Structure and Life of Classical Conversations

To teach is to learn...
Leigh Bortins, Founder of Classical Conversations

Philosophy

1. Every healthy organism has two components – Body and blood, skeleton and life, frame and breath. Jesus and all of Scripture model this for us. His laws give us structure, His fulfillment gives us life. The saints grow in grace and knowledge and the Church is healthier.

Classical Conversations seeks to provide families with a skeleton, a frame, a body which supports the very hard task of providing an education for children. Our Tutors provide the blood, the breath, the life to our growing community.

2. Those who join us believe modern education has failed and they would like to recover the knowledge of how to teach and learn effectively and efficiently.

Classical Conversations provides a framework to show families how to learn well. Primarily, we teach grammar, dialectic, and rhetorical skills. Secondarily, we tutor subjects. Our Tutors clearly understand the difference and work to their enjoyment to give life to the skills and subjects.

3. Every parent teaches every child. Every child watches both our sinful and righteous actions. God designed us to learn.

Classical Conversations models learning for families, not master teachers who impart a year of knowledge in a particular subject to a group of students only to move on to another group of students. Our Tutors relish the opportunity to show parents and students their joy in learning anything God has created while teaching how to learn.

4. Scripture teaches us to be steadfast; our post-modern culture conditions us for change.

Classical Conversations offers accountability that encourages hard, consistent work rewarded by a quality education that makes men free. Our Tutors guide their families away from the desire to try every new fad, and to stay the course by demonstrating various ways to engage students in learning fundamental skills.

5. Every reward comes with a choice, cost, and sacrifice.

Classical Conversations academic student programs are priced far below comparable programs and all parent’s training is free. Our Tutors teach because they love sharing the talents the Spirit has bestowed upon them.

6. Home Schooling experience is valuable.

Classical Conversations provides parents with an academic structure designed and developed by families, who have always home-schooled and have multiple grown children productively and profitably serving the Lord with their talents. Our Tutors confidently believe that if a loving parent is kept accountable to an effective, educational model, any parent can be their child’s first and best teacher.

7. There are no hard subjects, just poor learning skills.

Classical Conversations provides research and training in the recovery of excellent teaching and learning techniques. Our Tutors demonstrate those techniques to anyone who is willing to learn using the Classical model.
Foundations Program

1. Memorizing Subject Grammar
   a. This is the “foundation” of our Foundations Program. Tutors should inspire students to memorize these valuable pegs of information through creative repetition, drills and recitations.
   b. Remember the skill of memorizing large quantities of information, as we do within the Foundations Program, is the more important, long-term skill and goal. What we memorize is secondary to that long-term skill/goal. We are not saying that “what we memorize” is not important, but that the skill “to train the brain to retain” is the foundational goal of our Foundations program.
   c. Memorizing for recitations is the unfamiliar, hard work that modern educators neglect. Share success stories with parents to encourage their hearts and efforts.
   d. Program memory work content and thus “Memory Master” testing content will be based on the Foundations Guide memory work for the year’s given cycle.
   e. A Foundations Program Memory Master has everything memorized. Not almost or close, but mastered and not some but all of the memory work for that cycle. This is the CC standard of accountability and quality for parents to adhere to that wish to take full advantage of our Foundations Program.

2. Science Projects
   a. Many parents plan their calendar yearly and will be frustrated by too much change. Parents are encouraged to purchase the resources so they can plan around our structured experiments and projects while thinking about how to personalize them at home.
   b. Experiments (Weeks 1-6, 13-18): Tutors must use the experiment their Director provides from 201 Science Experiments to ask and answer scientific method questions. Directors may improve upon the experiment, but tie it to one in the 201 book.

   The goal of the six weeks of experiments is to review the grammar of the scientific method by asking questions that relate to the purpose, procedure, materials and conclusion within the context of an experiment relating to the semester’s “broad topic”.
   c. Demonstrations (Weeks 7-12, 19-24) Tutors must use the project or demonstration their Director provides. Directors feel free to improve on these while staying in broad topic taught that semester.

   The goal of the six weeks of demonstrations is to have fun, hands-on demonstrations that relate to the broad topic for the semester.

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Note: “Moving” science experiments or demonstrations around within their respective “six week periods” is permissible, but not recommended. By design, these projects correlate with the science fact some weeks and other weeks they do not, but they all stay within the broad topic for the semester. For new directors and tutors that are “systematic” thinkers this is a potential stress, but as the director and tutor mature within the Foundations Program the overall beauty of science is more fully realized.

