

TEACHER'S MANUAL
NEW FIRST STEPS
IN LATIN

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A FOCUS TEXT

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Part One: Introduction

1. Latin and Grammar

This textbook is based on two propositions: that learning Grammar is important, and that learning Latin is a good way to learn Grammar. It is designed for Middle School students (that is, young people aged 12-14) whose teachers accept those propositions and know Latin well.

Why is it important to learn Grammar? And for that matter, why write “Grammar” with a capital letter? Grammar (with a small g) is a description of how a particular language works, and in this sense we say that each language has its own grammar. In English, for example, it is ungrammatical to put a word strongly marked as an object before its verb if a word strongly marked as a subject follows the verb, and a sentence like “Him saw I” is ungrammatical, although “Him I saw” is not. Latin has no such constraints on the order of marked words, and *eum vidi ego* and *eum ego vidi* are both grammatical. The two languages have different grammars.

Capitalized Grammar, on the other hand, describes how language in general works. In this sense we can speak of a universal Grammar, common to all users of human languages, and we can say that Latin and English have the same Grammar (S. Pinker, *The Language Instinct* 1994, 230-240). Learning Grammar gives human beings a window into the processes by which their minds interact with the world. They become aware of themselves thinking, and they become better at it.

The categories and terminology that have been developed to describe Latin grammar make a reasonably good fit with the categories and terminology of Grammar. Nouns, verbs, their modifiers, subjects, predicates, and many other concepts traditionally used to describe Latin seem in fact to be applicable to language in general. Even the distinction between vocabulary and syntax, which plays so fundamental a part in the layout of lessons in this book, seems to be wired into the neural circuits of the human brain.

Learning Latin is a good way to learn Grammar. Since all languages are equally grammatical, it may seem that learning any language would develop understanding of Grammar. In fact several circumstances make Latin a better-than-average choice as a tool for helping young adolescents learn about Grammar.

Because Latin has no living native speakers, nearly everyone who uses Latin must come to it by exercising powers of analytic and synthetic reasoning. Learners in the grammar-translation method, which this book uses, organize and master the elements of Latin, and they use these elements to build structures of meaning. Before these acts become unconscious, they take place at the level of consciousness; a student learns to recite the declension of *puella* before being able to respond automatically with *puellae* as the plural of *puella* or making either the subject of a sentence. Young adolescents of middle-school age are beginning to develop their ability to analyse, synthesize, and think in abstract terms. Latin at this age can be a powerful tool for the development of their intellectual powers.

Latin, also, has evolved into a special kind of language. It is a classicised, regularized form of the living, untidy language of the Roman street and forum. The Romans themselves began to eliminate

the inconsistencies of their own speech, and generations of teachers and grammarians have continued the process. Romans before Cicero's generation had no difficulty in saying *audibō* or *audibis* (Plautus, *Captivi* 619), but they quickly settled on *audiam* and *audiēs* as the standard forms of the future indicative. Even though we know that Cicero wrote *servos* for *servus*, we choose not to follow his practice, and yet in our texts of Donne we may find "Goe, and catch a falling Starre," just as Donne wrote. Unlike Latin, English preserves historical spellings alongside its currently standard ones. Latin grammar books tell us that "Stems in **-quo**, like **equo-**, change **qu** to **c** before **u**. Thus, —**ecus** (earlier **equos**) **equi**, **equo**, **ecum** (earlier **equom**), **equē**" (Allen and Greenough, *New Latin Grammar* par. 46, n.1). We write *equum*, and so do our grammar books. The regularization and standardization of the Latin enshrined in textbooks make it easy for young students to recognize patterns and to use these patterns to construct in their minds the basic grammar of the language, and so of language in general. Latin has advantages over any living language as a tool for learning about Grammar.

Learning Latin will often, as many English-speakers have observed, help students to understand the grammar of English, but that synergy only partially justifies the effort needed to learn Latin. Latin and English have in fact very different grammars, and many of the categories and terminology of Latin grammar do not fit English very well.

