Getting started on classical Latin

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Introduction

The aim of this free course is to enable you to get started on learning Latin in a fairly leisurely but well-focused way. It has been developed in response to requests from students who had had no contact with Latin before and who felt they would like to spend a little time preparing for the kind of learning that studying a classical language involves. This course will give you a taster of what is involved in the very early stages of learning Latin. Along the way, you will learn some Latin words, master the pronunciation of Latin and explore the links between Latin and English. Importantly, too, you will gain a basic understanding of how Latin 'works' – its grammar and sentence structure – and gain a useful impression of what learning Latin actually involves. The material which follows is designed to be studied in small sections. In all, it will probably take about 8–10 hours to work through. But even if you have only a small amount of time available, you will find it useful to work through the early sections and familiarise yourself with some basic grammatical terms.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course A276 *Classical Latin: the language of ancient Rome* .

Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand some of the main links between English and Latin
- pronounce Latin words confidently
- have an understanding of basic English grammar in order to recognise and describe the way languages work
- unravel basic Latin sentences.

1 Learning Latin: study techniques

If you have studied classical literature in translation, at the OU or elsewhere, you will be used to the demands of extensive reading of set books, note-taking and preparing essays. However, the 'tools of the trade' for learning a classical language are somewhat different, and you will need to develop new skills, of which the most basic are actually the most important, since they underpin everything else that you do as you progress your studies in the area.

To study Latin successfully, students typically find they need to develop a study pattern suited to their lifestyle and to the demands of this type of language learning. 'Little and often' is best; however, you may not be able to set aside an hour or so each day. This course will give you the opportunity to try out various study patterns and find out which suits you best.

You will also be able to find out which aspects of language learning come easily to you, and which seem more difficult or more time-consuming. For example, some people find dealing with grammar difficult. Others may worry about memorising words, although with practice many people find that they can develop techniques to help with this. As you work through this material, you might like to experiment with different ways of learning vocabulary – for example, writing out the Latin words and/or saying them aloud; thinking of English words which are derived from, and therefore similar to, the Latin words you have learnt; using flash cards; getting a friend to test you; recording vocabulary items and listening back to them; or a combination of these strategies. If you can set up the habit of learning just a few words each day, you will benefit enormously.

2 Links between English and Latin

Although Latin is not the direct ancestor of the English language, as it is of languages such as Italian, French and Spanish (the so-called 'Romance' languages), it has nevertheless given us an enormous number of English words. According to some estimates, around half of all English words come from Latin.

2.1 Latin and English: the Roman empire

You may be familiar with the idea that words such as **science**, **transport** and **solution** are derived from Latin, but did you know that **street** and **kipper** come from Latin words which entered ordinary speech during the period from the first to the early fifth centuries AD, when Celtic Britain was part of the Roman empire?

Activity 1

There are other homely words in this category. Try matching the following English words with their Latin origins below.

> beer
>
> box
>
> candle
>
> wine
>
> cheese
>
> peas
>
> sack
>
> sock
>
> street
>
> wall
>
> caster/cester/chester (as in Lancaster, Gloucester, Chester)

Match each of the items above to an item below.

> bibere (= to drink)
>
> buxus (= boxwood)
>
> candela
>
> vinum
>
> caseus
>
> pisum
>
> saccus (= large bag)
>
> soccus (= slipper)
>
> strata (via) (= paved way)

> vallum (= palisaded earthwork)
>
> castra (= camp, fort)

2.2 The influence of Norman French

In the sixth century, the Latin of the Christian church added such words as **monastery** and **minster, pope** and **noon** (from **nona hora** = *ninth hour* = 3pm) to the language, which was then essentially Anglo-Saxon. When William the Conqueror and his Normans came to Britain in the eleventh century, a vast number of words, derived both from Norman French and from written Latin, entered English. Among these are **duke, general, soldier, army, palace, law, chivalry, merchant, mutton, beef** and **pork**. In some instances, English was further enriched by having two versions of what was originally a single Latin word.

Table 1 English words derived from Latin and from Latin through French

Words from Latin through French	Words from Latin
treason	tradition
rage	rabies
ray	radius
poor	pauper
reason	ration, ratio
firm	secure
abridge	abbreviate

2.3 The Renaissance to the modern era

The Renaissance in Europe, the Enlightenment in Britain, and the growth of science and technology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, produced thousands more words derived from Latin, such as **administration, computer, decimal, horticulture, interface, molecule, missile, satellite** and **superhuman**.

This is a huge and fascinating topic. If you would like to think about it in greater depth, you could read *Latin in our Language* by Peter Barker − see the ' Further reading ' section for full publication details. This book contains many vocabulary exercises.

In English there are often two words expressing the same idea, one of Anglo-Saxon origin, the other of Latin origin. Anglo-Saxon words can often seem more simple and straightforward in style, while Latinate words can seem more scientific and academic. So simple words and phrases such as **go down, high, sad, speed up, watch, hate, do well** and **hide**, for example, can be contrasted with words of Latin origin like **descend, elevated, miserable, accelerate, observe, detest, succeed** and **conceal**. But do bear in mind that not all words derived from Latin sound elevated: remember the homely words of Latin origin you met in Section 2, like **cheese**, **peas** and **sock** !

