanding of grammar, they are challenged to produce longer and more complex texts, through open-ended short-answer and essay tasks.
- The modern foreign language progression culminates in the reading of canonical literary works, which are examined through a combination of individual and group reading, class discussion, and writing assignments.

## II. How do we go about teaching this based on what we believe about it and its purpose?

- Students build their understanding of a modern foreign language systematically and step-by-step.
- To this end, grammar is presented and practiced in small, discrete topics at a time.
- All courses are taught in an immersion-style classroom setting in order to develop the habit of grammar to the fullest extent possible and recognizing that this habit requires extensive practice.
- Because the ultimate objective is the reading and appreciation of great literature, the immersion-style class is also essential to this end, since the skill of reading is most effectively practiced once a significant level of fluency in the language has been achieved.

## III. Is there is a language of the discipline that we help kids understand during their course of study?

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- In addition to learning the language itself, our students learn to use the metalinguistic terminology that allows for the science of grammar to inform development of the habit of grammar.

#### **IV. What big questions will/should students be asking in their course of study?**

- How do speakers of this language create meaning out of the symbols and systems (e.g., morphology, syntax) of the language? How does the structure of an expression inform its meaning (i.e. how do form and function interact in this language)?
- How does the expression of meaning in this language differ from that of another that I know?
- What commonalities exist between this language and another that I know?
- How is beauty expressed along with meaning in this language?

#### **V. What skills and habits should students develop through studying it?**

- Memorization of vocabulary and grammatical paradigms
- Logical reasoning – given what I know, what can I understand about new examples of the language that I encounter; how can I express my intended meaning using the vocabulary and structures that I know? (also requires the skill of creative production)

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# Epilogue

Specifics around individual disciplines, from a K-12 perspective

## ENGLISH GRAMMAR

- Grammar, writing activities aligned with readings and with liberal arts—textbooky exercises kept in their place, avoidance of formulaic “6 traits” writing, no low-minded writing prompts
- Sentence diagramming, parsing of English
- Writing with clarity, fluency, formal diction
- To make connections between books
- Recitation of poetry
- To make reference to texts, text-based arguments
- To speak objectively/analytically about givens, not just about personal experiences

## LATIN

- The *language* is primary—history, mythology have only a supporting role
- Focus is not upon games, costumes, Roman play-pretend
- Desired classroom décor: maps of ancient world, photos/posters of Roman artifacts and architecture (Student drawings of gods and goddesses should not have prominent place)
- Parsing of nouns, verbs, adjectives
- To make etymological connections
- Declining/conjugating
- To identify of special constructions
- Accuracy in both literal and idiomatic construing of meanings
- Accuracy and confidence in pronouncing (reading aloud, speaking)
- Ability to read through a sentence

## MODERN LANGUAGES

- To speak entirely in foreign language
- To use foreign language to ask questions about foreign language
- Correct accent/pronunciation
- Reading, writing, speaking about a text
- Reciting/memorization of text in FL
- In upper grades (11-12), classic works of French/Spanish/German literature are being studied and discussed in something like a Socratic seminar
- Textbooks are used carefully—inappropriate examples or exercises (i.e. about parties, dating, TV shows) are quietly passed over
- Lessons and activities do not refer to consumer or entertainment culture (e.g. brands, music, celebrities)