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Augustinian Composition Pedagogy and the Catholic Liberal Arts in the Time of Generative AI

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Abstract: This article proposes a theoretical basis of Augustinian composition pedagogy by tracing the symbiotic relationship between writing and knowing found within St. Augustine's *Letters*, *The Trinity*, *Soliloquies*, and *Confessions* and connecting them to modern writing-to-learn composition pedagogies. Given today's trying times of generative AI, this article argues that Catholic schools revitalize the writing arts in a manner proposed by Augustine—that is, to enrich inward contemplation and outward love for others. In embracing such philosophy of writing and applying it across the disciplines, Catholic schools can enrich their distinctively Catholic liberal arts mission—and ward off dangers found in generative AI trends and overzealous relativism. By outlining the details and value of Augustinian writing pedagogy in relation to contemporary composition theory, this article provides educators with Augustinian language and perspectives to help design distinctively Catholic writing-intensive curriculum and learning objectives to foster in students what Pope Francis calls the "wisdom of the heart."

Keywords: Augustine of Hippo, writing-to-learn, writing-across-the-curriculum, rhetoric, trivium, contemplation, artificial intelligence

It is safe to say that generative artificial intelligence (AI) writing platforms—such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Claude, Quillbot, and others—have changed ways that secondary and tertiary educators approach writing at Catholic institutions. Some institutions may implement harsh penalties for students who misuse generative AI; other institutions may allow generative AI to augment their pedagogies; others may ignore generative AI—or maybe even deemphasize

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teaching writing instruction altogether, foreseeing that writing will not be as valuable in the future. Luckily, St. Augustine provides some, often overlooked, pedagogical guidance to help Catholic teachers recalibrate during these frenzied times—and re-instill hope in the role of writing in Catholic education. Consulting St. Augustine's wisdom, this article argues that not only writing tasks, but also writing intensive classrooms and contemplative writing culture, serve important roles in Catholic liberal arts education. They serve crucial roles in these times of generative AI technologies.

Although writing intensive curriculum is often accepted as a best practice within secular public universities, writing intensive curriculum also has value within Catholic university curricula as well, albeit with different objectives. This article traces how the writing arts can aim toward those objectives to distinctively enrich Catholic educational missions. By harnessing contemplative attitudes, Catholic educators can consider writing through the lens of the liberal arts tradition. Much like twentieth century rhetorician Richard Weaver (1948/1970) promotes in his essay "Write the Truth," writing instruction should prioritize the liberal arts of thinking instead of merely rehashing writing mechanics. As such, students can write to others to advance their own pursuit of truth; they can also pursue truth to eventually communicate their claims toward audiences via writing; and, of course, they can oscillate, combine, and overlap these processes. Whether writing-to-progress or progressing-to-write, Augustine's ideal writers seek objective knowledge, not merely socially constructed claims or subjective conveniences. While Weaver directs writers toward this objectivity in the mid-twentieth century, it is more foundationally an Augustinian understanding of writing. Specifically, Augustinian writing differentiates Catholic composition from overzealous expressivist and relativist approaches to writing that have been popularized throughout American secular education since the 1970s. In addition, Augustine's understanding of writing helps writers fortify themselves against, what Pope Francis (2024) has recently recognized as, the harmful uses of artificial intelligence. Ultimately, the Augustinian perspective accentuates the foundational liberal arts values of composition; it orients students toward the pursuit knowledge and truth—and fosters loving communication.

As a philosopher, theologian, rhetorician, and teacher, St. Augustine of Hippo (2008c) celebrates liberal arts learning and communication most prominently in *On Christian Teaching* (*De Doctrina Christiana*), specifically, in Book Four where he spotlights how communication and rhetoric should serve the Good and the True (pp. 101–104). Yet, while *On Christian Teaching* is crucial to the study of communication, this article will more uniquely examine the Augustinian symbiotic relationship between meaningful writing and meaningful progress toward truth promoted in Letter 143 of his personal correspondence—specifically, as Augustine puts it, writing to communicate recently acquired knowledge, and, by means of writing, further advancing knowledge.

As will be outlined in this article, Augustinian composition is informed by the classical *trivium* foundation of the liberal arts. It emphasizes the art of thinking alongside the art of language (grammar) and the art of communication (rhetoric). The article proposes that writing intensive courses should primarily aim to build edified habits of spirit and mind. Although it may sound counterintuitive, Augustinian writing pedagogy teaches tactics of rhetorically attuned writing *secondarily*. Refined writing should primarily seek to serve *fides et ratio* through applied *ora et labora*. In this way, writers cultivate their faith and reason and habituate prayer and work; but most importantly, they symbiotically intersect these elements. In other words, writing serves prayer and thought while prayer and thought serves the writing. Writing to philosophically advance or spiritually progress helps writers advance or progress their skills as writers. As such, an Augustinian symbiotic relationship between intellectual and spiritual growth and writing development can inform pedagogical decisions about the role of organic composition within the classroom. The symbiosis can also offer perspective into how writing can be integrated across wider curricula in addition to specialized writing courses.

