

A way into Latin

The study of Latin should have at least seven components:

- accident
- syntax
- vocabulary
- derivation
- translation
- passages
- history.

The meaning of a Latin sentence does not depend on the order of its words, but on their **endings**, and accident is the set of such alterations in the form of a word, usually at its end, which are called inflections. Latin, unlike English, is a highly inflected language. The word 'syntax' comes from two Greek words, respectively like our 'together' and 'placing', and means the set of principles for putting words together in a particular language. As we increase our Latin vocabulary, it is good to attend too to English (or other) words derived from the Latin ones. We need to learn to translate Latin sentences into English ones, and *vice versa*: at early stages these sentences will be short and usually made up for the purpose. We thus become ready to understand, appreciate, and translate passages of Latin, preferably notable ones from famous writers. We should learn something of the history of ancient Rome and of any subsequent society from which a Latin passage may come.

All seven of these components are to be found in *Latin for Today: second course*, published in 1933. I should recommend Cicero's discussions of what is most valuable in human life as a major source of passages, rather than Julius Caesar's accounts of his campaigns.

The first three components are very well presented in exactly 60 pages (289-338a) near the end of the book. These should be thoroughly mastered, ideally in the first year of study. (For anyone without the book they could be photocopied.) Plenty of revision is required, in which one aims to develop a visual memory for some things, says sets of words aloud, and preferably uses a cassette or CD, such as I have produced for the accident as set out in a more advanced text, so that Latin is often **heard**. At first, keep working, at any stage, on **each of four** parts of these pages: 289-301 (accident other than verbs), 301-16 (accident, verbs), 317-28 (syntax), 335-8a (vocabulary, a first list: the words introduced in the earlier book). Later you can go on to pp. 329-34a (vocabulary, a second list). Notice what a helpful layout is used for learning and revising vocabulary, even though the words are not arranged by parts of speech (nouns, pronouns, verbs etc.).

It would not be easy, if you had no one to consult, to relate the accident to the syntax so as to **understand** how each Latin sentence or word-group in the section for it had the meaning provided. However, as your acquaintance with each of the four parts grows, you will understand more and more, and, with that understanding rather than just from memory, be able to translate for yourself Latin sentences or word-groups into English and English ones into Latin, **and give explanations**.

Latin for Today: second course is excellent on derivation. Go through the book looking for the section headed “Application of Latin to English” which is provided in many of the chapters.

Another very valuable book is *A Latin Word List* by K.C. Masterman, who taught at Geelong Grammar School and the Australian National University. Very many of the words listed are accompanied by English words derived from them. The three lists are arranged according to the parts of speech and their patterns of inflection. (We use the word ‘conjugation’ for a whole set of verb-endings and ‘declension’ for a set for a noun, pronoun or adjective.) I have put all three lists of Latin words onto cassettes.

At first, get to know the layout and nature of these two books, and read the introduction to the first and “The Latin Language” in the second.

Determine for yourself, as you go, what writing or typing you will do. I suggest that you have a growing range of looseleaf pages, well headed and kept in a binder, on which you do such things as copying the sentences provided to illustrate syntax, with plenty of space between them, with notes added giving explanations and references, as here for the first pair:

<i>Poetae</i>	<i>narraverunt</i>	Poets have told
noun, m or f, 1st declension, nominative plural, from <i>poeta</i> , poet.	verb, 1st conjugation, 3rd person plural, perfect (tense), from <i>narro</i> , I tell.	

As your familiarity with grammatical terms increases, use more abbreviations. Put in, wherever you wish, references to numbered **sections** of the treatment of syntax (“Summary of grammatical rules”). ‘Nominative’ is explained adequately for ‘*Poetae narraverunt*’ at 8 (I prefer to say ‘subject-locution’ [‘Sub-L’] rather than ‘subject’: see *Making up Sentences* Ch. 1, sec. 3 and sec. 7, paragraph 1) and ‘perfect’ at 55, except that the word ‘act’ is too narrow. As always, add whatever notes you wish.

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