

Simply Charlotte Mason presents

# The **ART** of **COMPOSITION**

# SAMPLE

A stylized illustration of a hand holding a pen, rendered in shades of purple and blue. The hand is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the cover, with the pen pointing towards the center. The background features a soft, abstract pattern of wavy lines in shades of pink, purple, and yellow.

**YEAR 1**

Karen Glass

Your student is already fluent in narration, completing written narrations every week. Now your student's writing skills are ready to be honed with *The Art of Composition*.

The *Art of Composition* course guides your high school student to become an excellent writer, while still retaining his own unique personal voice. Your student will work independently, building on written narrations from other school subjects.

Great writing is an art. This four-year course's once-a-week, 30-minute lessons will guide your student to learn the art of communicating well with the written word. By the end of the course, your student will have a firm grasp of how to write with excellence and be prepared for writing assignments in college-level courses.

In Year 1, your student will explore the editing process; structure and outlining; and introductions, conclusions, and transitions.

Set your student on a path to success in writing with *The Art of Composition*!

*Simply*  
*Charlotte Mason*

# THE ART OF COMPOSITION

*Year 1*

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BY KAREN GLASS

The Art of Composition, Year 1  
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## ABOUT THE ART OF COMPOSITION

*The Art of Composition, Year 1*, offers a full school year of composition studies.

- Complete one lesson per week.
- Each lesson should take about 30 minutes.
- The lessons are designed for the student to complete independently with parent or teacher supervision and discussion.
- The lessons are based on the student's written narrations from other school subjects with a focus on fine tuning and improving those written pieces.
- A grammar handbook will be helpful as the student completes the lessons; for example, *Write Right!* by Jan Venolia.





## TO THE TEACHER, A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Teaching composition is one of those things that seems like a daunting task to homeschool parents. You've taught your children to read. You've taught them to tie their shoes, use a fork and a toilet, you've taught them science and history and even math, but somehow, teaching them how to write seems like the most insurmountable task of all.

But it is not. Writing is communicating with words, and your children can already do that. Who taught them how to talk in the first place? You did, of course, but how did you do that? Not with lesson plans and curriculum and objectives and tests. You probably never gave your 3-year-old an assignment that sounded like, "Now, I want you to say three sentences about the flowers." What did you do instead? Probably, you talked about the flowers and invited your small child to have a share in the conversation.

"Aren't these flowers pretty? I love the blue color. Blue flowers are sort of rare. Lots of flowers are pink or yellow, but the blue ones are really special, and bees like them. Do you want to smell the flowers? What do you think? Which one do you like best? Should we pick a few and put them in water for the house? We'll leave most of them for the bees, but I think we can bring a few indoors for ourselves." And there's a good chance your 3-year-old will look at the flowers with you, and maybe say, "I like the pink ones." Or, "There's a bee." Or, "I want to pick them." And you'll have some kind of conversation, and maybe the little one will learn a new word or two, or maybe not, this time, but you'll keep on talking, and someday the 3-year-old will be an articulate 10-year-old, and you never had to purchase curriculum to teach him how to speak!

Writing the words on paper is only a little bit more complicated than that. But fundamentally, the process is the same, and a child beginning the task of learning to write should be allowed all the grace and time to grow naturally that we allow our little lisping toddlers. Baby-talk doesn't last forever, and neither does baby-writing. Our children grow in their abilities to communicate simply through the process of practicing and doing it.

If you have been following Charlotte Mason's practice of oral narration, your child has really been building his composition skills

for a long time. He has grown accustomed to using words and shaping sentences to tell what he knows. He is articulate in speech, and he will bring that ability to the process of becoming articulate on paper. However, just as with speaking, there is a process, and the beginning stages are far from perfect.

Most parents who have been using oral narration for several years have grown accustomed to the very fluent narrations their 9- or 10-year-old children can give. It's easy to imagine that, given a piece of paper and a pencil, that child will be able to produce the same level of narration in writing, but unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. Speaking aloud and writing words on paper are not exactly the same thing.

