

With enrollments in Ancient Greek stable but perennially low, an undergraduate course in prose composition can seem a risk at best and an indulgence at worst. Recently faced with an opportunity to teach Greek prose composition, I used the occasion to experiment in hopes of making the class seem a natural extension of modern language instruction as much as a ritual reenacted from the glory days of Classical Studies. This paper summarizes the materials and methods that proved most positive and effective.

Since a practical benefit of prose composition is increased comfort with reading, one component of the course tracked this benefit directly. Anne Mahoney's new edition of *Morice's Stories in Attic Greek* (Focus 2006) proved perfect for the task. The stories, in 100-word chunks by a non-native writer of Greek, grow increasingly complex grammatically, the content is far from predictable and no English translation is available. Students were assigned fifteen paragraphs a week (roughly 7-8 pages) and quizzed on the content in class. At first the quizzes were in English but gradually the questions were entirely in Greek (although students answered in English). Before a quiz, students could ask specific questions about the text, but no one was ever allowed to translate.

The most time-honored component of prose composition belongs to the practice of converting English text into Greek, essentially reverse translation. I gave assignments from several different prose composition books, but by far the best proved to be A.S. Sidgwick's *First Greek Writer and Introduction to Greek Prose Composition*. The quirky style and variety of content kept the exercises fun, even when the mechanics proved daunting. Sidgwick's sensible progression and practical assistance with vocabulary and idiom also recommend these volumes. Fortunately, now, too, both are available for free on-line from www.textkit.com.

To demonstrate that modern composition in ancient Greek is not dead and to provide a model for successful 21st-century prose in the language, we studied Andrew Wilson's excellent Ἄρειος Ποτήρ καὶ ἡ τοῦ φιλοσόφου λίθος (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*). Wilson provides a template for many problems facing today's writer of classical Greek, e.g., what is the cultural perspective of the reader (Wilson posits an educated fourth-century AD reader, for whom post-classical technological developments, for example, must be glossed; cf. www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~loxias/harry_potter.htm). Students read chapters and were given take-home quizzes, with questions in English, which they had to answer in Greek. Since Wilson's translation is far from literal and the questions sometimes general (e.g., summarize a certain passage), students had to compose freely, but using Wilson's work, to answer the questions successfully.

Rather than pursue Plato or Demosthenes as the ideal of Greek prose, students built on their reading skills with Morice, their practice with Sidgwick, and their study of Wilson for the most important assignments: free compositions. Students wrote Halloween stories, letters, and other compositions. These students generally had no more than four semesters of Greek prior to the course, and, while technical skill varied and no one (including the teacher) was ever free of even simple errors, each student by the end of the course had read over 150 pages of Greek prose and written some twenty pages of their own. Most importantly, no student any longer felt reading and writing Greek was impossible, intimidating or an activity restricted to great men of long ago.