2. Learning Latin with First Steps

The middle-schoolers for whom this textbook has been designed are passing through a time of intense, concentrated intellectual growth. They encounter mathematical concepts like variables and equations, literature that demands careful analysis of plot and character, and abstract grammatical concepts like subject and predicate. Learning these new things can easily make learning itself mysterious.

Learning Latin gives these young adolescents an opportunity to become aware of their learning as it happens. In addition to learning the language, they learn an elaborate, articulated vocabulary for describing it, and with the help of their teachers they use this grammatical vocabulary to develop conscious strategies for organizing and controlling the facts of the language. Knowing this, we have kept in mind those for whom learning, especially where language is concerned, may not come easily. Intelligent young children often develop unconscious strategies to cope with specific difficulties in processing language. Studying Latin, we believe, helps these students in their adolescence by giving them conscious strategies to supplement their unconscious repertoire.

For many students, learning Latin is like learning to read again. They must once again associate phonemes with symbols, learn rules of sequencing, and extract meaning from marks on a page. In some cases, difficulties and learning differences which students experienced and overcame when they learned to read their native language resurface as they try to learn Latin.

These students can use Latin as a tool to become better learners, and *First Steps in Latin* has been designed to help them and their teachers. While these features will make learning Latin easier for

all students, they are especially important for students with learning differences:

Elimination of distractions. *First Steps* has deliberately been made austere. Everything in the book is important. A student does not have to decide what is important to learn and what can be skipped. Nothing can be skipped.

Focus on one skill at a time. Traditional grammar describes language in terms of single elements and categories. When language is taught by the grammar-translation method, instruction focuses on one aspect at a time, and in the student's mind deliberate analysis precedes deliberate synthesis. The grammar-translation method presents the morphology, lexicon, and syntax of a language separately. In the grammar-translation classroom, activities target one aspect of language, and often one cognitive skill, at a time. Dictation, for example, targets auditory processing, and quizzes on forms test a student's memory.

This individuation of linguistic concepts and cognitive skills makes it possible to identify the particular concepts and skills with which students have difficulty. A teacher can then tailor classroom activities and assignments to reinforce the difficult matter. Students who have difficulty with a specific skill can become aware of this learning difference and work to remedy it.

Repetition and Review. *Repetitio mater memoriae.* All students benefit from constant review of concepts, formulas, and data. As far as possible, we have tried to make *First Steps in Latin* beneficial by making it repetitious; for example, the rule for forming the perfect stem is always given in the words, "The perfect stem is found by removing the final $-i$ from the third principal part." This sentence appears five times in *First Steps*. We have also tried to make sure that in the heart of the book (Lessons IX-XXVII) every word presented in vocabulary appears in a sentence at least once within every five chapters.

Consistency. We have also taken great pains to make the format of each lesson consistent, so that paradigms, explanations, vocabulary, and exercises always have the same general appearance and structure. Students will find it easy to know how to approach each lesson and to consult previous lessons.

A Reference, not a Text. Because middle schoolers learn from their teachers and from each other, not from their textbooks, we have designed *First Steps in Latin* to be used as a book for reference and consultation, not as a textbook. *First Steps* will work best when students turn to the left-hand pages after the new grammar of a lesson has been presented and drilled, not before.

3. Teaching with the Grammar-Translation Method and First Steps

There are three ways to teach Latin: the oral-aural method, the reading-in-context method, and the grammar-translation method. None of these methods is essentially superior to the others; it is important to note, however, that each of them has somewhat different aims, and that each of them does different things to the minds of students.

The three methods and the teachers who use them differ in the value and weight they give to the four skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. All give reading first priority and acknowledge that learning to read Latin is an important goal of studying the language, but they place varying degrees of emphasis on the remaining three skills. *First Steps in Latin* emphasizes learning to read Latin sentences but gives nearly equal weight to learning to write them, and each lesson includes as many or nearly as many English-to-Latin sentences as Latin-to-English. Listening, whether to dictation exercise or to Latin spoken in the classroom, ranks third, with speaking a distant fourth. Oral recitation, however, plays an important part in the grammar-translation method.