In the same way that a baby-speaker's tongue and lips are unpracticed in making sounds so that his words are adorably "fuzzy," lisping, or a bit garbled, the older child's physical ability to write is a stumbling block, standing between his racing thoughts and his actual ability to write out the words that are in his mind, while also keeping an eye on tricky spelling, and leaving hardly any room in his thoughts for capitalization or punctuation. The scrawled, illegible sentences don't seem quite as sweet as a 2-year-old's "pasketti" for spaghetti, but they are essentially the same thing—a mighty attempt to do something just a little bit difficult right now, but that will become automatic and natural with practice.

So, please don't look at written narrations that are full of errors as evidence that you have failed to teach your child to write. That is simply the beginning of a natural process that will develop and correct itself as your child practices.

Once he has grown fluent in getting his thoughts on paper, he is a fairly fluent writer. That process will take several years, just as it took a few years to become fluent in speaking and in orally narrating. Once that level of fluency is reached—which might be as early as age 11 or 12 for some children, and as late as age 14 or 15 for others—the fluent writer is ready to learn formal composition.

That is what this course is going to help you and your student accomplish. Following the general plan outlined in the book *Know and Tell* for teaching fluent narrators to write formal compositions, these lessons will guide your student into a greater understanding of writing as a craft and give him some tools to use in practicing that craft. Each module contains 12 lessons, which should take

approximately 30 minutes to complete each week. Students will be using their own narrations and learning to refine and improve them. Eventually, this will develop into writing formal compositions and essays.



*Good writing is essentially  
rewriting. I am positive of this.*

—Roald Dahl

#### TO THE TEACHER

---

Students beginning this book should be fluent writers. They should be used to writing narrations just about every day, and they should have been doing this long enough that the process is fairly easy for them. Up until now, you've accepted the narrations as written, and they have been what we might think of as first drafts. All writers have to make corrections to first drafts, and, as William Zinsser wrote in *On Writing Well*, "The essence of writing is rewriting" (p. xii). That's why students should be fairly competent at writing when they begin this course, because we are going to be working on rewriting.

There are several levels of editing, and in Module 1: Editing, we will address level one editing—simply correcting mechanical errors. If your students are already writing with perfectly correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation, you might not need this level, but most students will benefit from going over their work and making sure that it is as close to 100 percent error-free as they can make it before moving on to address other aspects of their writing.

The primary objective of this module is for students to grow accustomed to finding and correcting the errors in their writing. The primary focus is on mechanical errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar. It is assumed that the student has already studied and learned the basic guidelines governing written

English. This module is focused on helping students to discover and correct errors, but it is not designed to teach them those basic guidelines. Lessons include reminders about guidelines that students should already know and draw attention to how errors may be discovered and corrected.

Most of the time in each week's lesson will be spent correcting one of the student's own written narrations. One of the most important things to do is to read the narration aloud. Students should be encouraged to do this for themselves (and by themselves if having someone overhear disturbs them).

The narration should be read one sentence at a time. Hearing a sentence read aloud often reveals grammatical errors because something doesn't "sound right." Corrections may be made "by ear"—so that the sentence does sound right—without reference to specific guidelines of grammar. However, if you have a grammar handbook, taking the time to look up the rule that governs the error, and copying that rule (perhaps in a shortened form) onto the Grammar page in the back of this notebook, will increase the likelihood that the error will not be repeated. It also serves as a quick way for students to check the rule while writing if they are unsure about a sentence. Possible grammatical errors are too numerous to address directly in a course focused on writing. This is an area where input from a parent or teacher may be needed, but the best guide to correctness of grammar is your ear, not your eye. If a sentence makes sense and sounds right, it is probably correct or mostly correct as written.

Spelling and punctuation errors rely on the eye and close observation. In addition to hearing the sentence aloud, students must look closely at every word. If they are at all uncertain about the spelling of any word, they should mark it as they read and double-check. If a word has been misspelled, it should be corrected in the narration and added to the Spelling pages in the back of this notebook. That becomes a place for students to check while they are writing. If he knows he misspelled *Tuesday* or *February* in the past, he can quickly look at the correct spelling before writing it in a narration.

