Chapter 12: The Perfect Tense

Chapter 12 covers the following: the formation of verbs in the perfect-tense system, the four principal parts of Latin verbs, and at the end of the lesson, we'll review the vocabulary which you should memorize in this chapter.

There are three important rules to remember: (1) The perfect tense represents action completed in the past; (2) Latin perfect tense forms are often marked by changing the present verb base in any of the following ways: adding -v- or -s- to the end of the present verb base, lengthening the vowel of the base, and/or reduplicating the first consonant of the base; (3) Perfect-tense verb forms in Latin have only two parts: a base and an ending.

The perfect tense system. This is another long and important chapter. By the time you're done learning the material included in this chapter, you'll double the number of verb forms you know, you'll learn the two ways the Romans viewed the past -- the perfect vs. the imperfect -- and you'll have memorized the four principal parts of all the verbs we've studied so far.

In Latin grammar, "perfect" means literally "completed in the past." This is the counterpart, in many ways the opposite, of the imperfect, the tense we've already studied which shows unfinished or incomplete action in the past. Perfect action is action that happened once and was finished, such as, "I was taking a shower" -- that's imperfect -- "when the phone rang." It rang once. I got out of the shower. I picked up the phone. It stopped ringing. So the action was completed in the past. That's perfect.

The perfect tense also has another important connotation. It often represents past action that has immediate bearing on the present. For instance, "But I have done my homework, sir," which is crypto-student code for "Stop asking me for it. Here it is," vs. "Uh, well, I was doing my homework when umm… aliens invaded and probed my brain which is why I didn't get it done." "Was doing" represents action that was unfinished in the past and a perfect example of an imperfect excuse.

The prefect system in Latin includes three tenses: the perfect, the pluperfect, and the future perfect. The perfect is best represented by the English modal, or tense marker, "has" or "have," also "did;" the pluperfect, meaning literally "more perfect," represents an action that is past in relation to the past -- don't panic. We'll get to that in a second -- is the counterpart of the English tense marker "had;" and the future perfect represented by English "will have."

Forming perfect-tense verbs is much simpler in Latin than forming verbs that are in the present system, that is, verbs that are present, imperfect, or future tense, because present-tense verbs have up to four components: a present base which gives you the meaning, a thematic vowel which tells you what conjugation the verb belongs to, a tense marker that tells you when the verb is happening, and a personal ending that tells you who's doing the action, such as *amabimus*: *am-* meaning love, *-a-* meaning first conjugation, *-bi-* meaning "will," and *-mus* meaning "we," that is, meaning "we will love." Perfect system verbs, by contrast, have only two components: a perfect base that gives you the verb's meaning to which is added tense endings. These tense

endings also show person and number. Thematic vowels in the perfect system simply don't matter. They're there but they're part of the perfect base which you'll memorize with each verb.

Here's how we'll proceed with this lesson: we'll first study how to form the perfect base, that is, use the third principal part of the verb -- we've been using only the first two so far; then we'll study how the perfect system endings are attached to the perfect base to indicate person, number and tense, that is, make the verb perfect, or pluperfect, or future perfect.

<u>The perfect base.</u> The past tense forms of many verbs in both Latin and English are not predictable and therefore they must be memorized, for example English says, "I came, I saw, I won." None of those past tense forms are predictable from "come," "see" or "win." In the same way, Latin says *veni, vidi, vici*, "I came, I saw, I conquered." None of those forms are predictable either from *venio, video,* and *vinco*. For that reason, vocabulary lists and dictionaries include a third principal part for every regular verb in Latin. The third principal part provides the base for the perfect tense. The same is true in English. Try looking up the verb "see" in an English dictionary. You'll always find "saw" because "saw" is not predictable from "see," therefore, to be complete, the dictionary has to list it. This is standard practice for dictionaries in every language across the globe. In Latin that third principal part will look like, for instance, *amo, amare, amavi, amatum* meaning "I love," "to love," "I have loved," "having been loved." We won't use the fourth principal part, *amatum*, until we get to Chapter 19. That's where we'll study what that verb form entails, the perfect passive, but you need to memorize that fourth principal part for all verbs starting now because if you try to start memorizing them at the point where we first use them, the list will be overwhelming. Let me be absolutely crystal clear: start memorizing all four principal parts of every verb **now**. No excuses. No alien invasions. No, "I couldn't find them in the book." Wheelock lists the principal parts for all the verbs we've studied so far on pages 54, 56 and 57. Also, starting now, the vocabulary in every chapter will always cite all four principal parts of every verb -- assuming the verb has four principal parts, not all of them do.