In addition, the grammar-translation method places great emphasis on developing in the student a systematic understanding of language and an ability to describe language accurately. Parsing, diagramming, writing synopses, and other activities promote this understanding. The grammar-translation method can in fact be defined by this emphasis. As its name suggests, in the grammar-translation method no form, lexical item, or syntactical rule is used until it has been explained. Grammar precedes translation, and students construct their knowledge of Latin by deduction.

Most good Latin teachers use techniques from all three methods, and the following general observations about teaching with *First Steps* will be familiar to many. What may seem novel is our insistence that the consistency and repetitiveness of the text be reflected in the consistency of a teacher's practice. Middle schoolers are creative thinkers. They learn best, we believe, when their creative thinking occurs in a framework of clear, consistent expectations. Learning Latin, also, involves paying attention to detail. Details become easier to organize and master when they are consistently presented.

Good Latin teachers also use Latin. The more Latin heard, spoken, written, and read, the better. Ten examples are worth a hundred explanations.

Consistency. The more important an activity, the more important it is to do it in exactly the same way every time.

Every Latin class should begin and end in the same way. Some teachers begin every class with a review of forms or vocabulary; others begin with spoken greetings in Latin. The choice of activity is less important than its consistent presence.

Every time a student or teacher manipulates the language, that manipulation should follow a clear, explicit order. Following this practice will help students develop a sense of the basic framework of Latin. The construction of a noun or adjective, for example, should always be given in the order CASE, NUMBER, GENDER; verb tenses should always be listed in the order PRESENT, IMPERFECT, FUTURE; PERFECT, PLUPERFECT, FUTURE PERFECT; verbs should always be construed in the order PERSON, NUMBER, TENSE, MOOD, VOICE. Students should follow these orders in oral recitation, written exercises, classroom games, and every time they describe a substantive or verb.

Repetition. Latin classes never leave the first chapter behind. Learning Latin is not a linear process; instead, it resembles a recursive spiral, in which a return to first principles precedes every advance in knowledge.

Some of every Latin class should always be devoted to review of previous work, and every test should include questions on material that the students have already learned. To some extent, the recursive structure of grammar and the design of *First Steps* make some repetition inevitable, but a good teacher will build in more.

Speaking. Language is sound in the air. This statement is true even of Latin, a language with no living native speakers, and true even when Latin is taught with reading and grammatical understanding as its principal objectives.

From their first Latin class, students should be taught to pronounce Latin carefully and accurately. Many teachers focus on the consonants characteristic of Latin, the hard **c** and semivocalic **v**. It is more important, we believe, to do everything possible to help students master the vowel sounds and accentuation of Latin. A student who becomes accustomed from the beginning to say *ámô, ámás, ámat*, not *amó amás amát*, and to pronouncing the differences between long and short **i** and long and short **e** will find it harder to confuse *dūceris* with *dūcēris* or to suppose that *mīseram* means “an unhappy girl.”

Even in a grammar-translation classroom there is a place for spoken Latin. Middle schoolers enjoy learning and using Latin greetings, commands, and requests. Plays and skits, Latin oral reports, and other activities can reinforce a student’s knowledge of Latin phonology as well as of other aspects of the language.

Even a teacher who does not want to speak Latin in the classroom should make sure that no Latin is ever translated, analyzed, or discussed until it has been read aloud, with correct pronunciation.

Listening. Learning to hear and to comprehend Latin as it is read or spoken can promote the important skill of understanding a Latin sentence as it unfolds. If students are to read Latin fluently, they cannot approach a sentence as a snarl of words to be untangled by “looking for the verb.” Instead, they must learn to process a sentence in its Latin order, clause by clause.