For the first lesson or two, you may want to walk through the process with your student. Work through the whole narration, sentence by sentence. Each sentence should get two checks. The first time, read it aloud slowly and pay attention to spelling. Grammar and spelling errors should be noticed and corrected. The second time,

your student can read silently, paying attention to capitalization and punctuation. It will feel a little slow and cumbersome at first, but the process will be easier as he goes through it week by week. The habits being developed in this process will serve your student well, and he should be encouraged to take on the task of editing his own work as soon as possible.

When you have gone over every sentence in the narration this way, your student should read the whole narration aloud one more time in full, rather than slowly sentence by sentence. When your student hears it this way, as a whole, he may discover that he wants to add or change something that was missed the first time. If not, that's fine. Future modules will give further instruction about ways to improve sentences.

Your student should rewrite the narration with the corrections so that an error-free final draft is complete. This helps to build the understanding that a piece of writing can be altered and updated and that the final draft, after corrections are made, is the one that would be shown to other people. Students may be writing narrations by hand or using a computer. For editing purposes, you might want to print out a written narration before making corrections. Final drafts should be in the same form as the original narration. If a student is writing on the computer, the entire editing process could be done on the computer; however, it might be a good idea to print out a narration for corrections and go through the process on paper a few times before doing it on a computer. It is important to use the reference pages in the back of this notebook to make note of spelling and grammar corrections. As the student grows more confident and makes fewer errors, these will become less necessary.

As your student begins to build the habit of editing and correcting a narration for mechanical errors, fewer errors will likely be made. However, few pieces of writing are perfectly correct after a single draft, so taking the time to notice and correct mistakes is something every writer has to do—even very good ones.

There is a checklist chart included in each lesson. It can be used in a few ways. It serves as a reminder of the things that require attention during the editing process. It can also be used to note the number and type of corrections made. For example, if no words were spelled incorrectly, your student can place a checkmark in the “correct” column. If there were spelling errors, he can make a note of how many words were corrected in the “incorrect” column. If everything

has been capitalized correctly, he can add a checkmark in the “correct” column. The chart is not for grading purposes, but it serves as an overview of the number and type of mistakes a student is making. Without doing anything else besides correcting one narration per week, the number of errors should gradually be reduced. It may take a year or two, but having to find and correct errors is an incentive to make fewer errors in the first place. Later modules will focus on improving a student’s writing in other ways.

A parent or teacher may want to go through the editing process with a student for a while, but again, as soon as possible, students should be responsible for their own editing. At that point, a parent should read only the final draft, which should be nearly error-free. A student who can find and correct his own errors is well on the way to becoming a better writer.

If final drafts still contain one or two mechanical errors, that’s not a problem (do point them out!). If a final draft still contains many errors, a student may need an adult to help him with the editing process for a while longer. If a student is capable of correcting errors but has an error-filled final draft, you can send him back to go through the process on the same paper again. A few comments about “several spelling errors” or “one important capitalization error” may help to focus his attention. Don’t be discouraged by the number of errors or the time it takes to build the habit of finding and making corrections. This is all a normal part of the process, and some students will take longer to write without mechanical errors. They are growing into better writers while they are working on this.



### Creative Narration

Quite often, as younger narrators grow more skilled in writing, the usual practice of simply “telling back” what happened in a narration becomes boring. One way to break up the monotony and add interest to narration is to encourage creative narration. You can assign as many creative narrations as you like if your student enjoys them. There are several suggestions for creative narrations included throughout the course.

Encourage your student to give creative narration a try. However, if he doesn’t want to narrate in the proposed way, feel free to skip the suggestions or substitute others.