3. Fine Arts
   a. Many parents plan their calendar yearly and will be frustrated by too much change. Parents are encouraged to purchase the resources so they can plan around our structured fine arts projects while thinking about how to personalize them at home.
   b. Drawing (Weeks 1-6): Tutors may use any picture they like to teach students to practice the 5 basic drawing elements using pencil and paper.
   c. Tin Whistle (Weeks 7-12): Tutors may use any tunes they choose to teach to student to read and count basic notes, basic music theory with associated vocabulary.
   d. Great Artists (Weeks 13-18): Tutors must teach the Artist and project provided to them by their Director from Discovering Great Artists. The Director chooses the artist and project from Discovering Great Artists, which correlates with the cycle’s time period.
   e. Orchestra and Composers (Weeks 19-24): Tutors use the Orchestra Song and the three classical compositions from Music for Dummies to teach students to listen. This has been the hardest area for most Tutors. Listening is a difficult skill that requires students to practice patience and concentration. Large group orchestra activity is encourage to give the “feel” of a large orchestra.

4. Presentations
   a. Tutor may suggest/assign any topic related to Foundations or Essentials
   b. Presentations are a signature portion of our Foundations program, but must not be allowed to overshadow the other aspects of the Foundations’ classroom time.
   c. Student should focus on Composure, Clear Speech, Eye Contact, and Managing the Audience. This is easier if the child is encouraged to practice his or her presentation at home.

Tutoring Foundations has provided me with an excellent “foundation” in approaching the upper schooling years with confidence and security.

Looking back at all that I have gleaned and learned over the last four plus years... It is truly incredible... I can dialogue intelligently and thoughtfully with my kids about subjects that used to be “Greek” to me!

Of course, I didn’t see or understand this potential when I started in the Foundations program, but now… Looking back… What a transforming process!

- Three year Foundations Tutor

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Essentials Program

1. Grammar
   a. The Tutors first priority is the Student Mastery Sheets. This grammatical repetition will make the rest of Language education easy. Encourage parents to review and drill this information using written work (ie mastery sheets), oral recitations, flashcards, and other methods that aid in memorizing the “grammar” of language.  

   **Note:** Much of the “grammar” used in Essentials is also contained within the Foundations Guide’s English Grammar memory work. Parents may wish to copy the summary pages from the Foundations guide onto cardstock to make flashcards for additional reinforcement tools!  
   b. The Sentence Structure allows students to accurately say what they mean and correct confusion in written work.  
   c. The Question Confirmation gives students the tools/skill to figure out why their sentence structure is unclear.  
   d. Diagramming ensures that the rules for parts of speech are understood, sentences are well-formed, and sentence structure and question confirmations make sense to the students.  
   e. The Quid et Quo provides assurance that students know the details of Language so they can ask good questions while learning a foreign language.  
   f. Spelling, Capitalization, and Punctuation are secondary. These subjects may be covered briefly and rather sporadically within the grammar and writing portions of Essentials.

2. Writing
   a. Tutors use the recommended IEW resource for that given year, as the core product to build their teaching schedule around. Families will need this same resource at home for continuity and ownership of teaching the method.  
   b. Tutor’s must follow the IEW model of teaching structure and style, and may bring in “supplementary” source texts, if so desired.  
   c. Tutors should make it clear to families that they may choose to “hand in” a paper for a given writing project (for comments), or not. Thus keeping the management of the student’s progress and abilities in the hands of the parent.  
   d. Lots of class participation and little quiet time are expected. Work on assignments as a class so students can share ideas and be encouraged by peers, parents, and Tutor.

3. Arithmetic
   a. Effective Tutors believe that student speed and accuracy in the basic operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) are vital to the success of their higher-math education.  
   b. Tutors should ensure the time allotted for this portion of class is not neglected.

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Challenge Program

1. Scope
   a. The titles of the scope (grammar, exposition, logic, research, debate, rhetoric) indicate the skill the Tutor intends to model in class. Tutors need to really understand what the title of the scope means so they may teach that skill as applied to that material.
   
b. Parents and students are responsible for learning the material at home.
   
c. Tutors are responsible for showing students how to learn the subject’s grammar, answering questions parents could not answer, and providing lots of dialectic and rhetorical opportunities within a Christian worldview.