Activity 2

In addition to the words which have derived from Latin or from Latin through French, English also uses a number of words taken straight from Latin without any change. See if you can match the following Latin/English words with the meanings of the original Latin words below.

agenda

data

exit

formula

fungus

innuendo

lens

media

plus

referendum

vacuum

Match each of the items above to an item below.

things to be discussed

things given

he/she goes out

rule/method

mushroom

by hinting

lentil

things in the middle

more

thing to be referred

empty thing

2.4 Latin vocabulary

The links between Latin and English vocabulary are good news for students of Latin. Because of the presence of so many words of Latin origin in English, many Latin words are relatively easy for English speakers to absorb. Indeed, some Latin words are almost identical to their English equivalents, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Latin words with similar English equivalents

Latin word	English meaning
adulescens	young man, youth, adolescent
affirmo	I affirm
desidero	I desire
finis	finish, end
pars	part
persuadeo	I persuade
rapidus	rapid, swift
respondeo	I reply, respond
similis	similar, like
templum	temple

The fact that Latin words often have English derivatives can also make them relatively straightforward to learn.

Table 3 Latin words with English derivatives

Latin word	English derivations
familia, household	family
filius, son	filial
habito, I live, dwell	habitat
celo, I hide	conceal
clamo, I shout	exclaim
intro, I enter	enter
porto, I carry	porter
timeo, I fear	timid
voco, I call	vocation (i.e. a 'calling')
amo, I love	amiable
curo, I look after	curator

Activity 3

Now it's time to do a little vocabulary building. How many of the following common Latin words can you guess the meaning of? Type your answers next to the Latin words in the box provided.

> arma:
> causa:
> custos:
> defendo:

difficilis:
elephantus:
femina:
frater:
nomen:
optimus:
pater:
servus:

Answer

Latin word	English meaning
arma	arms, weapons
causa	cause, reason
custos	guard (custodian)
defendo	I defend
diffiicilis	difficult
elephantus	elephant
femina	woman (feminine)
frater	brother (fraternal)
nomen	name (nominal)
optimus	very good, excellent (optimal)
pater	father (paternal)
servus	slave (servant)

3 The pronunciation of Latin

Contrary to what many people think, we do know how classical Latin (the Latin spoken in the first century bcE and the first century CE) was pronounced. One of the main clues is provided by the spelling of Latin names in Greek: thus, since the Latin name Valeria, for instance, was spelled Oualeria in Greek, we can tell that Latin 'v' was pronounced as a 'w' sound. Alternative spellings and misspellings on inscriptions also help to show common pronunciations, as do the regular metres of Latin poetry; the remarks of ancient grammarians and other writers; and comparison of Latin with other languages.

3.1 Latin pronunciation and the Latin alphabet

The Roman alphabet is still very much in use today: it is the alphabet used for English and many other languages throughout the world, and it owed its original spread to the use of Latin in the western Roman empire. In classical times, the alphabet consisted of 23 letters, not our 26, as it lacked j, v and w.

3.2 Learning to pronounce Latin

Most students find that they master the principles of pronouncing Latin easily enough, though it can take a little patience and practice. Unlike with modern languages, there is no pressure to develop an 'authentic' Latin accent. However, being able to pronounce Latin consistently will ultimately allow you to absorb Latin vocabulary more quickly, read more fluently and appreciate the rhythms and sounds of Latin poetry and prose that much better.

Activity 4

To learn how Latin is pronounced, visit the 'Sounds' section of the Introducing Classical Latin website, produced by The Open University. You should set aside around an hour to work through this section of the site. (If you have studied some Latin before, you may find browsing this section of the website a useful way of refreshing your memory.)

To begin to acquire some basic Latin vocabulary, you may also like to look at the 'Words' section of the Introducing Classical Latin site. (But note that you will be prompted to revisit the site later, both to look at the 'Words' section again – and also to work through the 'Sentences' section, which you should leave to one side for now.)

In line with the 'little and often' approach that you are advised to adopt for learning Latin, you may wish to break down your time working on the 'Sounds' and 'Words' sections into small chunks of 10–20 minutes. You will no doubt also find it useful to revisit the Introducing Classical Latin website again after a few days, too, to review what you have learnt: consolidation and practice are key when it comes to making languages stick!

You will notice that, some letters on the Introducing Classical Latin site are marked with short lines over the top; these are called 'macra' (singular: macron) and they mark the difference between 'short' and 'long' vowels. (You can hear the difference between

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the length of vowels when you work through the section on the 'Sounds' of the Latin alphabet.) Macra can be useful when learning how to pronounce Latin words, but since most printed versions of Latin texts do not use them, we've chosen not to include them in this OpenLearn course.

4 Introducing grammar

The grammar of a language is simply a way of describing the rules its native speakers intuitively use when they speak or write. In this section, you will explore some aspects of English grammar that it will be useful for you to be aware of when studying Latin. As someone who has already mastered one complex language that is related to Latin – namely English – you may be pleasantly surprised at how familiar some of the principles of Latin grammar turn out to be.

4.1 Inflection

The underlying grammatical rules of Indo-European languages (for example, English, Gaelic, French, German, Russian, Latin, Greek, Punjabi) are similar, but it is not always easy to appreciate this when you are beginning to learn a new language. A common feature of all these languages is the '**inflection**' of nouns, adjectives and verbs, whereby the end of the word is changed according to its function in the sentence. For example, **woman**, **woman's**, **women** and **women's** are all inflections of a noun. **This** and **these** are inflections of an adjective, and **teach**, **teaches**, **teaching** and **taught** are inflections of a verb.

