

Commonplace Book

“A commonplace book is a method for recording thoughts, quotations, anecdotes, or other items into a single repository for use or reflection. Some keepers of such books provide annotations or reflections on their selections, while others simply record the quotation—even without attribution! Some choose to organize their books by topic while others simply fill in quotes from front to back.

...

“A common-place book is what a provident poet cannot subsist without, for this proverbial reason, that ‘great wits have short memories,’ and whereas, on the other hand, poets being liars by profession, ought to have good memories. To reconcile these, a book of this sort is in the nature of a supplemental memory; or a record of what occurs remarkable in every day’s reading or conversation.” ...

Commonplace books aid the memory in a number of ways. They force the reader to slow down and dwell on the reading. When on the lookout for pleasing, insightful, or useful quotations, he must ponder and weigh every word. The mind, eye, and ear tune themselves to beauty and learn to heed her call.”

<https://www.circinstitute.org/blog/incarnational-memory-and-commonplace-book>



Toward a Life Well Read

“The Commonplace Book is the place for students to record beautiful passages that they encounter in their reading. Most often, we ask for passages that strike the student as intriguing, beautiful, wise, or humorous—something that inspired his or her delight. Sometimes we will ask for a specific category of commonplace entry, such as an example of distorted communication from *That Hideous Strength*, or a passage from *The Man Who Was Thursday* related to principles of revolution vs. reformation (a theme in this year’s history studies). Three or four entries per week is the minimum requirement, but more are welcome! The goal is to make commonplacing a lifelong habit, as so many great men and women of the past have done.

A new practice we have just instituted is a weekly Scriptorium, where our students gather on a separate day from our co-op day for the exclusive purpose of completing reading journals and commonplace entries. We meet for an hour and a half around my dining room table.”

<https://scholegroups.com/toward-a-life-well-read-high-school-humanities-at-providence-prep/>

Structuring a Commonplace Book - Jenny Rallens Method

There are many different ways to structure a commonplace book, but here I will discuss one of the most popular methods: the “Jenny Rallens Method.” Take the parts you like and leave out the parts you don’t. Remember, your commonplace book is personal—so keep it that way. This is simply a way to get started if you want a general guide.

Jenny Rallens is a former teacher at a classical school and attended New Saint Andrews College and Oxford University. Many have followed her lead on how to teach commonplacing to students, but unfortunately her original instructional articles have been deleted. The following is based on notes people have taken on her method.

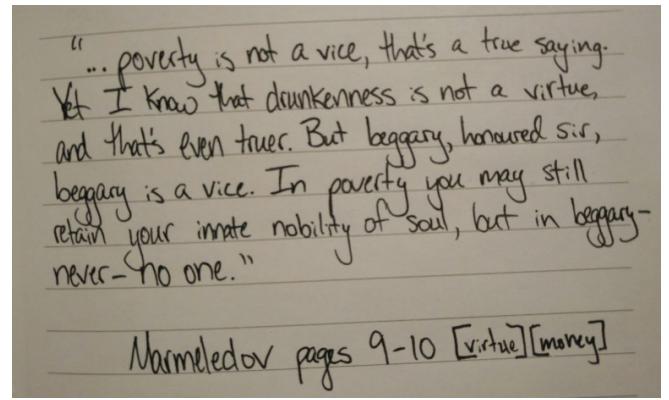
- Start with a **Title Page**. This can be something along the lines of “Commonplace Book [Your Name] [Inspirational Quote]” or simply your name. Perhaps the quote could be something like this wisdom from St. Jerome: “...to read without also writing is to sleep.”
- *Optional: Number the pages* in the bottom right hand corners (you will only be using the right pages). This will make it easier to find quotes later with the table of contents and index.
- **Skip the first 3-5 pages.**
- Create a **Table of Contents** page. This will be filled out with all the books contained within the commonplace book over time.
- **Skip the next 1-3 pages.**
- Create a **title page for the first book** in the commonplace book and include the full title and author’s full name.

- On the next page, begin your **entries for the first book**.
- Repeat the previous two steps for each book.
- On the final right-hand page, create an **index**. This can be used to document all references to a certain theme (mentioned later) or particularly meaningful quotes.

For entries, follow this format:

- Skip two lines** between each quote.
- Use ellipses** to cut out unnecessary parts of the quote.
- Cite each quote**: include at least the page number and character speaking, though it may also be helpful to include the chapter or stanza (depending on the book).
- Optional: Date the entry**. Either write it all out (January 1, 2000) or abbreviate (1.1.00).
- Tag the entry** with brackets. For example, if I wanted to tag the entry with the theme of money I would tag it “[money]”. Tags are normally themes, great ideas, or figures of speech.
- Optional: Write a reflection** on the quote.

<https://commonplacecorner.wordpress.com/2017/02/04/structuring-a-commonplace-book-jenny-rallens-method/>



Commonplace Books – In our class

- This exercise is designed for you to get the most out of your reading!
- We will start with 1 commonplace entry per day of reading – for example, in week 2, you will do two HtRAB entries and three *Out of the Silent Planet* entries.

30-Aug	Image: Wk 2 <i>How to Read a Book (Adler)</i>	<i>Out of the Silent Planet (VI)</i>	Ch 6 (p 59-74)	Outline	Essay	I: Prelude		
31-Aug							AL Present Ch 6 SP I	Vocab CF
1-Sep			Ch 7 (p 75-95)	Outline		Ch 1 - 9	II: Recitation	
2-Sep						Ch 10 - 16	III: Discussion	
3-Sep							CF Present Ch 7 Wk 2 SP II, III	vocab PF

- Entries should follow the suggestions above, sometimes (but not always) including a reflection from you (you don't HAVE to reflect ~ but I think you will want to!)
- We will share our entries in class as time permits! I've not figured out how often or how many we will share – but know you won't need to share your reflections if they are personal to you!
- You are NOT required to use the journals I hand out in class – I just thought this would be a good starting point for you – please personalize as you go!
- My hope is that we all develop a life-giving habit this year, and that this isn't just another "thing on the list to do."
- Don't get paralyzed by perfection! Make your journal your own and enjoy it! I liked this quote:

"A dear and wise friend reminds me often of Voltaire's admonition not to let the perfect be the enemy of the good." ~Kathy Weitz