

Quintilian: *Institutio Oratoria* 3.2-13

Quintilian (35-95 CE) wrote the *Institutio Oratoria* (“The Orator’s Education”) in first-century Rome, the height of the Pax Romana. His views have influenced educational practice ever since, especially in the Renaissance, laying the groundwork for rhetorical instruction until the emphasis in the field shifted from oral to written composition in the nineteenth century.

Rhetoric, or the theory of effective communication, was for Quintilian merely the tool of the broadly educated citizen who was capable of analysis, reflection, and then powerful action in public affairs. Oratorical excellence resulted from native skill as a speaker along with extensive background reading in philosophy and the liberal arts and intensive writing practice, with the goal of producing “a good man skilled at speaking.”

The cradle was not too early to begin this education, according to Quintilian. Supposedly cutting-edge early education approaches today, such as Baby Einstein and LeapFrog, only echo many of the principles this ancient teacher advocated. As the pupil progresses, each step is carefully laid out in his twelve-book instruction manual on how to grow a lawyer.

In the following excerpt, the author outlines the specific qualities a good boy (*probus*) must exhibit in order to become an ideal student. For instance, he must be able to be nurtured and shaped by the superior guidance and talents of a master-teacher, one like Quintilian himself.

Text and Translation

Ingenii signum in parvis praecipuum memoria est: eius duplex virtus, facile
In children, the principal sign of talent is memory. (Its) quality is two-fold, to understand (things)

percipere et fideliter continere. Proximum imitatio: nam id quoque est
easily and to retain (them) accurately. Next (is) the ability to imitate: for that is also a part

1. **ingenii:** *ingenium*, -ii, n.: natural mental power, mind; here, talent
praecipuum: *praecipuus*, -a, -um: special; here, principal
duplex: *duplex*, *duplicis*: two-fold
facile: (adverb) easily
2. **percipere:** *percipio*, *percipere*, -cepi, -ceptum: comprehend
fideliter: adverb of *fidelis*, -e: faithfully; here, accurately
proximum: *proximus*, -a, -um: next
imitatio: *imitatio*, -onis, f.: imitation; here, the abstract quality of imitating
quoque: (adverb/conjunction) also; placed after the word it emphasizes

docilis naturae; nam probus quoque in primis erit ille verē ingeniosus.
of a teachable character; for a good boy also will be the one in his earliest years (who seems) truly gifted.

Alioque non peius duxerim tardi esse ingeni quam mali: probus autem ab
And I would not consider (it) any worse of a problem that he is slow-witted than (that he is) ill-behaved: however, the good boy

illo segni et iacente plurimum aberit. Hic meus quae tradentur non difficulter 5
will be very different from one (who is) slow and lethargic. This (student) of mine will absorb without difficulty what will be taught (to him)

accipiet, quaedam etiam interrogabit: sequetur tamen magis quam praecurret.
and certain things he will even ask about: nevertheless, he will follow (the teacher) rather than get ahead (of the class).

3. **docilis:** *docilis, -e*: teachable
probus: *probus, -a, -um*: good
primis: *primus, -a, -um*: first; here with *in*, in the earliest years (of a student's education)
verē: (adverb) truly
ingeniosus: *ingeniosus, -a, -um*: gifted
4. **peius:** comparative adverb; here with *non*, less of a problem
duxerim: I would consider; perfect active subjunctive 1st sing. of *duco*
tardi ... ingenii: gen. of characteristic, literally "of slow intelligence"; here, slow-witted
mali (ingenii): here, ill-behaved
5. **segni:** *segnis, -e*: slow
iacente: *iaceo, -_re, iacui*: be idle; here, (being) lethargic
plurimum: (superlative adverb) very
aberit: *absum, abesse, afui*: be far removed, be different
tradentur: *trado, -ere, -didi, -ditum*: teach
difficulter: (adverb) with difficulty
6. **interrogabit:** *interrogo* (1): ask
sequetur: *sequor, sequi, secutus sum* (deponent verb): he will follow
magis: (adverb) rather
praecurret: *praecurro, -currere, -cucurri, -cursum*: go on ahead

Mihi ille detur puer quem laus excitet, quem gloria iuuet, qui victus fleat.
Let that boy be given to me whom praise motivates, whom recognition encourages, who (when) bested, cries.