## Commonplace

As you and your student delve into the practice of editing and refining, your attention to the craft of writing will increase. Another way to develop an appreciation for well-written sentences is to keep a “commonplace book,” or “book of mottoes,” where examples of interesting writing or content are recorded. Your student will be prompted to look for examples of good writing and write them into the Commonplace section of this notebook, but the practice can also be encouraged by providing a separate, lovely notebook or journal that will become a keepsake.

### TO THE STUDENT

---

Because you have been writing narrations for a good while, you have become a fluent writer. You know how to get your thoughts onto paper. Now you are ready to begin the journey to becoming a better writer. You’ve been writing narrations long enough to be able to write them fairly well, even if you make some mistakes. You probably write your narrations and consider them finished, just because you’ve written them. But good writing, the best writing, is never finished just by getting the words down. That’s a first draft.

When you write something for the first time, your thoughts sometimes move quickly, and you hurry to capture them with words on paper. You might hurry from one sentence to the next and miss a thought now and then in your haste. Other times, your thoughts are sluggish, and you have to think hard between each sentence. A lot of thinking might happen between each sentence that you write.

In both of these cases, the written words might be a little incomplete. They might not fully cover the material you were trying to write about, and they might also contain some errors. You might have misspelled a word, forgotten to capitalize the name of a city, or had a comma go astray.

When you take time to go back over your written work to find and correct errors, that is editing. It’s part of making your original writing more correct, but it might also be a time to make your writing a little better.

If you draw or sketch with a pencil, you might occasionally erase a bit so you can change a line to create a better effect. You might add in some shading or make a line thicker. You might erase stray marks

or wobbly lines to streamline your drawing. Editing is a little bit like that—you aren't erasing everything you've written, but you are refining it—trying to make it a little bit better.

Think of your favorite book. Who is the author? The story that you read and liked so much is not the very first draft that the author wrote. No writer, in the history of making books, has been such a good writer that he or she could just write a story and send it off to be printed and published. The author of your favorite book went back over the story and made it better. Maybe there were corrections to be made, but he or she probably made other changes, too—changes that made the story better. He might have added new details. He might have changed some words. He might have tossed out some bad sentences and rewritten them completely. The story that you enjoyed was edited several times before the author decided that it was exactly right.

If you have been writing narrations for a while, you are already a writer. But in order to become a better writer, you will need to learn how to edit your writing. First drafts can always be made a little better, and in this module we'll be looking at how to make sure your writing is free from errors. Future modules will help you make your writing better in other ways. Editing is a process that you can learn. It may be cumbersome at first, but it will grow easier as you practice. For now, you should plan on editing one of your written narrations each week. After editing, you'll make another draft of your narration, a final draft that should be error-free.

## LESSON 1: *Introduction to Editing*

---

Let's begin the process of learning how to edit. You will need both your eyes and your ears. Sometimes you can see a mistake, but other times your ears will tell you things that your eyes will not. For that reason, you must begin by reading every sentence aloud, one by one. While you are reading the sentence aloud, listen to it. It should make sense. If it doesn't, it probably contains a grammatical error. You may be able to correct the error "by ear," without checking a grammar book. If the sentence makes sense after the correction, you've fixed it, but if you know the grammar guideline that addresses the problem, jot that rule down on the Grammar page in the back of this notebook. It will be there for you to check while you are writing in the future.

While you are listening to your sentence, let your eyes pay attention to each word that you are reading aloud. If you are not sure that a word has been spelled correctly, mark the word with a check mark or underline. When you have finished all the sentences, look up the spelling of the words you marked. Correct the words that need to be corrected and write them correctly on the Spelling pages found in the back of this notebook. You can use that Spelling Journal as a quick reference while you are writing if you are unsure of that word again.

After you read a sentence aloud while looking at spelling and listening for correct grammar, read it again and pay attention to the capitalization and punctuation. You know sentences begin with a capital letter and that proper names are capitalized. Make sure that you have capitalized every word that needs to be capitalized. Look at punctuation as well. Every simple sentence ends with a period, although sometimes we use question marks or exclamation points. If you have used commas, apostrophes, parentheses, or other punctuation, check to be sure you have used them correctly. If you are not sure, ask for help or look up the rule in your grammar resource. Make needed corrections, and if applicable, note the rule you needed on the Grammar page of this notebook.

