Cicero’s On the Ideal Orator is a dialogue that demonstrates a move away from arguing the merits of philosophy over rhetoric, and vice versa. In his writing Cicero does not aim to prove that one is better than the other, rather he writes about the benefits of each, and inversely their drawbacks. This writing differs from the other handbooks that were referenced in other works we read, because as I understand it, the point is not to turn everyone into a great orator. Rather, the goal here is to provide the audience with information that will help them achieve that goal, and more importantly present his view on what makes a great orator as something the audience should aspire. There are other differences as well; primarily that Cicero focuses on knowledge, where Plato wrote about the importance of truth, and the greater good. Cicero believes that to be a great orator “one must acquire knowledge of a great number of things,” and this knowledge will ultimately give the orator the ability to do more than repeat, or structure language, in a way that is effective. I understand this as a critique of relying solely on language to make the speaker eloquent. It is not, according to Cicero, “the choice of words, but by their arrangement as well” that makes an orator great.

Of course, Cicero understands that to have a great knowledge of every topic is impossible, but this is merely the ideal that orators should aspire to obtain. He also argues that orators need to understand philosophy and law. Here again, Cicero pushes for rhetoric and philosophy to be used together. It is important to note that Cicero also believes a good orator is a good person, and will serve his community, lead by example and inspire others to do the same. So, like the others we’ve read thus far, we see that morality continues to play a role in defining terms, and understanding roles.