Hic erit alendus ambitu, hunc mordebit obiurgatio, hunc honor excitabit, in
This boy will have to be nourished through his desire for achievement, criticism will sting him, admiration will spur him on,

hoc desidiam numquam verebor. Danda est tamen omnibus aliqua remissio,
in this boy I will never worry about laziness. There must be given to everyone, nevertheless, some leniency,

non solum quia nulla res est quae perferre possit continuum laborem, sed 10
not only because there is no matter which is able to withstand unremitting effort, but also

quod studium discendi voluntate, quae cogi non potest, constat. Modus
because the love of learning rests upon a willingness (to learn) which is not able to be compelled.

7. **detur:** let him be given; present passive subjunctive 3rd sing. of *do, dare, dedi, datum*
excitet: (it) motivates; present active subjunctive 3rd sing. of *excito* (1)
iuuet: (it) encourages; present active subjunctive 3rd sing. of *iuvo*
fleat: (he) cries; present active subjunctive 3rd sing. of *fleo, -ere, flevi, fletum*
8. **alendus:** *alo, -ere, alui, altum*: nourish
ambitu: *ambitus, -ūs, m.*: desire for popularity; here, desire for achievement
mordebit: *mordeo, -ere, momordi, morsum*: bite; here, sting
obiurgatio: *obiurgatio, -onis, f.*: reproach; here, criticism
honor: *honor, -oris, m.*: a mark of respect; here, recognition
9. **desidiam:** *desidia, -ae, f.*: idleness
verebor: *vereor, -eri, veritus sum* (deponent verb); I will worry
remissio: *remissio, -onis, f.*: leniency, indulgence
10. **quia:** (conjunction) because
perferre: *perfero, perferre, pertuli, perlatum*: stand
continuum: *continuus, -a, -um*: unremitting
11. **discendi:** *disco, -ere, didici*: learn; genitive gerund (verbal noun); here, of learning
voluntate: *voluntas, -tatis, f.*: willingness
cogi: *cogo, -ere, coegi, coactum*: compel
constat: *consto, -are, -stiti, -statum*: rest on
modus: *modus, -i, m.*: limit

tamen sit remissionibus, ne aut odium studiorum faciant negatae aut otii
Nevertheless, there should be a limit to indulgences, lest either (when they are) denied, they create a dislike of studies or

consuetudinem nimiae. Sunt etiam nonnulli acuendis puerorum ingeniis non
(when they are) too frequent, (they create) the expectation of leisure. There are even some games (which are) not useless in sharpening boys' minds.

inutiles lusūs, cum positis invicem cuiusque generis quaestiunculis
(especially) when they compete (against one another) with debate questions of every sort posed back and forth.

aemulantur. Mores quoque se inter ludendum simplicius detegunt. 15
Character also reveals itself quite naturally in the course of (their) playing.

12. **sit:** there should be; present subjunctive 3rd sing. of *sum*
ne: (conjunction) lest, not
odium: *odium, -ii, n.:* dislike
faciant: with *ne*, so that they do not create; present active subjunctive 3rd pl. of *facio*
13. **consuetudinem:** *consuetudo, -tudinis, f.:* habit; here, expectation
nimiae: *nimius, -a, -um:* too frequent
nonnulli: *nonnullus, -a, -um:* several
acuendis: *acuo, acuere, acui, acutum:* sharpen to a point; here with *ingeniis*, in sharpening the minds
14. **inutiles:** *inutilis, -e:* useless
lusus: *lusus, -ūs, m.:* game
cum: (conjunction) when
positis: *pono, -ere, posui, positum:* put, pose
invicem: (adverb) back and forth
quaestiunculis: *quaestiuncula, -ae, f.:* a little question (diminutive of *quaestio*, “question”)
15. **aemulantur:** *aemulor, -ari* (deponent verb): they compete
inter ludendum: *ludo, -ere, lusi, lusum:* play; neuter accusative gerund (verbal noun); here, in the course of (their) playing
simplicius: quite naturally; comparative adverb of *simplex, simplicis* (“simple”)
detegunt: *detego, -ere, -texi, -tectum:* reveal