Modern English uses inflected forms in a fairly limited way. But many languages use them much more than English does – including Latin which is a heavily inflected language. In English, we have, on the whole, exchanged the inflections for a very strict system of word order. For example, 'Those girls are feeding the horses' means one thing and 'The horses are feeding those girls' means something rather different. Similarly, 'You are going to Spain tomorrow' is different from 'Are you going to Spain tomorrow?' We can tell who is doing what to whom, in the first example, and whether something is a statement or a question, in the second example, from the order of the words.

This is much less true of Latin. The endings of words (the inflections) are vital to understanding how words relate to each other and enable us to work out the meaning of a sentence. When learning Latin (or Greek, German or Russian), we have to change our reading habits. We need to look even more carefully at the ends of words than at the beginnings, and only if we do this will the meaning of a sentence become clear and unambiguous. In learning Latin, vocabulary is important, but just as important is the system of word endings.

4.2 Parts of speech

In describing the grammar of written Latin, the best method is to use the traditional classical grammar, as worked out by the Greeks and Romans themselves. As a preliminary exercise, it may be useful to be familiar with the 'parts of speech' in English.

Table 4 below gives a very brief explanation of the eight parts of speech which are found in both Latin and English. A fuller discussion of the most important terms follows.

Table 4 Parts of speech in English

Part of speech	Explanation	Latin derivation of the term
noun	a naming word	nomen, a name
pronoun	a word used in place of a noun	pro, instead of; nomen, a name
adjective	a 'describing' word	adiectum, thrown at, added
verb	a 'doing' or 'being' word	verbum, a word
adverb	a word added to a verb, adjective or another adverb	ad, to; verbum, a word
preposition	a word placed before a noun or pronoun	prae, in front of; positum, placed
conjunction	a joining word	coniunctum, joined
interjection	an exclamation	interiectum, thrown between, insert

4.2.1 Nouns

Nouns are used to name people, places, things or concepts; for example **Cicero**, **Italy**, **field**, **happiness**. Most nouns can be singular or plural; for example **field**, **fields**.

In Latin, nouns are usually subject to inflections: their endings change. This is sometimes so in English, too, as you saw in Section 4.1 with woman, women, woman's, and women's.

Activity 5

Identify the nouns in this passage from Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*.

> Once upon a time there were four little Rabbits, and their names were – Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail, and Peter. They lived with their Mother in a sand-bank, underneath the root of a very big fir-tree.
>
> 'Now, my dears,' said old Mrs. Rabbit one morning, 'you may go into the fields or down the lane, but don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden: your Father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor.
>
> Potter, 1902, pp. 7–11

> **Answer**
> time, Rabbits, names, Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail, Peter, Mother, sand-bank, root, fir-tree, dears, Rabbit, morning, fields, lane, McGregor's, garden, Father, accident, pie, McGregor

Gender of nouns

In English, we tend to classify nouns according to their sex, 'masculine' being used of males, 'feminine' of females and 'neuter' of everything else. Observe the following examples:

> What's wrong with that **man** ? **He** seems really annoyed.
>
> I saw you speaking to that **woman**. What did **she** say?
>
> You had the **book** in your hand just now. Where did you put **it** ?

'He' tends to be used for male humans and animals; 'she' tends to be used for female humans and animals; and 'it' is used for inanimate objects and animals of indeterminate gender.

In Latin, however, nouns are classified according to their gender, and the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' are not restricted to male and female people and animals.

So, some **masculine** nouns identify people or animals that you might intuitively class as 'masculine', such as:

> vir, man
>
> miles, soldier
>
> servus, (male) slave
>
> lupus, (he-)wolf

But a number of inanimate objects or concepts are also masculine in Latin:

> campus, field
>
> murus, wall
>
> pons, bridge
>
> annus, year

Similarly, some **feminine** nouns identify people or animals that you might intuitively class as 'feminine', such as:

> femina, woman
>
> regina, queen
>
> uxor, wife
>
> lupa, she-wolf

But many inanimate objects or concepts are also feminine in Latin:

> flamma, flame
>
> statua, statue
>
> urbs, city
>
> arx, citadel

In addition to masculine and feminine, Latin also has a third gender: **neuter**. Neuter nouns include:

> templum, temple
>
> bellum, war
>
> consilium, plan
>
> nomen, name

If you are new to language learning (and even if you are not!), the idea of gender may be challenging to grasp. There is, after all, nothing intrinsically masculine about a 'year' or feminine about a 'flame'. Rest assured that gender is something that you will get used to over time, however.

4.2.2 Pronouns

Pronouns are used to avoid repeating nouns and to supply the subjects for verbs. **I**, **me**, **we** and **us** are known as the first person pronouns; **you** is the second person pronoun; and **he**, **him**, **she**, **her**, **it**, **they** and **them** are third person pronouns in English. In Latin, pronouns are used only when really necessary for the sense of a sentence, or sometimes for emphasis. Often, a pronoun subject, such as **I**, **you** or **she**, can be understood from the ending of the verb. **This** and **that** can also be used as pronouns, both in English and in Latin.

4.2.3 Adjectives

Adjectives are words which describe nouns, for example **big** city, **these** chairs, **good** people, **my** chocolate or **swift** horse. In Latin they 'agree' with the noun they describe: that is to say, they match with regard to gender (masculine, feminine or neuter) and number (singular or plural), for example. This is occasionally so in English, too. For example, we say **that** house but **those** houses.