To facilitate this position, this article first outlines Augustine's perspectives about writing-to-progress and progressing-to-write. Next, the article consults write-to-learn scholarship and integrational cognitive perspectives from the modern field of composition studies to spotlight how writing assists student thinking. Returning to Augustine, his insights about epistemology are then outlined to highlight how Augustinian liberal learning differs from modern utility-minded learning. To this end, interrelationships between the *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa* are traced to show how writing to progress and progressing to write builds productive habits of spirit and mind. Finally, consulting Pope Francis, C.S. Lewis, and Plato, Augustinian composition pedagogy is celebrated as a boon to current Catholic educators and students during a time when so many secular schools overly promote two extremes: subjective relativism and informational discourse, both of which ignore the wider tapestry of reality. As such, this article demonstrates the value of a classical Augustinian writing pedagogy—one that serves the heart, not merely the senses or the head—in the pluralistic marketplace of education. To this end, this article spotlights organic writing as a tool for liberal learning and contemplating truth—which is especially important to Catholic liberal arts education in these disruptive times of generative AI.

Augustine, Writing, and Progressing

In the fields of composition and communication, Augustine is often most familiar for *On Christian Teaching* which unpacks a series of insights about homiletics, rhetoric, language, and teaching. Augustine's lesser-known letters written to colleagues and friends across the Late Roman Empire can also be valuable to consult—and provide perspectives that may be unfamiliar to Catholic educators. For instance, in Letter 143, Augustine writes to his friend Marcellinus. With

humility, Augustine discusses the origin of the soul and recognizes that others may criticize his argument since he is wrestling with metaphysical issues that are much larger than he. Augustine is clear: he appreciates readers who may critique his writing and ideas because he is a merely a fallible man. After this humble admission, Augustine (2008b) confesses, "I try to be of the number of those who write by advancing in knowledge, and advance by writing" (p. 150)—which has also been translated as "I endeavor to be one of those who write because they have made some progress, and who, by means of writing, make further progress" (Augustine, 1886, p. 490). Although a single line in a personal letter, the quotation is revealing. In addition to revealing Augustine's attitude toward perfective thinking, it provides Augustinian perspectives about the value of writing.

What does it mean when Augustine claims that he writes because he has made some progress? This line indicates that he strives to think more lucidly toward truth as an individual so he can write and communicate these ideas to others. Moreover, the second part of Augustine's phrase acknowledges that writing cooperates with a perfective truth-seeking program to assist understanding. In fact, Augustine's act of letter writing itself illustrates how he writes toward progress and progresses toward writing. In his letters, Augustine publicly grapples with philosophical issues like happiness, Christian conduct, and differences between paganism and Christianity. He does not write to merely express himself or to establish personal feelings. Instead, he seeks to discover and refine his understanding of truth; he philosophizes as an individual as a means to philosophize with others and progress his knowledge through public-facing writing.

For example, in Letter 3, Augustine corresponds to Nebridius. In it, Augustine writes to dialectically understand the concept of happiness; but he first seeks to progress his thinking before writing. Augustine reveals that he deeply contemplated the concepts before composing the letter. He writes, "I read your letter by lamp-light after dinner; it was almost time for bed, but not quite time for sleep: so I reflected for a long time, sitting on my bed, and Augustine held this conversation with Augustine" (Augustine, 2008a, p. 7). He internally "reflected for a long time" so that he could outwardly provide Nebridius with insights to move the conversation forward—that is, he progresses his thinking to eventually progress the written conversation toward better understanding of truth. Augustine advances as a thinker and writes to Nebridius to productively—and outwardly—advance the exchange.

Outside of his letters, Augustine's dialogues feature meaningful ways where he contemplates and then writes. As Brian Stock (2010) outlines in *Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Antiquity*, Augustine's texts oscillate between outward and inner dialogues. As Stock notes, Augustine's first dialogues are primarily moved by questions concerning truth; in these early dialogues, Augustine often communicates his ideas through inner dialogue—that is, he asks himself questions and responds as if two people were dialoguing (p. 86). For example, in Augustine's *Soliloquies* (*Soliloquia*), the conversation unfolds between Reason and himself.

Augustine recognizes that he is alone in this contemplative space; but still, he outwardly illustrates an internal dialogue. Readers of the *Soliloquies* peer into Augustine's inner thought process. This inner thought process is similarly referenced in Letter 3, when Augustine refers to his own "conversation with Augustine": a dialogue that progresses toward truth.

