



The following excerpt is taken from Chapter 6, “Three Roads to Recovery,” in [Trivium Mastery: The Intersection of Three Roads](#). **Trivium Mastery** is available at amazon.com and other online booksellers. For more details, see <http://classicalscholar.com>.

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Getting back to the basics of your classical inheritance is so much easier than you may think. If you have been operating under the neoclassical model for any length of time, you will probably find the freedom of a real classical Christian education exhilarating. Freed of the structure of the twelve-year, three-stage urban legend, you can relax and enjoy your children as you teach three simple skills: language, thought, and speech.

Where are you going?

If you recall, the ancient definition of the classical trivium is the intersection of three roads. Each of the three skills represents a road. Each of the roads culminates in a point which I will call “substantial mastery.” Over the years, you will teach your child each of the three skills, performing periodic evaluations to assess mastery. This process will take years, but depending on when you start and how your child progresses, you will eventually reach the intersection of substantial mastery.

When you finally arrive at the intersection, your role as parent shifts from that of teacher to guide. The child who has substantially mastered the three skills of the trivium has all the necessary tools to study any discipline in depth. Note that substantial mastery is not the same as perfection. Naturally, few people ever achieve absolute mastery over the three skills, so as you expose your teens to the inherited body of Western knowledge during the high school years, you might also continue to teach some final advanced skills of the trivium like how to develop a thesis and defend a dissertation.

To summarize the big picture, the first several years of classical home schooling should be devoted to developing the skills that will allow your teenager to interpret meaning. Classical education has always been primarily interested in “ideas,” so your first task is to give them the tools for learning, and your second task is to supervise the discussion and interpretation of ideas.

How will you get there?

Start with your own education. In order to “teach to mastery,” you need to be familiar with the foundational building blocks of the English language, critical

thinking (especially arithmetic), and both oral and written communication. Look over my “Road Maps to Mastery,” and assess your own level of knowledge. If there are areas that are weak, plan to shore up this knowledge before you need to teach it. You know most of this basic information, but you may need to refresh your memory in some areas.

Next, take a few days off, and make time to assess each child using my “Road Maps to Mastery” and the interview questions found in the appendix. Use the tools in the appendix, or establish your own criteria for determining whether they have mastered a skill or not. Once you know where each child stands, prepare a simple short-term plan like the ones in the “Makeover” section of this book for each child.

When should you start?

Realistically, involved parents unknowingly teach all three skills from an early age as a matter of daily life in the family. The new parent who enthusiastically gathers the small toddler into her lap for a snuggle and a good board book is already teaching language. The playful parent who regularly works puzzles and plays games with the child is teaching critical thinking skills, and the parent who consistently includes the children in adult conversations teaches effective oral communication. Look for real-life teaching opportunities in every circumstance.

How long will it take?

That depends on each child, too. In our family, our kids had mastered language and thinking skills before they mastered oral and written communication skills, so when your teen is regularly writing analytical short essays, he or she is ready to move on the deeper study of subjects for high school credit. If he’s ready for deeper study when he’s thirteen, set him loose. Once you teach your children to master the three skills of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, the student can explore any number of ideas that excite his or her passions.

How will you do it?

Now, in my opinion, one of the most beautiful facets of a true classical education is the creative potential for a variety of learning experiences. Freed of previous requirements, you can choose any number of ways to teach your child the skills. Your objective is to teach a skill, but the classical method gives you the freedom and responsibility to teach that skill in any manner. This allows you to completely tailor the education to your child and family.