4.2.4 Prepositions

A preposition is a word which accompanies a noun (or a pronoun) to provide information such as the location of the action of a sentence in space or time, e.g. **in**, **towards**, **against**, **with**, **among**, **from**, **after**, **about**.

Prepositions are always used with a noun or pronoun in what is called a 'prepositional phrase', for example: **towards the woman**, **near the cinema**, **behind the clouds**, **after breakfast**, **with her**.

Notice how English says: 'This is **for him**' (not 'for he'); 'He went **with me** ' (not 'with I') and 'Give the sweets **to us** ' (not 'to we'). That is to say, English tends to use a particular form of a pronoun when it is used in a prepositional phrase. In Latin, it is not just the forms of pronouns that change when they are used with prepositions: the forms of nouns change, too. The Latin for 'slave', for example, is **servus** ; but 'with the slave' in Latin is **cum servo** (i.e. the final – **us** of servus has changed to – **o**).

4.2.5 Verbs

Verbs are the most important words of all, as is suggested by the fact that the verb in both English and Latin is named after the Latin word verbum, word! Without a verb, a sentence

cannot be a proper sentence, or a clause a proper clause. A one-word sentence consists of a verb only, for example, 'Run!'

Verb endings

The ending of a Latin verb shows who is carrying out the action of the verb (which is why there is usually no need for a pronoun to show this). Table 5 below shows the present tense person endings of almost every Latin verb.

Table 5 Person endings of Latin verbs (present tense)

Person	Singular	Plural
1st	**o** (= I)	**mus** (= we)
2nd	**s** (= you)	**tis** (= you)
3rd	**t** (= he/she/it)	**nt** (= they)

The part of the verb to which the person ending is added is called the stem. Thus, the stem **ama** plus the person ending – **t** produces **amat**, 'he/she/it loves'. Alternatively, **ama** plus **nt** produces **amant**, meaning 'they love.'

Activity 6

Identify the person (1st, 2nd, 3rd) and number (singular or plural) of the following English verbs. Type your answers in the box below.

> He loves:
> They capture:
> She carries:
> You desire:
> I fear:
> We see:
> They are:
> I carry:

Answer

Example	person and number
He loves	3rd singular
They capture	3rd plural
She carries	3rd singular
You desire	2nd singular or plural (depending on whether 'you' refers to one person or more than one people)
I fear	1st singular
We see	1st plural
They are	3rd plural

I carry	1st singular

The tense of verbs

As well as indicating an action, and who is carrying it out, a verb usually tells us **when** the action happens: **I'm eating**, for example, tells us of something happening at the present moment, whereas **I ate** indicates something that happened in the past. This kind of difference is known as the 'tense' of the verb. In English, this is often indicated by using another verb to help out the meaning, for example **I *will* eat** . This extra verb is sometimes referred to as an 'auxiliary verb', from the Latin word **auxilium**, meaning 'help'. In Latin, on the other hand, a change of person ending, and sometimes a change of stem, indicates a change in the tense.

The main tenses in Latin are given in Table 6 below.

Table 6 The main tenses in Latin

Tense	Latin	English translations
Present	porto	I carry (simple present) I am carrying (present continuous) I do carry (emphatic)
Future	portabo	I shall/will carry I am going to carry
Imperfect	portabam	I was carrying (continuous action in the past) I used to carry (repeated action) I carried (repeated action)
Perfect	portavi	I have carried (present perfect) I carried (past simple: a completed action)
Pluperfect	portaveram	I had carried (further back in the past than the perfect)
Future perfect	portavero	I will/shall have carried

You will note that 'I carried' is a possible English translation of both the imperfect and the perfect.

Latin would use the **imperfect** (portabam), from Latin **imperfectum**, 'incomplete', when the action was **continuing** or **repeated**: e.g. 'I carried my books to school every day'.

Latin would use the **perfect** (portavi), from Latin **perfectum**, 'complete', for a **one-off** action: e.g. 'I carried my books to school on Tuesday'.

Latin has only the above six tenses. As you can see from the translations provided, there are not as many different ways of describing actions in Latin as there are in English!

Activity 7

Identify the Latin tense – present, imperfect, perfect or pluperfect – that would be used to translate the following English verbs. Then identify the person and number of each (e.g. first person singular; third person plural). Type your answers in the box provided.

You speak:
They have arrived:
We used to know:

We went:
You are flying:
I was trying:
He had jumped:
She fell:

Answer

Example	Person and tense
You speak	present tense, 2nd person
They have arrived	perfect tense, 3rd person plural
We used to know	imperfect tense, 1st person plural
We went	perfect tense or imperfect tense (depending whether it is a completed or repeated action), 1st person plural
You are flying	present tense, 2nd person
I was trying	imperfect tense, 1st person singular
He had jumped	pluperfect tense, 3rd person singular
She fell	perfect tense (depending whether it is a completed or repeated action), 3rd person singular

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Activity 8

The following extract from the Parable of the Prodigal Son in the New Testament contains several verbs. Identify each of the verbs and say which tense would be used to translate them into Latin (present, future, imperfect, perfect or pluperfect). Type your answers in the box provided.

'And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country... no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you …'

(Luke 15: 14–18)

Provide your answer...

