

SEVEN LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES

Throughout our lives, we have heard of the liberal arts and sciences. But until we were presented with them in *The Winding Stair* lecture, most of us had only a vague notion of what they consisted of. The Fellowcraft Degree commends Freemasons to study the Liberal Arts and Sciences, which are grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. When we study the historical background for this list, we will uncover layers of Masonic meanings for us in each of the seven areas of knowledge.

Youth, manhood, and age are the three stages of our lives. Likewise, the three degrees of Masonry progress from youth to manhood to maturity. The EA degree builds a foundation of brotherly love, relief, and truth. The FC degree leads us toward successful manhood with an attentive ear, an instructive tongue, and a faithful breast. As we progress further we are taught that time and patience will accomplish all things.

We advance in life as if we were climbing a winding stair. We cannot see too far ahead. Our progress requires courage to press on as we grow and mature. We first encounter the three steps in Masonry. Next, we master our five senses as we observe our world. And we climb the steps of the seven liberal arts and sciences. Likewise, education is a process of steps up a winding stair. First grade teaches us to read and write simple ideas. We progress up the steps of schooling to abstract concepts and ideas.

There must be many fields of knowledge that could have been listed: history, chemistry, or literature. Yet this list is commended to our consideration. Why "grammar"? Why "rhetoric"? We may well ask, "Why this list and not others?"

The phrase, the liberal arts, comes from the Latin *artes liberales*. *Liber* is translated both as Free and Book. Much of the well-educated in antiquity disliked work. If you were indentured as an apprentice, you were not free to study what you wanted. You had to do what was assigned to you. The *artes illiberales* were vocational studies aimed for an economic purpose, such as a being a stonemason. So it is intriguing that speculative Masonry encourages us to study the liberal arts and sciences.

The history of the seven liberal arts and sciences is intricate, but chiefly Pythagoras, Plato, and St. Augustine play key roles in framing it.

Pythagoras, was not only a great mathematician and philosopher, he was a master Greek theologian. His students in the Academy looked for connections between Geometry and the Divine. His disciples sought relationships in music, arithmetic, and astronomy. Pythagoras is associated with the last four in the list of the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences. Pythagoras was at his peak around 520 BC.

About BC 400, Plato wrote of the importance of education for citizens in *The Republic*. Plato (illustrated in a statue above) emphasized logic, philosophy, and dialectic. For Plato, logic represented our highest cognitive faculty. To see both sides of an argument, the pro and the con, is to understand it.

St. Augustine of Hippo left behind 5 million words that still exist today. Though he lived in the third century AD, he was the greatest teacher of rhetoric in the known world. He held that if one wished to defend truth, one must be eloquent to refute falsehood through the power of oratory. He filled out the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences with his emphasis on grammar and rhetoric.

There is wisdom in the order of the items in the list. Teachers and scholastics have found these seven and their general order to be of great utility. Home-schoolers today are returning to this list to start with grammar and rhetoric in their education.

As infants, we are unable to speak. We must learn words to describe everything. Words organize our thoughts. Language is essential for learning. As we progress up the winding stairs, we learn to speak with eloquence and grace, which is rhetoric. We learn to use logic to make our arguments persuasive and true.

We advance up the lessons to higher levels of arithmetic, geometry, and music. These require abstract thinking and greater levels of concentration. As we mature in life, we gain perspective and wisdom as we enjoy the glorious works of creation, the stars and planets, astronomy, and the Divine. The order of these topics was developed over a thousand years. They continue to attract our attention today.

1. Grammar

In Genesis, the first job given to Adam is to name all things. Adam is told to name them and to have dominion over creation. Knowing the name of things gives a man authority to speak and to understand.

In elementary school or Grammar School we learn to recite the alphabet, numbers, and colors. Grammar involves words and meanings. The earliest lessons in speaking involve repetition and alliteration. We say tongue twisters and recite phrases to learn to speak. We say, "she sells sea shells by the seashore" as an articulation exercise. Children learn their own language as well as foreign languages. To learn another language, grammar and structure are essential.

Grammar can be divided into technical or exegetical grammar. *Technical grammar* is what most of us associate with the word grammar — diagramming sentences with subjects and verbs. Grammar involves learning declensions (variation of form) for verbs and nouns. But *exegetical (the interpretation of) grammar* involves learning the meaning of words, their nuances, and how they fit in different settings.