Let's return now to the perfect base and how to form a perfect tense verb. To get the perfect base of any verb, that is, the base that will be used to form any verb in the perfect active system, drop the *-i* from the end of the third principal part of the verb. So, for example, *amo, amare, amavi*, dropping the *-i* from the end of *amavi* produces the perfect base, *amav-*. Here is a second-conjugation verb: *moneo, monere, monui*. The perfect base is *monu-*. In third conjugation, *duco, ducere, duxi*, the perfect base is *dux-*. Fourth conjugation: *sentio, sentire, sensi*, the perfect base is *sens-*. Finally, third *-io*: *capio, capere, cepi*, the perfect base is *cep-*. With that you should see that forming the perfect base will be made complicated by the fact that perfect bases are irregular and unpredictable and must be memorized for every verb. That's why there's a third principal part.

Now, now, don't get too depressed. There are some patterns that can help you with this fairly heavy memorization load. For starters, first, second, and fourth conjugations have standard ways of forming their perfect bases. First-conjugation verbs very often go: *-o, -are, -avi, -atum*, as in *laudo, laudare, laudavi, laudatum*. Second-conjugation verbs often go: *-eo, -ēre, -ui, -itum* as in *moneo, monēre, monui, monitum*. Fourth-conjugation verbs often follow this pattern: *-io, -ire, -ivi, -itum* for example, *audio, audire, audivi, auditum*.

As always, third conjugation is more troublesome. If there is a dominant pattern, it is to add *-s* to the end of the present base to form its perfect counterpart, for instance, *duco, ducere, duxi, ductum*. Note that when *-c* and *-s* run into each other, they're spelled as *-x*. *Scribo* also follows this pattern: *scribo, scribere, scripsi, scriptum. -B-* plus *-s-* will be spelled as *-ps-* in Latin. In like manner, *mitto* will form a third principal part *misi* which is the result of *-s* being added onto the end of the present base *mitt-*. Other verbs, and especially those which are third and third *-io* conjugation, lengthen the vowel of their present base to form their perfect base such as *ago, agere, egi, actum*; *facio, facere, feci, factum; fugio, fugere, fūgi, fugitum;* and *capio, capere, cepi, captum*. But vowel lengthening to form the perfect base is not the sole province of third and third *-io* conjugations. Verbs like *venio* and its compound *invenio* do the same: *venio, venire, vēni, ventum.* In second conjugation *video* also follows this pattern: *video, videre, vidi, visum*. As part of the Indo-European heritage we share with Latin, some English verbs demonstrate the same characteristic. Compare English present- and past-tense forms like "take," "took;" "blow," "blew;" "see," "saw;" "write," "wrote;" "come," "came;" all of them very common and regularly used forms. No verb that isn't that way could sustain this kind of irregularity.

A few verbs follow two of these patterns, for instance, lengthening the internal vowel in the base and adding *-s* such as: *intellego, intellegere, intellexi, intellectum* where both the internal vowel, *-e-,* is lengthened and an *-s* is added which, when combined with *-g-*, produces the letter *-x-*. Another example: *iungo, iungere, iunxi, iunctum*, following the same pattern as *intellego*. And here's a third example: *traho, trahere, traxi, tractum* where the *-h-* plus *-s-* produces *-x-* as well.