Answer

Verbs	Tense
had spent	pluperfect tense
arose	perfect tense
began	perfect tense
['to be' is also a form of verb: an 'infinitive']	
went	perfect tense
joined	perfect tense
gave	imperfect tense (since the action was habitual: he kept not being given anything)
came	perfect tense
said	perfect tense
have	present tense
['to spare' is also a form of verb: an 'infinitive']	
perish	present tense
will arise	future tense
(will) go	future tense
will say	future tense
have sinned	perfect tense

4.2.6 Other parts of speech

Nouns, adjectives, verbs, pronouns and prepositions are the most important parts of speech to get to grips with as you start to learn Latin.

If you would like to know more about the other parts of speech – adverbs, conjunctions and interjections – you can look these up in the glossary, which you will find towards the end of this unit.

4.3 Sentences

In this section, you will take a closer look at sentences, in particular the concepts of 'subject' and 'object' which are so vital for understanding Latin.

4.3.1 Subject and verb

A sentence consists of a number of words which, to make sense, must include a verb. Unless this is the only word in the sentence (as in 'Run!'), there will normally be a word telling us who or what is doing the action. This person or thing carrying out the action of the verb – which is denoted by a noun or a pronoun – is called the **subject** of the verb.

Consider these sentences:

The players ran onto the pitch. The referee blew his whistle, and the centre-forward kicked off.

This short passage has three separate statements (in the two sentences), each determined by a different action expressed by a verb – **ran, blew** and **kicked**. There are also three separate 'doers' or subjects of the actions: **the players, the referee** and **the centre-forward**.

Activity 9

Identify the subjects and verbs in the following sentences. Type your answers in the box provided. The first one has been done for you.

1. I like chocolate.
2. The boys ran as fast as they could.
3. Tomorrow my friend and I are going to Paris.
4. She was sitting beside her friend on the bus and they were talking loudly.
5. Chris and Robbie climbed the tree.

> 1. Subject: I; Verb: like
> 2.
> 3.
> 4.
> 5.

Answer

Subject	Verb
I	like
The boys	ran
They	could
My friend and I	are going
She	was sitting
they	were talking
Chris and Robbie	climbed

4.3.2 Subject and object

Sometimes a sentence also contains a noun (or pronoun), indicating to whom or what the action is being done. In the sentence, '**The referee blew his whistle**', the subject is '**the referee**', the verb is '**blew**', and '**his whistle**' is the thing to which the action is done. This 'receiver' of the action is called the 'object' of the verb. Another way to think of this is to ask a question of the subject and verb; for example, 'The referee blew – what?' The answer to the question, 'his whistle', is the object.

Two of the sentences in Activity 9 above also have objects: 'I like **chocolate** ' and 'Chris and Robbie climbed **the tree** '.

Activity 10

Identify the subject, verb and object in the following sentences. Type your answers in the box provided.

1. The dog fetched the ball.
2. The girls were quietly reading their books.
3. We don't like hard work.
4. In 60 ce Boudicca destroyed Colchester, London and St Albans.
5. The Romans could not forgive her.
6. People will be watching you.

> 1.
> 2.
> 3.
> 4.
> 5.
> 6.

Answer

Subject	Verb	Object
The dog	fetched	the ball
The girls	were reading	their books
We	do + like	hard work
Boudicca	destroyed	Colchester, London, St Albans
The Romans	could + forgive	her
People	will be watching	you

As you can see from the examples in Activity 10, in English the subject usually comes before the verb and the object after it, so the order of components is **subject–verb–object** (sometimes shortened to SVO). This is not always so, however: the object may come first in English, perhaps for the sake of emphasis. And so it is possible to say:

> **Hard work** we don't like.

Similarly, the verb can sometimes come before the subject in English:

> 'Get lost!' **shouted the man** angrily.

4.3.3 English and Latin: word order and meaning

As the subject–verb–object order is normal in English, the difference between a word as subject and the same word as object is not shown by inflection; this is unnecessary. Some English pronouns form an exception, nevertheless:

Table 7 English pronouns that change form

Subject (in the subjective case)	Object (in the objective case)
I	me
he	him
she	her
we	us
they	them

This change of form is a vital point to bear in mind when learning Latin, because Latin nouns and pronouns (and adjectives) change their form according to whether they are the subject or object in their sentence: it is the form of the word, or 'case' as it is usually known, that determines whether it is the subject or the object.

This is a particularly important point, as English usually relies on word order to distinguish between subject and object, as we have already noted: 'The dog bit the postman' is in the conventional order of subject–verb–object, but changing the order of words to 'The postman bit the dog' substantially alters the meaning of the sentence.

This would not be so in Latin, because the different case-endings on the nouns (etc.) indicate which word is the subject and which the object, even if the order of the words is unexpected: object–subject–verb, for example. All the same, there is a word order in Latin which is more usual than others, and this is subject–object–verb. Because of this, the Latin reader has to wait until the end of the sentence with great anticipation to find out what the action (the verb) is!

4.4 Unravelling sentences

In this section you get to practise your skills of analysing English sentences, first by looking at a passage of prose then at poetry.

4.4.1 English prose: subjects and objects

In order to consolidate your knowledge so far, you will first practise identifying subjects and objects in the context of a passage of English text.

Activity 11

The following passage is about the Roman emperor Gaius, better known as Caligula.

Read through it and identify as many subjects, verbs and objects as you can. You will note that not all of the verbs in the passage have an object. Type your answers in the box provided.