As previously stated, in Letter 143, Augustine (2008b) shares that he wants to "advance to write" or "by means of writing, make further progress." Simply, he writes to direct himself and others toward goodness and truth. He writes to structure his own thinking and structure readers' thinking toward the Good, the True, and God. He also recognizes the epistemological limits of human thinking; in Letter 143, Augustine humbly admits that he will not fully and immediately uncover the truth through writing. After all, as Augustine (1921/2008) famously admits in his later *Confessions*: "our heart is restless, until it reposes in Thee" (p. 5). But, as cognitive expression, the act of writing helps him perfectively progress his ideas. Furthermore, his writing invites dialogic critique. In the context of Letter 143, he asks others to hold him accountable of his fallibility. Therefore, he acknowledges the sociality of written discourse. As a Roman Catholic thinker in late Antiquity and early Middle Ages, he naturally does not believe in conceptions of social constructed truths that are popular in today's modern era—such as the constructions promoted by twentieth and twenty-first century composition scholars like Kenneth Bruffee and poststructuralist philosophers like Richard Rorty (Olson, 1989, p. 1). Augustine's view of writing contrasts what compositionist James Berlin (1987) labels "social epistemic" understanding of communication, as well. Social epistemic composition prioritizes the cooperation of the "in here" (individual subjectivity), "out there" (material reality), and other people (p. 17). As a Platonist, Augustine aligns with different priorities. He prioritizes the relationship between "up there" (essence) and "down here" (existence). While the social epistemic perspective exclusively emphasizes worldly and socially facing dimensions of composition, Augustine emphasizes a translation of vertical dimensions into horizontal (or rhetorical) means of communication. Such verticality leads composition away from secular social epistemic priorities and aligns it with philosophical and theological oriented learning objectives—that is, a Catholic liberal arts approach.

Writing-to-Learn

Before examining how Augustine's writing-to-progress/progressing-to-write can inform writing pedagogy, the pedagogical concept of "writing to learn" (WTL) can first be established—since this pedagogical concept lays at the heart of Augustinian knowing-through-writing. Ultimately, some modern understandings of WTL can inform how Augustinian writing pedagogy operates in the modern context—and, reciprocally, how Augustine's classical ideas about composition productively diverge from secular modes of composition and generative AI writing.

What is WTL?

Writing-to-learn (WTL) is a modern pedagogical strategy whereby students, through acts of writing, more intimately wrestle with course material. WTL is often associated with writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) or writing-in-the-disciplines (WID) efforts to help students engage with content studies beyond English or writing classes. In other words, courses that are not specifically composition or communication oriented can use WTL approaches to foster student engagement, spark class discussion, or even assess understanding of content. For example, in the spirit of WAC WTL, biology students may write one-page reflections on completed lab experiments, or mathematics students may be required to write paragraphs that explain applied mathematical operations.

Throughout the decades, WTL scholarship has justified how writing assists learning processes. Early scholarship, such as the work of Lev S. Vygotsky (1962), Janet Emig (1977), and Walter Ong, S.J. (1982/2002) have outlined how writing can assist thinking. Since then, WTL has been commonly associated with informal low stakes writing—such as student reflection assignments that are not formally assessed or even assessed at all—which indicates how WTL can be applied in a broadband manner. Instructors do not have to be expert compositionists to assign and assess these smaller informal WTL assignments.

However, in zealously celebrating such informal writing tasks, modern expressivist pedagogies unfortunately distance WTL from the Augustinian mode of writing-to-progress. For example, in an influential 1982 essay, compositionists Toby Fulwiler and Art Young maintain that modern WTL is primary fueled by expressive writing, that is:

> . . . not to communicate; but to order and represent experience to our own understanding. In this sense language provides us with a unique way of knowing and becomes a tool for discovering, for shaping meaning, and for reaching understanding. For many writers this kind of speculative writing takes place in notebooks and journals; often it is first-draft writing, necessary before more formal, finished writing can be done. (p. x)

They maintain that WTL does not need to be a transactional act; it does not need to focus on communication; instead, it involves writing for oneself. Although this expressive aim may sound overly self-involved, Fulwiler and Young (1982) importantly qualify that informal WTL also "allows authors to distance themselves from experience and helps them to interpret, clarify, and place value on that experience; thus, writers can become spectators using language to further define themselves and their beliefs" (p. x). Fulwiler and Young's secondary admission more closely resembles a classical Augustinian understanding of writing-to-progress but it still ignores a crucial Augustinian ingredient: the philosophical pursuit of truth and wisdom that may not be exclusively

sparked by personal experience. Ultimately, this divergence from classical values provides a useful demarcation of Augustine's writing-to-progress. Unlike the modern expressive understandings of WTL, Augustine seeks to fuse "writing to learn" with the pursuit and communication of objective knowledge, rather than only subjective perspective.