We learn that deferential(polite or respectful) language is appropriate to use for speaking to those in authority over us. We are told to keep a tongue of good report in the FC Charge. The FC historical lecture directs us to have an instructive tongue so that we become better men. Grammar teaches us to speak clearly and concisely

2. Rhetoric

synonym for rhetoric is persuasion. To study rhetoric is to study speaking and writing to persuade others. Too often we think of rhetoric as unimportant, as in the throwaway line, "well that was just a rhetorical comment." Rhetoric is serious business: it has substance. Rhetoric is essential in the study of law and regulations. Roscoe Pound, Albert Mackey, and Allen Roberts were some of the greatest writers on Masonic jurisprudence. They were marvelously persuasive writers as well.

Influential Romans learned to speak in public with fluency and oratory. Newly initiated Entered Apprentices are invited to speak in Lodge on whatever was on their hearts. Public speaking is terrifying to some: but to Freemasons, we learn both to speak to listen to others.

Rhetoric adds force and elegance to our thoughts. As we improve in rhetoric, we captivate the hearer with both the strength of our arguments and the beauty of our expression. Our mastery of rhetoric teaches us to entreat and exhort our brethren to acts of charity. Skillful rhetoric uses tact to admonish our brothers. Rhetoric weaves praise to applaud excellence in conduct or deportment.

3. Logic

Logic is the third step of the Trivium Logic directs and guides us after truth. It consists of a regular train of argument where we deduce or infer from the facts. Logic leads us to conclusions based on our knowledge.

We use all of our faculties of conceiving, judging, reasoning, and disposing of questions before us. Logic trains the mind to think clearly. We are charged to be good men and true. Sincerity and plain dealing should distinguish any Mason.

As we advance in logic, we begin to think about proofs for the existence of God. We see the beauty of an autumn leave, so intricate and perfect. The teleological proof of God's existence is that design in nature proves that there must have been a designer, our G.A.O.T.U.

Grammar, rhetoric, and logic are the trivium, or first three, of the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences. We are charged to polish and adorn the mind by studying them.

4. Arithmetic

Arithmetic involves computation or reckoning with numbers. Ignorance of numbers leaves many things unintelligible. To perceive the world accurately, we need facility with counting and measurement. Mathematics is taught step by step. We first learn to count before we learn to add and subtract. As a science, it is progressive by building skill and familiarity through frequent practice.

5. Geometry

Geometry concatenates (links together) *geo* and *metric*, or earth measurement, within it. Geometry discovers unmeasured areas by comparing them to areas already measured. Geometry is synonymous with self-knowledge, the understanding of the basic substance of our being. Freemasonry places special emphasis on geometry.

The tools of geometry are plumbs, squares, and levels. They are the basic tools of operative Masons. We use them in speculative Masonry to teach lessons of right-behavior, rectitude, and truthfulness. Our guide in the FC degree leads us much like the apprentice is led by a Master of his trade.

6. Music

Music is the sixth of the seven Liberal Arts and Sciences. Pythagoras and his followers were keen on studying music as a science.

Music is part of us. Our heartbeat is the basic pattern, with sounds ranging from the first cry of a newborn baby to our last gasp for breath. The sense of hearing is improved, so that we recognize ditties and rhythms and syncopation. Clapping and singing are part of who we are as humans.

7. Astronomy

Astronomy is last in this list of Arts and Sciences as we contemplate the stars and planets, and yes, the G.A.O.T.U.

Time and space seem to dwarf us. We feel tiny as we look at the Milky Way and the other planets in our solar system. Often it is said that "*The Fear of God is the Beginning of Wisdom.*" Looking at the universe helps to instill both fear and a sense of the glory of the universe.

The Seven Liberal Arts & Sciences are branches of Wisdom or Learning. If we are to become better men, we should work on becoming better able to understand our world.

There is a charge to us in these seven steps. That charge for us is to continue to be learners. Our education doesn't stop in high school or college. We are to continue to read classic literature, the Bible, biographies, history. We should see ourselves as life-long learners.

We should better comprehend the use of music, plays, and art in our lives. We should use math and geometry. We need to continue even with the Trivium to expand our vocabulary and practice writing. As we persevere in learning throughout our lives, we will become better men in Masonry.

Thank you for your attention Brethren,

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