Gaius deprived the noblest men at Rome of their ancient family emblems – Torquatus lost his golden collar, Cincinnatus lost his lock of hair, and

Gnaeus Pompeius lost the surname 'Great'. He invited King Ptolemy to Rome, welcomed him with appropriate honours, and then suddenly ordered his execution, because, at Ptolemy's entrance into the amphitheatre during a gladiatorial show, his fine purple cloak had attracted universal admiration. And if Gaius encountered a good-looking man with a fine head of hair – he himself was bald – the back of his scalp was brutally shaved.

(Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, *Caligula* 35; adapted from the translation by R. Graves)

> *Provide your answer...*

Answer

Subject	Verb	Object
Gaius	deprived	the [noblest] men
Torquatus	lost	his [golden] collar
Cincinnatus	lost	his lock [of hair]
Gnaeus Pompeius	lost	the surname
He	invited	King Ptolemy
(He)	welcomed	him
(He)	ordered	his execution
his [fine purple] cloak	had attracted	[universal] admiration
Gaius	encountered	a [good-looking] man
(He himself)	was	
the back [of his scalp]	was shaved	

4.4.2 English poetry: subjects and objects

In English prose – as in spoken English – you can normally rely on sentences conforming to the standard word order of subject–object–verb (or simply subject–verb where the sentence doesn't contain an object). Neither Latin nor English is always so straightforward, however. In English poetry, in particular, it is not uncommon to find language used in experimental or unconventional ways, word order included. Consider the following, for example:

> The dark and vicious place where **thee he got**
> Cost him his eyes.

(Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 5.3.171–2)

In the three words formatted in bold above, Shakespeare varies the word order from a standard English word order. **Thee** is the old English objective form of **thou**, and the normal order would be 'he got [= begot] thee'. Poets, for special effect or to improve the

metrical rhythm, often do vary the order. Consider this example from Shakespeare's Sonnet no. 133:

> Me from myself thy cruel eye hath taken
>
> (Shakespeare, Sonnet no. 133, line 5)

Here we can analyse the sentence to find out the structure:

1. Which is the verb? – 'hath taken'
2. Who/what has done the action? – 'thy cruel eye' (subject)
3. What has been taken? – 'me' (object)

Similarly:

> To me fair friend, you never can be old;
>
> For as you were when first your eye I eyed,
>
> Such seems your beauty still.

(Shakespeare, Sonnet no. 104, lines 1–3)

What is the grammatical structure in 'when first your eye I eyed'?

1. What is the verb? – 'eyed'
2. Who/what is doing the action? – 'I' (subject)
3. What is being eyed? – 'your eye' (object)

This sort of analysis will be important in your study of Latin. But, as it is the case-ending on the Latin noun which indicates whether it is subject or object, it will be easier to sort out which is which in a Latin sentence than it is in some passages of English text.

Activity 12

To make sure you have understood the principles established so far, see if you can pick out the subject, verb and object in the following seven examples. Record your answers in the box provided.

Example 1

Our hearts you see not;

(Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, 3.1.170)

Example 2

For that security craves great Lucifer

(Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 2.1.36)

Example 3

This casket India's glowing gems unlocks

(Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*, 1.133)

Example 4

Wit, brav'ry, worth, his lavish tongue bestows

(Johnson, *London*, 126)

Example 5

Much he the place admired, the person more.

(Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 9.444)

Example 6

Two massy [massive] keys he bore, of metals twain

(Milton, *Lycidas*, 110)

Example 7

In Peace the thoughts of War he could remove

(Dryden, *Absalom and Achitophel*, 25)

Example 1:
Example 2:
Example 3:
Example 4:
Example 5:
Example 6:
Example 7:

Answer

Subject	Verb	Object
You	see	Our hearts
great Lucifer	craves (for)	that security
This casket	unlocks	(India's) glowing gems
his lavish tongue	bestows	wit, brav'ry, worth
he	admired	the place, the person
he	bore	two massy [massive] keys
he	could remove	the thoughts (of War)

5 Reading Latin: working with words and sentences

To round off your work on sentences, you should now revisit The Open University's Introducing Classical Latin website. In Section 3.2, you were asked to work through the 'Sounds' section and, if you had time, to begin looking through the 'Words' section.

Activity 13

Now finish working through the ' Words ' section of the Introducing Classical Latin site. Once you are confident that you have a reasonable grasp of the 24 Latin words you are asked to learn, work through the ' Sentences ' section, looking at 'Using Nouns 1', 'Using Nouns 2' and 'Using Adjectives' . The activities on this website will give you the opportunity to translate some basic Latin sentences. As you work through the exercises, you will also begin to see how the learning you have done in this course relates to the practicalities of reading and understanding Latin.

Aim to set aside around 2 hours to work through the 'Words' and 'Sentences' sections. Once more, in line with the 'little and often' approach you are advised to adopt for learning Latin, you may wish to break down your time working on these sections into small chunks of 10−20 minutes.

5.1 The cases in Latin

To finish off your study of 'Getting Started on Classical Latin', let's take a brief look at a key feature of Latin grammar: 'cases'.

'Cases' indicate the various functions that nouns, pronouns and adjectives can have in a sentence. The case is shown by the word ending in Latin.

During your work on the Introducing Classical Latin website, you met the two most important cases in Latin. These are the **nominative** case (i.e. the subject forms, like servus and femina) and the **accusative** case (i.e. the object forms, like serv **um** and femin **am**).