WTL within Writing-Across-Curriculum

The WAC perspective can further contribute to an understanding of Augustinian truth-seeking composition curriculum. As noted by compositionist Chris Anson (2010), writing-across-curriculum categorizes WTL into two silos. First, WTL can develop student writing skills. Such instruction focuses on written output, writing development, and communication. These writing skills are assessed formally rather than informally. Quite simply, students need to practice writing—that is, make grammatical, logical, and rhetorical choices on their own—and receive and apply feedback to refine their writing skills.

Generative AI can clearly interfere with Anson's first silo of "learning to write." The more that generative AI makes decisions for students, the less opportunity students have to thoroughly practice, habituate, and take responsibility for their decisions. And while generative AI may provide broadband feedback to guide some dimensions of writing, it cannot provide substantive feedback about rhetorical dimensions, such as *kairos*, contextual exigence, and specific readerships. More generally, preliminary studies show that generative AI tools like ChatGPT lead to detrimental effects such as increased tendency toward procrastination, memory loss, lessened intellectual engagement, and overall academic ineptitude (Abbas, et al., 2024; Cai, et al., 2023; Chan & Hu, 2023): all hinderances to effective writing habits. Still, there is hope for teaching students to "learn to write" if it is folded into Anson's second silo "writing to learn": a silo that more robustly aligns with Augustinian writing pedagogy.

In the second silo, much like Fulwiler and Young suggest, students can also "write for learning" content which can be more expressive; it focuses on input, learning, and discovery; and it is often informally assessed (Anson, 2010, p. 14). Of course, these two WTL distinctions—"learning to write" and "writing to learn"—stretch across a continuum. Therefore, assignments may facilitate both; they may simultaneously help students learn to write while also helping them write to learn. Within WAC efforts, universities often preference the latter. They see writing as a vehicle for learning content—that is, it helps students more closely read course material, memorize course information, and analyze and synthesize course material (Anson, 2010, p. 14).

Within Anson's second silo of "writing to learn," several cognitive distinctions can contextualize Augustinian writing pedagogy and discourage generative AI. After all, there are multiple levels in "writing to learn." As Perry Klein (1999) outlines, at least four processes unfold when students write to learn. The first WTL process is the most informal and elementary. Klein categorizes

it as "shaping at the point of utterance" where language helps students make tacit knowledge explicit; students begin to code switch toward linguistically-encoded schemata (p. 209). Here they cognitively toggle between language choices to better understand. The second and more advanced WTL process category involves "forward search hypotheses." This process helps students cluster ideas to support inference-making as they write. The third category constructs "genre-related hypotheses" where genre schemata help students link ideas and spark a robust search for knowledge. The final category is the "backward search and other hypotheses related to planning" whereby students consider rhetorical implications and audiences (or absent audiences) to elaborate knowledge and emerging knowledge (Klein, 1999, p. 209).

Writing to learn cooperates with Augustine's progressing-to-write and writing-to-progress. It helps cultivate truth-seeking through writing. Generative AI can conversely suffocate process-based writing and thinking by exclusively focusing on product or destination—which stifles students' technical, intellectual, and spiritual journeys. Fundamentally, generative AI creates instant written products without allowing students to thoroughly wrestle with the process. It can perpetuate attitudes of impatience in students. To heal this rift and reinstate more patient labor, room needs to be made for the organic process: thinking about writing and writing about thinking. Klein's (1999) stages of "writing to learn" can help. Educators can use the stages to transform a written paper assignment into a writing "project": one that paces the writing and thinking process over a series of homework assignments or in-class exercises. And, depending on the student population, instructors can integrate low-stakes reward systems to cultivate student investment. By pacing out writing projects, students are not only concerned with final product—something that generative AI can manufacture—but the process, something that generative AI cannot authentically manufacture. Ultimately, "writing to learn" helps students unlearn the secular utilitarianism that is reinforced by generative AI, and embrace the classical virtues supported by Catholicism. It helps students recognize that the ends do not always justify the means. And it helps educators escort students toward the spaces where growth genuinely unfolds.