In a few instances, verbs of one conjugation borrow a pattern from another conjugation such as *maneo* (or *remaneo*), *manere, mansi, mansum. Maneo* is second conjugation but uses the *-s-* perfect marker seen more often in third conjugation. *Iubeo* of second conjugation does the same when it produces its third principal part *iussi*, the double *-s-* being the combination of *-b-* plus *-s-*. Another example of this sort of inter-conjugational borrowing is *rapio, rapere, rapui, raptum. Rapio* is third *-io* conjugation but uses the *-ui* more typical of second. *Possum, posse, potui* also should probably be included in this category, though because it's based on the verb *sum*, it's highly irregular. One final example of this kind of mixed conjugation perfect-base form is *peto, petere, petivi, petitum. Peto* is third conjugation but the *-ivi* perfect form is more typical of fourth.

A final pattern seen in the formation of perfect bases is called reduplication. This pattern involves the doubling of the first consonant of the present base with *-e-* or *-i-* added in between these geminated consonants. So, for instance, *do, dare, dedi, datum*. Note that in the third principal part, the perfect is formed by doubling the *d-* at the beginning of the base and putting an *-e-* in between the geminated *d*'s. Here's another example of reduplication: *tango, tangere, tetigi, tactum*. Here, *-t-* is reduplicated to form the perfect base and notice that the *-n-* is lost -- that's a present tense marker. Here's a third example of reduplication: *pello, pellere, pepuli, pulsum*. Here *-p-* is reduplicated and one of the *l*'s is lost in the perfect base. *-l-* is another way the *-n-* present tense marker can show up. Finally, *disco, discere, didici*. Here *-i-* is used in between the geminated *d*'s. Linguistic evidence shows that reduplication was a very ancient way of forming the past tense thus it shows up in very few but very commonly used Latin verb forms.

Finally to end this survey of perfect base formation, some verbs are just irregular and you'll have to memorize them. *Sum, esse, fui, futurum. Fui*? Hmm… phooey is right. But before we start throwing stones at Latin, let's make sure we don't have a few glass verb forms at home like, uh, "is," "was;" "go," "went." Hmm… Later in the class, we'll encounter other irregular perfect forms: *fero, ferre, tuli, latum*; *tollo, tollere, sustuli, sublatum*. Hmmm…. Your salvation for the moment is that you don't have to memorize those now, but you will eventually. So much for the perfect base.

Now let's do the easy part of this lesson: how to form a finite perfect-tense verb. Perfect-tense verbs are much easier to form than present-tense verbs because they involve only two components: a perfect base to which are added perfect-tense endings. Here they are. Let's recite them together: *-i, -isti, -it, -imus, -istis, -erunt*. Let's say it again: *-i, -isti, -it, -imus, -istis, -erunt*. Let's say it real fast: *-i, -isti, -it, -imus, -istis, -erunt*. Can you say it fast and backwards? *-Erunt, -istis, -imus, -it, -isti, -i.* Keep practicing. These perfect endings are added onto the perfect base to create a full, finite, perfect-tense verb, for example, the perfect of *amo*: *amavi*. Let's recite the perfect of *amo* together: *amavi, amavisti, amavit, amavimus, amavistis, amaverunt*. Please note that all perfect tense verbs in Latin, no matter what conjugation they belong to, form the same way: take the perfect base, add these endings, and you have any perfect-tense, finite verb in Latin.

And here is how these forms translate: *amavi* "I have loved," *amavisti* "you have loved," *amavit* he/she/it has loved," *amavimus* "we have loved," *amavistis* "y'all have loved," *amaverunt* "they have loved." These forms can also be translated as "did" as in "I did love," a form that is used very often in English when the speaker wants to negate the verb, as in, "I did not love." Or another possible translation is the simple past: "I loved," "you loved," and so on. For right now, please don't use that translation for the perfect tense. It can be confused with the imperfect. When translating the perfect tense, use only "have/has" or "did."

To form a pluperfect verb, the equivalent in English of "had," Latin uses these endings: *-eram, -eras, -erat,…* -- recognize these? You should. This is the imperfect of the verb "to be" here used as an ending in the perfect system creating a finite pluperfect verb like *amaveram*, *amaveras, amaverat* and so on. These translate as: "I had loved," "you had loved," "he/she/it had loved," and so on.