One of the things a writer needs to do so that reading is easier is to break up the piece of writing into paragraphs. If all the sentences run from the beginning to the end of the line in a solid block of text,

the reading becomes more difficult. If you have been dividing your writing into paragraphs, that's wonderful. If not, it's something to think about as you write, or at least during the editing process. Any time you begin a new thought or topic, you can create a paragraph break.

In most standard writing layout, a new paragraph begins on the very next line, but the first line of the new paragraph is indented. That means it begins several spaces to the right rather than at the very beginning of the line. Take a look at a few of your books. Each page is not a solid block of text but is broken into paragraphs, which you can identify by those indented lines. Another way to separate paragraphs (usually when you are typing) is to double return between each paragraph. Whichever way you separate them, paragraphs are one of the ways you make your written communication easier for a reader to understand.

After all the corrections have been made, read the whole piece through aloud again—in its entirety rather than sentence by sentence. If you hear anything else you want to change, make those changes and then rewrite the narration. This is your final draft, and it should be as error-free as you can make it.

Each lesson includes a chart, which you can use to remind yourself of things to look for while you are editing. If you find no spelling or punctuation errors, you can check the “correct” column. If you make any changes, jot the number of corrections you made in the “incorrect” column. As you grow more confident in your writing and editing, you will discover that you are making fewer mechanical errors in your writing, and you will be ready to think about improving your writing in other ways.

### **Practice editing:**

This is a short narration. Read it aloud and use your eyes and your ears to check for errors. Did you find any? Do you know how to correct them?

*Robinson cruso found a footprint in the sand. It made him nervus because he didn't know who was on the iland with him and he thought they might be dangrous.*

There are six errors in this very short narration—four spelling, one capitalization, and one punctuation error. Did you find them all?

If you corrected them, it would look like this:

*Robinson Crusoe found a footprint in the sand. It made him nervous because he didn't know who was on the island with him, and he thought they might be dangerous.*

## ASSIGNMENT

Choose one of the narrations you have written this week and follow the steps.

1. Read each sentence of your narration aloud one by one. Don't skip this step.

Listen to each sentence and ask yourself, "Does it sound correct? Does it make sense?" There are many kinds of grammatical errors that will make a sentence sound wrong when you read it aloud. Fixing it may be simple and easy, but if you aren't sure what is making your sentence sound wrong, ask for help. You may want to add an important grammar rule to the Grammar page for future reference.

Look at each individual word as you read. If you are uncertain about the spelling of a word, underline or mark it. Check those words and correct them if necessary. Some common spelling errors occur because words sound the same, like *their* and *there*. Be sure you've used the right word, and if you aren't sure, double-check. Make corrections to your narration and write the words correctly on the Spelling page.

2. Now read each sentence a second time, silently, looking carefully at two things: capitalization and punctuation.

Do capitalize the first word of each sentence and all proper names of people and places. Don't capitalize words that should not be capitalized. Make any corrections you need to make.

If you write short sentences, punctuation is probably quite simple. If you write longer sentences, you might be uncertain of how to punctuate those more complex sentences. Have you used any commas or apostrophes? If you aren't certain you have used them correctly, ask for help or consult a grammar handbook. When you read your sentences aloud, your punctuation should guide you to read correctly.

3. Read your whole paper aloud one more time and make any final changes you want to make, then rewrite an error-free final draft.

On the following chart, make a note of how many corrections you needed to make. As you continue to write and edit your writing, you will make fewer errors overall.

	Correct	Incorrect
Spelling		
Grammar		
Fragments		
Run-ons		
Other		
Capitalization		
Beginning of Sentences		
Proper Nouns		
Other		
Punctuation		
End Marks		
Apostrophes		
Quotation Marks		
Commas		
Other (parentheses, semicolons, etc.)		