5.1.2 Nominative: the case of the subject

The **nominative** is the form of the noun you will find in a dictionary. This is the form of the noun that is used for the **subject** of the sentence.

> **femina** aurum amat. **The woman** loves gold.
> **servus** forum videt. **The slave** sees the forum.

The nominative is also used for what is known as the **complement**, usually a word linked to the subject of a sentence by the verb 'to be'.

> femina est **regina**. The woman is a **queen**.

(Note that in this sentence, woman – femina – is also in the nominative since it is the subject of the sentence. One way to think of the verb 'to be' is as an equals sign, linking the two nouns: femina = regina.)

5.1.3 Accusative: the case of the object

The **accusative** case is the form of the noun used for the **object** of the sentence.

> servus **feminam** amat. The slave loves **the woman**.
> puer **lupum** capit. The boy captures the **wolf**.

The accusative is also used after certain **prepositions** in Latin (such as **ad**, 'towards').

> puer **ad feminam** currit. The boy runs **towards the woman**.

5.1.4 Summary of cases

Table 8 below summarises the uses of the nominative, accusative and the other four cases in Latin. There is no need to commit this to memory now: this is simply here to provide an overview of how Latin nouns work.

Note how the ending of a Latin noun like servus, 'slave', changes in the various cases (serv **us**, serv **um**, serv **i**, etc.). Importantly, whereas English speakers rely on **word order** to tell them what grammatical role a word is playing in the sentence, readers of Latin principally rely on **word shape**.

Table 8 Summary of the cases in Latin

case	use	English translation ('slave')
nominative (servus)	used for the subject of a sentence or clause used for the complement of the verb 'to be' (i.e. after the verb 'to be')	a slave …, the slave …
vocative (serve)	used when addressing someone	slave!, … O slave,
accusative (servum)	used for the object of a verb used after certain prepositions	… a slave, … the slave (meaning of preposition) + the slave/a slave
genitive (servi)	used to indicate possession: of, _____'s	of the slave, of a slave; the slave's, a slave's
dative (servo)	used with verbs of giving, saying, showing or telling: to, for	to the slave, to a slave; for the slave, for a slave
ablative (servo)	when used by itself (usually with things rather than people): by, with, from used after certain prepositions	by, with, from (whichever seems to fit) + the thing (meaning of preposition) + the slave/a slave

Note that Latin has no word for 'a' or 'the'. This means that you can choose to translate the different forms of servus as 'slave', 'a slave' or 'the slave', whichever seems to make best sense in context.

Conclusion

We hope that you have enjoyed 'Getting started on classical Latin'.

Simply by working through this free course, you have already begun to familiarise yourself with some of the key terms that you will meet again if you choose to learn Latin in earnest, such as 'noun', 'verb', 'subject' and 'object'. Do bear in mind that you have been presented with a lot of information in a very short time and you are certainly not expected to retain everything that you have read. Getting to grips with the basic principles of grammar – which you have already done – is always going to be more important than memorising the precise terms used to describe grammatical concepts. And the good news is that when you meet these grammatical concepts again when you are studying Latin, your understanding will give you an important head start. Remember, too, that this course has a Glossary if you need to refresh your memory of what certain grammatical terms mean.

Focusing on grammar is one aspect of language learning, but learning vocabulary is equally important; something else that we hope you have taken away from this course is just how strong the links between Latin and English are and, as a consequence, how similar many Latin words are to English words. You might like to take a moment to reflect on how many Latin words you are familiar with now that you've worked through this course.

If you enjoyed 'Getting Started on classical Latin', why not take your learning further?

If you would like to continue your learning of classical languages, you can try:

Discovering Ancient Greek and Latin

Introducing Ancient Greek

Here are some other options for exploring the classical world further:

Introducing Virgil's Aeneid

Latin graffiti at Pompeii

Introducing the Classical World

Hadrian: The Roamin' Emperor

Glossary

accusative (case)

The case of the direct object of the verb; e.g. vir **feminam** amat, 'the man loves **the woman** ; or puer **servum** videt, 'the boy sees **the slave** '. The accusative is also used with certain prepositions.

adjective

A 'describing word': that is to say, a word that modifies (i.e. describes) a noun; e.g. **beautiful**, **brave**, **large**.

adverb

A word which modifies (describes the action of) a verb. In English, adverbs commonly, but not always, end in – **ly**, e.g. **quickly**, **suddenly**, but also **soon**, **always**, **almost**. Adverbs can also modify an adjective or another adverb: **almost** ready; **really** easily.

agreement

In the case of verbs, agreement means the change in the form of the verb depending on the verb's subject. Thus in the sentence 'I do', 'do' agrees with 'I'; in the sentence 'he does', 'does' agrees with 'he'. In the case of adjectives, agreement means the change in the form of the adjective to match the number, gender and case of the noun: thus vir parv **us**, 'the small man', but femina parv **a**, 'the small woman'.

case

Latin nouns are found in one of six cases: nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, ablative and vocative.

clause

A section of a sentence containing, as a minimum, a subject and a verb (though in Latin, unlike English, the subject is not always stated).

complement

A word or phrase which adds to the description of the subject of a sentence (and which, therefore, like the subject, appears in the nominative case). A complement is most often found in conjunction with the verb 'to be'. Thus in the sentence 'vir est amicus', 'The man is a friend', the subject is **vir**, 'man' ('The man is …') whereas **amicus**, 'friend', is the complement ('… a friend').