Finally the third of the perfect tenses, the future perfect, is formed by taking the perfect base and adding the endings *-ero, -eris, -erit, -erimus, -eritis, -erint*. It looks a lot like the future of the verb "to be" but there's one big change: it's not *-erunt* in the third-person plural but *-erint*. To form a full finite verb in the future-perfect tense, take the base and add the future perfect endings we just recited so the future-perfect of the verb *amo* would be: *amavero, amaveris, amaverit,* and so on. These future-perfect forms in Latin are the equivalent of adding "will have" to a verb in English. Thus: "I will have loved," "you will have loved," "he will have loved," and so on. Be careful to notice one small difference, just a simple change of vowel that makes a big distinction in grammar: *-erunt* in the perfect third-person plural means "they have" or "they did" as in *duxerunt,* "they have led," or "they did lead;" *-erint* means "they will have" as in *duxerint*, "they will have led." Be careful to note this difference because this small change in form constitutes a significant change in meaning.

To end the grammar section of this lesson, let's look at the tenses on a timeline. Here's a diagram with numbers representing time values on it. Time is moving from left to right following the blue arrow. 0 represents the present tense. Any number with a "+" in front of it represents the future. Any number with a "-" before it represents the past. Now let's attach the tenses to those numerical values. First the present, represented by 0 because it's happening now. English uses tense markers like "is" and "does" to signal that a verb is present tense. According to this scheme, the future tense, represented in English by "will" would be +1. Conversely, the perfect and imperfect tenses represented in English by "was," "did," or "have" would be -1. The pluperfect would be -2. That's what the tense marker "had" really means in English; it represents an action that took place in the past from a past-tense reference point. Last of all, the future perfect happens sometime between the present and the future. Thus we assign it a numerical value of +1/2. The English tense marker "will have" says just that concisely: "will" +1, "have" -1/2. Thus "will have" equals +1/2. Okay, that would never fly in a math class but this isn't a math class. I think you get the idea.

Here's something more important to bear in mind. If all this seems very complicated and mathematical, remember this: you already know it. If not, you couldn't speak or understand English. To prove my point, I'll put this into a narrative context where I can show you how smart you really are. Remember the only real challenge here is to take things you already know and attach complex grammatical names to them. So trust your linguistic instincts. They'll show you the way to the right answer. Consider the following situation. My girlfriend and I are having a conversation over lunch at noon. We decide that later that evening we'll go and see a movie. As we're eating lunch she tells me she didn't do the shopping she needed to do yesterday because she discovered she had lost her purse but in the meantime she's found it -- which means she's paying for lunch. And so she tells me she needs to do her shopping before she goes to the movie tonight. So, by the time we get to the movie she will have done her shopping.

Let's review this story again paying careful attention to the tenses. My girlfriend and I are talking right now in the present tense about our plans in the future, that we will go to a movie, but because my girlfriend, in the past, didn't get her shopping done since she had "pluperfectly" at some point prior to that point in the past, lost her purse, now she's going to go do it and by the time she gets to the movie, in the future, this evening, she will have done her shopping making her the queen of the future perfect which is why we must marry and have many children.

One last thing to note about the relationship between tenses in Latin is how they're organized on the chart of Latin verbs. Note that the column on the left, the present system, starts at the top with a base tense, the present, which represents a +0 numerical time value. The column on the right, the perfect system, starts with a base tense, the perfect, which has a -1 time value. The first row, the present tense and the perfect tense, are then the base time-value tenses for those columns. The next tenses below them in the second row are both one step back in the past relative to each of those base time values. In the present tenses, the left-hand column, the imperfect is one step back from the present and has a -1 time value. In the perfect system, the right hand column, the pluperfect is -2 because it is one step back from the base time value of the perfect which is -1. In the third row, the future and the future perfect tenses, both represent time ahead of, that is, +1 or +½ from the base time value of their respective columns. If you find all of

this somewhat confusing, don't worry. We're going to practice these verb forms over and over. And, of course, it wouldn't hurt to listen to this presentation a second time because maybe the second time around a little more will sink in -- and you've got to admit, it's such a great presentation. Who wouldn't want to listen to it again and again and again…

And now that we've explored the ridiculous, let's explore the vocabulary.