An Augustinian writing intensive pedagogy—without the use of generative AI—most explicitly connects students with advanced third and fourth categories of Klein's WTL stages. These later stages aim at discovering knowledge itself—and away from Fulwiler and Young's more elementary expressive aims. Furthermore, Augustinian WTL efforts move writing intensive classrooms—and by extension, some curricular WAC or WID efforts—away from overemphasizing information and memorization. Instead, Augustinian WTL escorts students into deeper habits of knowing that drill down into first principles (that is, theological and philosophical modes of thinking)—and the rhetorical-mindedness of effectively sharing these ideas with others. As such, it can more holistically cultivate understanding, the desire to understand the logic more deeply, and the ability and desire to share understanding with others. These deeper explorations of philosophical and theological understandings—asking and exploring "why" questions—are often glossed over

when students use generative AI; moreover, the inhumanity of generative AI is not particularly apt at exploring theological or philosophical issues. It simply reduces issues to bullet-points of information or it retreats toward non-committal positions of cultural relativism. In short, Augustine writing pedagogy primarily helps students contemplate more authentically through the act of writing—while secondarily, it teaches students how to (and want to) write more thoughtfully and, if they feel inclined, spiritually.

WTL and Cognition

Outside of both composition pedagogy scholarship and the classical tradition, cognitive scientists support writing as external extensions of "intra-cognitive systems" which cooperate with pursuits of knowledge. From the cognitive science perspective, writing remains crucial to thinking and understanding; and by contrast, to remove written forms of representation from curriculum would severely obstruct cognitive capacities for thinking (Menary, 2007, pp. 624–625). Specifically, human memory plays a crucial role in WTL because memory becomes extended by "external memory systems" through writing (Menary, 2007, p. 625). Whereas Plato's (1987) *Phaedrus* recognizes writing as potentially harmful because it preserves ideas and inhibits our capacity to memorize ideas, theorists like Richard Menary, Merlin Donald, and Mark Rowlands conversely insist that writing fosters "novel representational systems and manipulations of those vehicles of those systems" and allows for innovative completions of cognitive tasks through written "ends" or products (Menary, 2007, pp. 626–627). Menary specifically insists that writing strengthens robust learning via the malleable manipulation of representational systems and not through mere slavish application of rules (p. 628). In this way, Menary's position supports the perspective that writing intensive learning should not only address grammatical correctness or horizontal grammar but teach malleable dialectical and rhetorical arts. Whereas grammatical instruction does not spotlight the "fluid and malleable manipulation of representational systems," the broader vertical arts of grammar (or what Sister Miriam Joseph [1948/2014] calls "general grammar" which is the "relation of words to ideas and to realities" [p. 52] or what Augustine [2008c] explores as *signum* [30–31]), cultivates such meaningful learning in the writing intensive curriculum as vertical grammar operates within the arts of thinking and rhetoric (see Hurley, 2017, for more). Consulting the cognitive science perspectives, the art of thinking alongside rhetorical uses of representational systems and vertical grammar can be prioritized within class time to build habits of writing-to-progress and progressing-to-write that operate outside of generative AI's reach. Ultimately, the three elements of language, thinking, and rhetoric—as they accentuate both horizontal and vertical axes—compose the classical *trivium*, the liberal arts foundation of cognitive prowess and effective communication. Augustinian writing pedagogy aligns with the *trivium*. Such an alignment reveals authentic dimensions of human writing and thinking that cannot be captured by generative AI.

A WTL-informed composition classroom can be a fruitful environment to teach knowledge-driven cognitive habits. After all, WTL facilitates both processes and products. Writing processes

and written products allow for different ways of thinking that are not available in exclusively internal neural processes. For example, writer-thinkers see their represented thoughts on the page, reread their represented thoughts, and can reorder/revise/refine their written thoughts to be read differently by readers (Menary, 2007, p. 629). Writing intensive courses—that is, courses that provide time and structures for drafting, revision, and reflection—allow students to revisit, reassess, and refine their thinking-on-the-page. In other words, through writing, students externalize their internal thoughts to be delivered into various social environments. This allows writer-thinkers to consider possible interpretations (and misinterpretations) by real-world readers; writers can then refine their represented thoughts. Through these outward-facing considerations, students consult the rhetorical arts, which is the third silo of the classical *trivium*. In pondering rhetorical effectiveness, students are not only concerned with effective utility, but they can also be motivated by classical values: charity, love, and the common good. In short, by practicing rhetorically truth-minded writing, students familiarize themselves with habits of caring outward communication; they can enact St. Thomas Aquinas's (1947) definition of love of others: to will "good to that other . . . [which] puts the other, as it were, in the place of himself." (I–I, q.20, a.1, ad.3).

Progress Toward Writing/Writing Toward Progress

Whereas many secular pedagogues often focus on students writing to *learn*, Augustine is more concerned with writing to *know*. Therefore, Augustinian writing pedagogy differs from modern practical pedagogies. And, unlike most modern compositionist pedagogies, Augustinian composition is ultimately married to philosophy and theology—that is, knowledge as an end in itself—a tenant of liberal learning as detailed by St. John Henry Newman's (1852/1982) *The Idea of a University*.

