

# THE FIVE CANONS OF RHETORIC

The Romans as well as the Greeks were interested in argument and rhetoric. The five canons of rhetoric appear in Cicero's first century Latin text, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, which contained four books that detail the rhetorical approach of the day and was highly influential for many subsequent centuries. Understanding and employing these five canons are the capstone of the trivium in a liberal arts education.

## 1. Invention

Necessity is the mother of invention, and the necessity of persuasion means we must first discover the best way to persuade in each situation.

- **Target analysis**  
The first step of invention is to understand the people to be persuaded.
- **Information**  
Secondly, consider what information is needed to persuade these people.
- **Presentation**  
Thirdly, decide how to present the evidence.
- **Timing**  
Finally, consider the context, timing, and duration of the argument.

## 2. Arrangement

Arranging an argument is like structuring an essay (which is arranging an argument).

- **Introduction (exordium)**  
Start with an introduction that positions both the argument and, if appropriate, oneself.
- **Statement of fact (narratio)**  
Present the basic facts of the case, clearly and with enough information that they can be accepted as independent facts, and not just personal observations.
- **Confirmation (confirmatio)**  
The next stage is to construct a persuasive argument as to what should be believed and done.
- **Refutation (refutatio)**  
Next, attack the stronghold of any opposing arguments.
- **Conclusion (peroratio)**  
End the argument with a summary of what has been said, reminding the audience of the key points along the way.

## 3. Style

Using style in an argument goes beyond simple statement of facts and description of reason and logic. Style moves an argument in to the realms of aesthetics, seeking to touch emotions rather than just intellect. Above all, it makes best use of language.

- **Eloquent language**
- **Powerful language**

## 4. Memory

The presenter must remember enough of the argument to be able to present the full story without hesitation or omissions.

## 5. Delivery

Communication means using every means of persuasion which includes body language as well as voice tone and texture.

[http://changingminds.org/disciplines/argument/five\\_canons/five\\_canons.htm](http://changingminds.org/disciplines/argument/five_canons/five_canons.htm)