2. Sequence
   a. The sequence has a specific order for reasons that can be hard to understand until you have done every assignment in every Challenge. The sequence will remain the same, though we make small adaptations each year in material and expectations for both new and mature Challenges.
   
b. Challenge A and B are reflected in Challenge I and II, so curricula modifications negatively impact the students opportunity to see the same material twice. No subject will ever be learned well in one year; but skills can be gained and improved upon rapidly.
   
c. Tutors are to seek to teach a Christ-centered, integration of subjects. Since most Americans are inept in math and science, they do not know how to evaluate where our math and sciences support our history and literature studies. Science is heavy in Classical Conversations compared to most classical schools. A classical emphasis on history and literature without regard to science perpetuates students’ inabilities to learn well. Math and Science will remain ‘hard’ subjects for Americans if we give into modern expectations of science studies. The science sequence will remain the same, though we will eventually work towards a stronger science series when more parents and students have the skills demanded for more rigorous studies.
   
d. There are even more rigorous classical skills that will eventually be introduced in Classical Conversations. We believe our course expectations can become even more specifically classical as the bulk of parents educated in the Classical model become better teachers. We pray our grandchildren will be able to read original works in their authors’ native languages, just as students in previous centuries have done and students in modern foreign countries still do.

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3. Tutors

a. Tutors love to learn, and seek to know God in all they encounter. They love finding Him in the particulars and then are eager to see how their new knowledge of Him works through the universals.

b. Their primary role is to show students how to learn, facilitate opportunities for rhetorical and dialectic practice, and provide structured accountability for students to complete their assignments.

c. Assignments may be modified within the resources specified to reflect the pace of the students as long as the standard of achievement is reflected by what the students are capable of doing and NOT based on what they are actually doing. For example, it is acceptable for students to suffer the consequences in Latin if they refuse to put hours into drilling each week. The disciplined, hard-working students model the expectation for the rest of the class.

d. Our Challenge I and II tutors love teaching and may drop up to 2 pieces of literature a year and to substitute with a personal favorite. Remember the hardship this can cause a family if they have to purchase something more or can't easily find your preferred resource. The rest of the Challenges have far fewer reading selections and we would prefer you don't make any changes as the assignments are integrated throughout the scope.

e. Seminar offering expectations

   a. CC curriculum text selections are non-negotiable. Tutors must be willing to work within CC’s text selections.

   b. All potential tutors must be willing to offer all courses outlined in CC’s scope and sequence for their given Challenge level.

   c. All potential tutors of Challenge I and above should soberly consider the workload and CC curriculum constraints before being contracted as a CC Challenge I or above tutor.

f. Co-Tutoring

   a. Challenge allows for co-tutors. A primary tutor and a secondary tutor. Given the following division...

      i. Exposition, Rhetoric, Debate, and Research be taught by the primary Challenge tutor

      ii. Grammar (Latin) and Logic (Math) curriculum taught by the secondary tutor.

   b. Challenge III and IV periodically allows for a third Research (science) tutor. Consult your State Manager and Program Manager concerning this option.

   Challenge Tutor Resource list:
   for growing in teaching Christ-centered, integration of subjects....

   Repairs the Ruins, Douglas Wilson
   Mathematics: Is God Silent?, James Nickels
   Mathematics and the Search for Knowledge, Morris Kline

   All Challenge Tutors should listen to online to ...
   Challenge Scope/Skill strand.

When I first began with Classical Conversations four years ago, I wanted to influence my children’s education. As I have tutored Foundations, Essentials and now Challenge I, the surprise has been that I have received the greatest benefit. Classical Conversations has given me the tools, both in content and modeling, to educate first myself, and then my children. I now have the confidence to study almost any subject, and I feel prepared to pass this knowledge on to others. But more importantly, I have the experience and confidence to encourage others to learn the tools for self-education.

- Classical Conversations Tutor

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The Culmination of a Classical Christian Education

Catechesis
...an echo in celebration

Goals or Purpose
Doxology

Wisdom
Rhetoric
Celebration

Knowledge
Grammar
Stories

Understanding
Dialectic
Themes

Theology
Science
Linguage
Math
History
Fine Arts
Son

Conclusion

Classical Conversations believes our time learning is a sacrifice of individual talents for God’s glory, the Church’s benefit, and our family’s successful witness. Sacrifice is the operational word. We have to sacrifice some of the time we use for things we like to do for things we don’t like to do. We can’t be all things to all people as Paul encourages us to do if we think our time learning about God’s kingdom is about ourselves only. Praise God that He delights in our individuality and humanness. Praise God that He delights in His body, the Church. Praise God that He delights in His Creation. And pray every day that we will work very hard to be able to rejoice in the knowledge, and understanding, and wisdom of His works as we praise with Him.

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