Responding to spoken commands in Latin can help students develop this skill. Dictation (or *dictâmen*) is another important tool of the grammar-translation method. From the earliest stages students can be asked to listen to a word or short phrase, write it down, and translate it. Successive sentences should repeat a single pattern, and students should gradually become accustomed to longer and longer sentences.

Writing. By a paradox of a kind not infrequent in education, giving students practice only in reading Latin is not the best way to teach them to read Latin. Writing Latin has been a traditional and effective part of learning to read Latin by the grammar-translation method. Active command of vocabulary and syntax comes into play mostly in the act of translating sentences and longer passages from English into Latin.

A typical chapter in *First Steps* includes nearly as many English-to-Latin sentences as Latin-to-English. Students should become accustomed as soon as possible to using idiomatic Latin word order and to looking for varied ways of expressing the same idea in Latin.

Composition does not mean only direct translation from English into Latin. Students may be asked to write answers in Latin to simple questions (*Quid est in picturâ? Ubi sunt librî tuî?*) or to complete sentences in which some word has been omitted. Any activity that encourages students to produce Latin will promote their ability to understand it.

Reading. Reading a sentence like the one which opens Cicero's *Third Oration Against Catiline* constitutes one of the most complex mental actions that we ask our students to perform. Instruction by the grammar-translation method aims to develop students who can read and understand such a sentence without having to translate or decode it, who can produce an accurate, idiomatic English translation of it, and who can describe completely its grammatical and rhetorical structures.

Those complex abilities are made up of individual, easily managed skills. In the beginning, conscious analysis, memorization, and labor precede understanding. A student learns that *-tis* is the second person singular ending, that it means "you," that it is added to the present stem of the verb to make the present active, and so on. From these data the student can conclude with deliberation that *vidêtis* means "you see." Consistent, repetitive practice makes this process almost automatic, so that the student hears or looks at *vidêtis* and knows that it means "you see." That automatic knowledge combines with many other kinds to allow a student to read Cicero's 47-word period, from *Rem publicam* through *vidêtis*.

Latin sentences can be long, complex, and occasionally difficult, but learning to read them need not be. *First Steps* tries to make the process of learning to read Latin orderly and progressive. Students should become accustomed to short, simple sentences in a limited number of patterns before they see variations on those patterns. When a new form or pattern is presented, it can be practiced by varying the sentences in earlier lessons.

Reading is, however, an inherently unnatural act. Human beings do not read without instruction. We must learn to read, consciously and sometimes with difficulty. Latin teachers need to be aware of the fundamental cognitive components of reading: sequencing, decoding, auditory and visual processing, and the rest. In the grammar-translation method, some classroom activities isolate one or two of these components. Teachers need to be alert to the Latin student who has difficulty with one or more of these components. Together with reading and learning specialists, Latin teachers can play an important role in helping such students become better students in all subjects, not just Latin.

4. Conclusion

Somewhere between the mechanical action of the eye scanning a page and the mind's assimilation of knowledge a miracle occurs. Our understanding of the morphology, vocabulary, and syntax of the language in which we read combines with our expectations and sense of context to process foreign information into meaning. The miraculous moment is brief if we are reading in our native languages, extended if we read in Latin.

To read in Latin we must build categories about language and form expectations about context in a more deliberate manner than when

we learned our native or second language. As Frank Smith puts it, “Teaching’ is often little more than telling children that a category exists” (*Understanding Reading: a Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read* 1988, 12). There is a great difference between Latin and English in the morphology alone, and that difference increases exponentially when syntax becomes involved. The experience is more taxonomical than sequential.

We have chosen the grammar/translation method to teach Latin because it exercises uniquely the linguistic skills involved in building categories and forming expectations about individual words, phrases, whole sentences, and texts. When students successfully acquire Latin, their way of approaching language changes permanently. Our grammar book aims to emphasize that change because we believe that this approach to language is a unique and valuable contribution to culture.



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