Progressing by knowing is outlined in Augustine's *On the Trinity* (*De Trinitate*). In Book 9, Augustine (2002) explains, "He (Christ) says that perfection in this life is to . . . press forward in purpose towards the goal that lies before us. . . . Let us be of this mind: so as to know that the inclination to seek the truth is safer than the presumption which regards unknown things to be known. Let us, therefore, so seek as if we were about to find, and so find as if we were about to seek" (p. 270). Along those lines, Augustinian writing pedagogy has the responsibility to facilitate understanding and knowledge, but also stokes the desire to perfectively understand and know. In this way, Augustinian writing pedagogy helps cultivate confidence and faith in the human faculties—specifically, memory, understanding, and will—toward excellence but tempered by humility.

In *The Trinity*, Augustine (2002) additionally shares: "The more a thing is known, but not fully known, the more the mind desires to know the rest" (p. 292). Both secondary and tertiary education liberal arts curricula have the responsibility of fostering the desire to know through

the act of writing. When an Augustinian writing intensive course connects the will to write with the progress-to-write, it can further reinforce the cardinal virtue of fortitude toward knowing. Specifically, it helps students to avoid falling victim to relativism or skepticism: two tempting paths that ignore perfective progression toward excellence. Such temptations toward the skepticism were also felt by Augustine in his time. Augustine particularly found the Academics to be a problematic school of thought because they doubted that knowing was possible—and such skepticism was seductively clothed as wisdom. In Book Five of the *Confessions*, Augustine (1921/2008) admits that he initially assumed that the Academics were wise because they doubted everything (p. 116). But Augustine soon recognized that the Academics lacked courage to pursue truth. In his *Soliloquies*, he notes the important role of courage when seeking knowledge. When Reason asks him if he knows "what a line is in geometry," Augustine (2010) replies that he indeed knows (p. 354). To this, Reason asks if he is afraid of the Academicians and their skepticism of knowledge. Augustine replies: "Not at all. They do not want the wise man to make a mistake, but I am not wise. Hence, I still am not afraid to claim knowledge of those things which I know. But if, as I desire, I arrive at wisdom, I shall do what wisdom teaches me" (p. 355). A similar perpetual movement toward better understanding—and the corresponding humility—is found in Augustine's symbiotic relationship between progressing and writing. Modern day skeptics and relativists share similar attitudes to those of the Academics of Antiquity; they doubt that knowledge is possible and argue the relativity of truth. Augustinian writing curriculum opposes this position much like Augustine does throughout *Against the Academics* (*Contra Academicos*); similarly, Augustinian writing pedagogy aims to inspire students to pursue objective knowledge with the necessary fortitude. It helps students cast off the temptation of ardent skepticism not by merely *theorizing* about Augustinian attitudes but by *enacting* Augustinian attitudes through the act of writing—that is, exhibiting courageous truth-seeking on the page and committing to truth-claims.

In addition to courage, Augustinian writing pedagogy promotes love. In *The Trinity*, Augustine (2002) promotes that love is an integral part of why and how people ideally understand: it "enkindles him with zeal, who is looking indeed for something he does not know, but who beholds and loves the form that he does know, to which the unknown thing belongs" (p. 294). He further suggests that the beauty of knowledge "through which men's thoughts are mutually made known by the enunciation of significant words, is quickly discerned by almost all rational minds; and because he knows the beauty of this knowledge and loves it because he knows it, he, therefore, eagerly searches for the unknown word" (Augustine 2010, p. 294). To Augustine, that pursuit of knowledge is vertical, grammatical, and beautiful: to remember, know, and love God through words. But more inclusive of college students, this mission may also include the contemplation of reality's beauty and the pursuit of philosophical lines of inquiry through words. To echo a *perichoric* trinitarian structure offered in Book 9 of Augustine's *The Trinity*, writing can help writers explore these philosophical and theological lines of inquiry when they know and love inner life, outer life, and knowledge itself.

Ultimately, writing-to-progress and progressing-to-write offers a writerly symbiosis of *vita contemplativa* (contemplative life) and *vita activa* (active life) distinctions. Therefore, to better understand the applicable value of Augustine's Letter 138 remark about writing, the combined *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa* can scaffold how knowing unfolds. The scaffold helps justify the important role of writing intensive courses, writing-to-learn pedagogy, and WAC or WID initiatives within Catholic liberal arts institutions (see, Joseph, 1948/2014, pp. 2–3, for more).