The first word is *deus, dei,* m., meaning "god." It's a second-declension masculine noun. Please note, it has a few irregular forms. The nominative plural is *di* not **dei* as one would expect of a second-declension masculine noun that has a base *de-*. Likewise the dative and ablative plural are *dis*, not **deis*.

The next word, *libertas, libertatis*, f., means "liberty." Like all words that go *-tas, -tatis*, it's a third-declension feminine noun. What is the base of this word? This is third declension so drop the *-is* from the genitive singular and you can see that the base is *libertat-*.

The next word is *rex, regis,* m., meaning "king." It's a third-declension masculine noun. So what is the base of this word? You got it. It's third declension again so drop the *-is* from the genitive singular and you can see that the base is *reg-*.

The next word, *diu*, meaning "long," "for long," or "for a long time," is an adverb and since adverbs neither decline nor conjugate, making our lives very easy, there's nothing else to say about this word.

The next word is one of the most important verbs we'll study in Latin: *dico, dicere, dixi, dictum*. It means "say, tell, speak, name, call." It's a third-conjugation verb. What is its perfect base? That's right: drop the *-i* from the third principal part and you can see that the base is *dix-*. How will Latin say "I will speak"? Remember, it's third conjugation: *dicam*. *-e-* is not used in the first person singular of the future in third conjugation. In first person singular the *-e-* is replaced with an *-a-*.

The next verb, *vinco, vincere, vici, victum*, means "conquer" or "overcome." It's another third-conjugation verb. One thing to note about this verb is the *-n-* that disappears in the perfect. The present base is *vinc-*, but the perfect base is *vic-*. That's a pattern that you'll see in some verbs in Latin like *relinquo* meaning "I leave behind," but its perfect base is *reliqu-*. While it looks like the perfect is missing its *-n-*, it's actually the other way around. The *-n-* is really a sound inserted into the present base to signal that the verb is present tense. The perfect base, representing the past tense, naturally does not include this *-n-*. There is one other minor point to make about this verb: the fourth principal part of *vinco* is *victum*, but the fourth principal part of *vivo*, the Latin verb for "live," is *vīctum*. The difference between the short *-i-* in *victum* which comes from *vinco* and the long *-ī-* in *vīctum* which comes from *vivo*, makes that long mark mandatory. However, we won't be dealing with these verb forms since we won't be using the fourth principal part until later in class. All in all, this is a minor distinction that affects only two verbs. As your Latin teacher, I feel I need to point this out. But as your mentor, I add, it's a minor point.

The next word is *Asia, Asiae,* f., meaning "Asia." It's a first-declension feminine noun. The name "Asia" was originally attached only to the peninsula we know as Turkey. This part of the world has some of the oldest evidence for human habitation and thus the ancient Greeks and Romans understanding the deep antiquity of this place made it the setting of some of their oldest myths like the story of the Trojan War. Eventually, as the Greeks and Romans extended their understanding of the wider geography of the world, the name *Asia* came to be applied to the entire continental mass now called Asia.

The next word is *caelum, caeli,* n., meaning "sky" or "heaven." It's a second-declension neuter noun. What would be the ablative plural of this word? Good: *caelis*.

And the last word in this vocabulary list is the name of the first man in Rome, Julius Caesar: *Caesar, Caesaris,* m., meaning Caesar. It's a third-declension masculine noun. *Caesar* is not only a name but because of the fame of the Roman general Julius Caesar, it also became a title, and thus there is a plural. One can talk about the Caesars, or in Latin, *Caesares,* meaning "the emperors," the generals who ruled Rome in his wake.

And that's it. That's the end of the presentation for Chapter 12. Do the rules that were cited at the beginning of this chapter now make sense to you? If not, please review this presentation. If so, please proceed to the next slide.

For the next class meeting, please bring in a copy of the worksheet for Chapter 12. Here is a link to that worksheet.

Avete discipuli! Bene fecistis.