conjunction

A word that links parts of a sentence; e.g. **and**, **but**, **since**, **because**.

ending

The letters added to the stem of a noun, verb or adjective, for example, in order to mark number and so on. Thus the ending of ama **nt**, 'they love', indicates that the verb is third person plural ('they').

feminine

One of the three genders of nouns (and adjectives) in Latin. Examples of feminine nouns are **femina**, 'woman', **regina**, 'queen', and **statua**, 'statue'.

future tense

The future tense describes an action that will happen in the future; e.g. 'I shall carry', 'she will listen'.

gender

Nouns (and adjectives) in Latin are one of three genders: masculine, feminine or neuter.

imperfect tense

The tense used to describe ongoing, repeated, or habitual actions in the past; e.g. **portabat**, 'he was carrying', 'he used to carry', 'he kept carrying' or just 'he carried' (when the 'carrying' went on regularly in the past: 'He carried his shopping home every day').

inflection (inflected)

The way in which words change shape to convey information about their precise meaning and/or their grammatical role in a sentence (e.g. English 'he'/'him', 'is'/'are', 'desk'/'desks', 'look'/'looked'). Languages like Latin that rely heavily on inflection to convey meaning are often called 'inflected languages'.

interjection

A word or phrase that is not connected grammatically to the rest of the sentence and which is used to convey emotion; e.g. **hey** ! **oh dear** ! **alas** ! **whoops** ! **wow** !

masculine

One of the three genders of Latin nouns (and adjectives) in Latin. Examples of masculine nouns are **amicus**, 'friend', **servus**, 'slave' and **vir**, 'man'.

neuter

One of the three genders of nouns (and adjectives) in Latin. Examples of neuter nouns are **aurum**, 'gold', and **forum**, 'forum, market place'.

nominative (case)

The case of the subject of the verb; e.g. **femina** virum amat, ' **The woman** loves the man'.

noun

A person, animal, place, thing, event, idea or concept; e.g. **puer**, 'boy'; **Roma**, 'Rome'; **statua**, 'statue'; **campus**, 'field'; **imperium**, 'power'; **virtus**, 'courage, virtue'.

number

Whether a noun, verb, pronoun or adjective is singular or plural.

object (also known as direct object)

The person in a sentence to whom the action of the verb is being done (or the thing to which the action is being done). In the sentence 'The man carries the soldier', for example, 'the man' is the subject, 'carries' the verb and 'the soldier' is the direct object (i.e. it is the soldier who is on the receiving end of the carrying). (In Latin, the direct object of a verb appears in the accusative case.)

part of speech

Whether a word is a verb, noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction or interjection.

person

The form of a verb will differ according to the 'person'. There are three 'persons' in both English and Latin: first person ('I' and 'we'), second person ('you', either singular or plural) and third person ('he', 'she', 'it'; 'they').

pluperfect tense

The pluperfect is the tense used to show that an action took place before another action in the past. The Latin pluperfect can usually be translated into English using 'had ____ed', e.g. portaveram, 'I had carried'; amaverant, 'they had loved'.

preposition

A word which accompanies a noun (or a pronoun) to provide information such as the location of the action of a sentence in space or time; e.g. **in**, **towards**, **against**, **with**, **among**, **from**, **after**, **about**.

present tense

The tense used to indicate that the action of a verb is either happening right now (e.g. 'I am running to school') or regularly happens at the current time (e.g. 'I run to school every day', or 'I do run …'). In Latin, 'I am running', 'I run' and 'I do run' are all expressed by the same word: curro.

pronoun

A word which (effectively) replaces a noun or a noun phrase: **this**, **that**, **he**, **she**, **it**, **we**, **they**. 'Look at the ship, **it** 's enormous!'; 'My parents? **They** 're retired now.'

sentence

A group of words which combine according to grammatical rules to express a statement, question, wish or command. A sentence usually contains at least one verb.

singular

In the case of nouns, pronouns and adjectives, 'singular' is when one is meant (as opposed to more than one); e.g. amic **us**, 'friend' (as opposed to amic **i**, 'friends'). In the case of verbs, a singular subject indicates that one rather than more than one person

(or thing) is performing the action of the verb; e.g. ama **t**, 'he/she/it loves' (as opposed to ama **nt**, 'they love').

subject

The person or thing performing the action of the verb in a clause. (In Latin, the subject is found in the nominative case.)

tense

Verbs in English and Latin have tenses; e.g. present, imperfect, perfect, pluperfect. The tense of the verb indicates **when** the action is performed.

verb

A word expressing an action, state or condition: **curro**, 'I run'; **dormio**, 'I sleep'; **est**, 'he/she/it is'. In Latin, the dictionary form of most verbs ends in – **o**.

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Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. R Graves (1979) Harmondsworth, Penguin.

Further reading

If you would like to explore the links between Latin and English further, you will find the following book useful:

Barker, P. (1993) *Latin in our Language*, Bristol, Bristol Classical Press.

And if you would like to begin learning Latin on your own, the following books are recommended:

Jones, P.V. (1997) *Learn Latin: The Book of the Daily Telegraph Series* , London, Duckworth.

Sharpley, G.D.A. (2014) *Get Started in Latin*, London, Hodder & Stoughton.

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Acknowledgements

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