Gesturing to St. Thomas Aquinas in his book *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, Joseph Pieper (2009) notes the *vita activa* as the working life. He separates the *vita contemplativa* into two parts: *ratio* and *intellectus*. According to Pieper, the *ratio* is the "distinctly human . . . power of discursive, logical thought, of searching and of examination, of abstraction, of definition and drawing conclusions" (p. 28). Pieper defines *intellectus* understanding as "*simplex inuitus*, of that simple vision to which truth offers itself like a landscape to the eye" and as such, it is "already beyond the sphere allotted to man" (p. 28). To this end, contemplation as *intellectus* is not work but requires passive receptivity (p. 29)—and fact, can be associated to "play" as done by Aquinas (p. 34). In this way, *intellectus* contemplation can be seen as the most leisurely of the three distinctions.

Knowing can be understood as the simultaneous interplay of *ratio* and *intellectus*. The act of writing, as a dimension of the active life, connects to both types of knowing. Augustine's writing-to-progress and progressing-to-write orchestrates this relationship—and the symbiosis between labor and leisure and active and contemplative trajectories.

As shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, both sequences involve different starting points and endpoints—one begins with *intellectus* and moves toward *activa*, the other begins with *activa* and end with *intellectus*—and both sequences can unfold simultaneously.

Figure 1

Writing to Progress

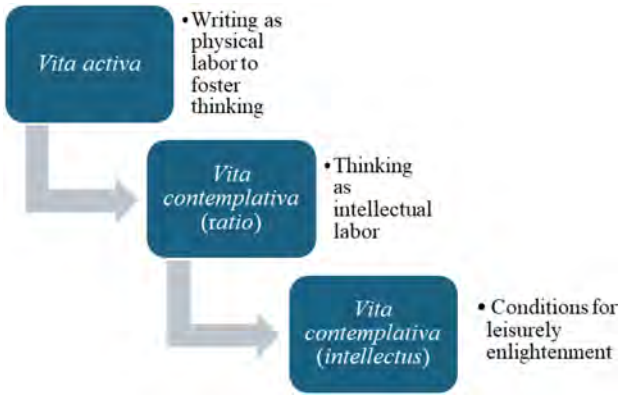
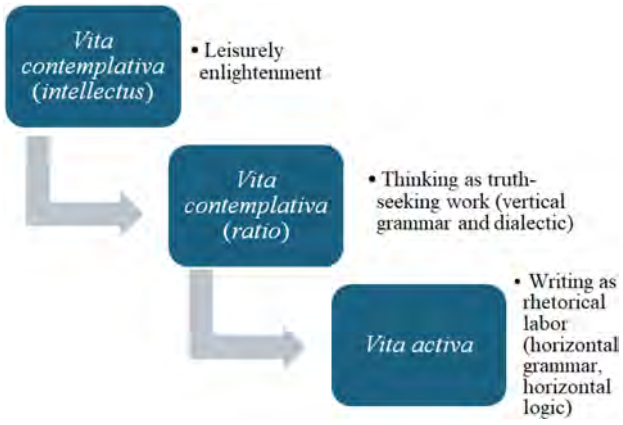


Figure 2

Progressing to Write



As suggested by these figures, composition in Catholic education should seek to teach more than grammar or engineering of generative AI prompts. Classical composition curriculum such as those based on argumentation, such as Scott F. Crider's 2005 *The Office of Assertation* textbook, can certainly explore these deeper areas—specifically, intersecting *ratio* with *activa*. Like Crider's perspective, Augustinian composition pedagogy corrals a wider aim. It unites internal thinking with outward communication, *vita contemplativa* with *vita activa*, form with content, and intellectual leisure with intellectual work. Labor can inspire leisure and leisure can inspire labor. The writing intensive classroom can provide opportunities for both leisure and labor by means of inspiration and instruction. And it places students into processes of *vita contemplativa* toward *vita activa* and *via activa* toward *vita contemplativa*.

Of course, leisure and labor take time. Consequently, Augustinian writing pedagogy, much like good writing itself, requires time. As a rhetorician, Augustine was very much influenced by Cicero; in many ways, Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* can be seen as a Christianized version of Cicero's teachings on rhetoric. Like Cicero's view of rhetoric, Augustine's view of writing requires time for invention and discovery, the first of Cicero's five canons of rhetoric (alongside arrangement, style, memory, and delivery). While idea generation and exploratory research can be overlooked or neglected when assigning papers because of curricular time restrictions, Augustinian writing pedagogy necessitates in-class and out-of-class time directed to this first canon of rhetoric with care.

The two sequences outlined in Figure 1 and Figure 2 can guide these invention and discovery processes. Per Figure 1, instructors may begin actively by assigning low-stakes writing assignments, freewriting paragraphs, or written brainstorming exercises —perhaps in class—to advance student thinking through their writing. Upon reviewing basic induction, deduction, and basic

logical syllogisms, instructors can then help students eventually advance their ideas toward more sophisticated arguments and wider enlightenment. Per Figure 2, instructors may choose to initially foster "leisurely enlightenment" by assigning spiritual or philosophical nonfiction or fiction for students to discover insights on their own which they can eventually process into an argument to be shaped by active rhetorical labor. Of course, when the final paper is finally ready to be written, students can be given the opportunity to draft, workshop, and receive verbal or written feedback to help rhetorically shape the final composition.

In the spirit of Augustinian composition, instructors should resist rushing these processes. Impatient thinking and rushed writing sequences can inhibit the depth of contemplative exploration. Students may be tempted to resort to generative AI when they are overwhelmed and procrastinating, which can emerge from impatient conditions. Furthermore, if student-writers are rushed, they may merely settle for Berlin's (1987) social epistemic mode of thinking, rather than patiently and laboriously pursuing the verticality of knowledge. Overall, expanding the length of writing processes—specifically, the invention and discovery processes—not only combats the use of generative AI, but it also cultivates disciplined truth-seeking, thoughtful writing, and space for the *vita contemplativa*. The prudent use of time redirects students away from a utilitarian product-based ethic and toward a Catholic contemplative process-based ethic that consults the head *and* heart.

Conclusion

The Augustinian dynamic of composition helps remind —and calibrate— Catholic educators toward liberal arts priorities in the classroom, specifically, what Pope Francis (2024) has called the "wisdom of the heart." During the World Communication Day in January 2024, Pope Francis explained that artificial intelligence—what he more aptly calls "machine learning"—can erode our sense of sociality so that we forget "our status as creatures." Whether AI can work for or against the Catholic mission depends on the "inclination of the heart," that is, whether it embraces the loving spirit of "communication and communion" (Pope Francis, 2024). As C.S. Lewis (1944/2001) observes in *The Abolition of Man*, teachers hold the key to unlocking the wisdom of the heart: one that does not depend on human "power over nature" (pp. 53–59) and cultivating "men without chests" (pp. 1–26)—but instead, educates toward universal values and edifies students toward the "Tao" (that is, the cosmos or God) (pp. 27–51). Lewis warns against two extremes being emphasized within education. Although *The Abolition of Man* was published in 1944, the two extremes are still evident today: overly sentimental subjectivity and purely informational discourse. As Lewis suggests, teachers should instead celebrate the middle space—the heart or chest—where healthy zeal helps students build deeper and humble understandings toward universal values, rather than to impulsively destroy or seize power. After all, "The task of the modern educator," he famously writes, "is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts" (pp. 13–14). Of course, Lewis acknowledges that his perspective was not entirely new in 1944; he echoes much of what

Plato said millennia before (p. 24). Plato's (1993) tripartite soul endorses a similar balance by including a spirited part of the soul. In *Phaedrus*, Plato (1987) discusses these parts of the soul as a charioteer (reason) with a white horse (spirit) and black horse (appetites). Without the white horse, a charioteer plummets toward the worldly; it cannot "progress" in the Augustinian sense via the wisdom of the heart toward God. Ultimately, Pope Francis, Lewis, and Plato agree that a loving heart plays a crucial role in balancing the soul. And genuine writing can offer a place to activate that spirit in a tangible and social manner.

Augustinian writing indeed celebrates that spirited faculty that celebrates wonder. As such, it resists modern educational missteps that have found their way into composition studies—and cloud the Catholic educational mission established in papal texts like St. John Paul II's (1990) *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Augustinian writing yearns for more than subjective sentimentality that is found in purely expressive writing; it also yearns for more than cold informational discourse that is found in AI generated texts. To borrow language from Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor (2007): writing-to-progress and progressing-to-write opens students toward "porous" attitudes of greater reality, rather than "buffered" attitudes of the isolated individual. To this end, Augustinian composition theory can act as a curricular compass and demands a robust WAC and WID programs at Catholic liberal arts institutions.

Augustine provides Catholic educators with useful language and stable perspectives on how writing functions within Catholic liberal arts curriculum—and how it functions across the disciplines, not merely in English courses. In the way that Augustine envisions it, writing bears spiritual fruits, not merely to tickle the ego, receive a grade, or recycle information from the internet. The process of writing habituates the "wisdom of the heart" to help Catholic curriculum prudently move forward. Accordingly, it can remind us of St. Thomas Aquinas's (1947) insight about generous communication: "as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so is it better to give to others the fruits of one's contemplation than merely to contemplate" (II–II, q.188, a.6). In this loving way, writing-to-progress and progressing-to-write unites prayer with work, leisure with labor, and inwardness with outwardness. Such an Augustinian orientation not only educates students but also edifies students. It builds habits of knowing—and habits of heart—so students can grow as charitable communicators.

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