THE
EVERYTHING
ESSENTIAL LATIN BOOK

Dear Reader,

Over the past twenty-six years I've studied and taught from many Latin books. I don't like any of them very much. Here is the book I wish existed when I was first learning Latin. The traditional approach lulls students into a sense of false security. Simpler things come first, then gradually grow more complex. Unfortunately, those complexities are more common, and when they suddenly appear, they don't fit the simplicity you had been trained to expect.

This book breaks from tradition. Since what you learn first sticks with you the best and becomes a template for the rest, the order of presentation has been changed so you get the most often seen grammar and vocabulary first, then move toward the finer, less common stuff. In other words, this book is based on frequency. Still, there are some common points that must be postponed because they rely on other knowledge.

If you're like me, you get a sort of endorphin rush from exercising your brain with something new and challenging. Latin is challenging because it's so different, not because it's hard. Read on with an open mind and you'll see.

Richard E. Prior, PhD

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Richard E. Prior, PhD

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Acknowledgments

Introduction

Latin has acquired a reputation for being a useless and lethal pursuit, a bitter medicine cruelly administered by strict schoolmarms old enough to be native speakers themselves. Perhaps you've heard this little schoolboy chant: "Latin is a dead language, that is plain to see. First it killed the Romans, and now it's killing me." In truth, Latin is more akin to the luscious grape cluster hanging just out of the fox's reach in Aesop's fable. Rather than apply any effort to obtain the prize, he skulked off muttering how sour they probably were. If only he had tried hard enough to taste even a single grape!

As off the mark as that little ditty is, it does bring up some important points. First, what does "dead" mean when applied to a language? Language is a living thing. It grows and changes day by day, imperceptibly, just as an infant grows to adulthood. There was never any calendar date marked when the folks in Rome stopped speaking Latin and started speaking Italian! The confusion may lie in the names we give languages. *Ure Faeder the eart in heofenum* is the beginning of the Lord's Prayer in English as English was spoken fifteen hundred years ago. English isn't a dead language, but it isn't spoken like that anymore, so we call that kind of English *Old* English. Likewise, the language of Caesar could be called Old Italian. (Or Italian Modern Latin!) Studying Latin, then, is studying the snapshot of a whiz kid who is now grown up.

The story of ancient Rome represents about 25 percent of all recorded history. If ancient Rome and her language are dead, tenacious ghosts remain. Nearly a billion people today speak Modern Latin (i.e., [*id*

est—that is], French, Spanish, Portuguese, et al. [*et alia*—and the others]). If you look out your window and see bricks, concrete, or a paved road; if you turn on the news or pick up a newspaper and see any reference to law or government; you're looking at Rome's ghost. In fact, if you speak English, you're perpetuating Rome's linguistic legacy. Thanks to the forced importation of Norman French into England in 1066, over 60 percent of English vocabulary is derived from Latin, not to mention the fact that centuries ago the Latin language was considered so perfect that many fussy grammar rules (e.g., [*exemplī gratiā*—for the sake of example], not ending sentences with a preposition, avoiding double negatives, not splitting infinitives, etc. [*et cetera*—and the others]) were imposed on English.

The second point that that ridiculous schoolboy rhyme evokes involves Latin's deadly effect on students. All too often people approach foreign languages as if they were simple questions of word substitution. This tack only leads to frustration, disaster, and sour grapes. Language may seem to be nothing more than words, just so many beads on a string, but it has a crucial component called syntax. Syntax is how words show their relationship to one another. How can you tell what or who is performing the action of the verb? How do you know whether the action of the verb is over, in progress, or hasn't happened yet? If Tim makes a reference to "Melanie's cat," how can you tell whether Melanie owns the cat, the cat owns Melanie, or Melanie is just the name of the cat? The key is syntax, and the syntax of Latin is the adventure of this book. It's a very different critter from the system English uses, so set aside your notion of how language works and prepare to see the world through new eyes— Roman eyes!

The Key to Understanding Latin

You're all set for some hot coffee, but one sip makes you spit and declare that it's horrible coffee . . . even though you know it's tea. Studying Latin is a lot like that. If you insist that Latin is a substitution code for English, you'll only get more and more ready to spit. There are some crucial differences in the way English and Latin operate as languages.

The Significance of Syntax

The most striking difference between English and Latin lies in syntax—the way words show their relationship to each other in a sentence. A word sitting by itself has a meaning, but that's all. When it's in a string with other words, though, it has to have a way to show how it interacts with the other words around it. Exactly how that relationship is shown doesn't matter. What matters is that all the speakers of the language agree on the rules.

When you speak or write English, words just seem to come out and fall into place in a way that makes sense. In fact, the key to English syntax really is "place"! Consider these two sentences:

Money the gave Jeff me when at were yesterday party the we.
Jeff gave me the money yesterday when we were at the party.

Take a closer look at those examples. Who did something? What did he do it to? Who benefited from his action? Where did it happen? Now for

the big question: How do you know any of these things? Both sentences contain the same words; the only difference is word order. Languages that rely on word order to make sense are called analytical.

Using word order to show the relationship between words is an arbitrary way to do it. It's just what English speakers all agree to do. Take a look at the concept of this sentence: Mark loves the dog. Does Mark come first in time? Does the dog? They are all there; they all "happen" simultaneously. Since they are all there together at the same time, there is no real reason for Mark to have to come first in the sentence. The only reason he comes first is because the rules of English dictate that if he is the one with the affection, he has to come before the verb in the sentence. Swap the word order—the dog loves Mark—and the meaning changes dramatically.

How Latin Syntax Works

Latin's MO (*modus operandī*—way of operating) is based on quite a different system of rules. Let's visit Mark and his best friend again, but this time in Latin.

Marcus canem amat. (Mark loves his dog.)
Canem Marcus amat. (Mark loves his dog.)
Amat canem Marcus. (Mark loves his dog.)
Marcus amat canem. (Mark loves his dog.)
Canem amat Marcus. (Mark loves his dog.)
Amat Marcus canem. (Mark loves his dog.)

How can all six mean the same thing?!

Here's another example. See if you can figure out what tiny change in the Latin made such a big change in the meaning.

Marcum canis amat. (The dog loves Mark.)
Canis Marcum amat. (The dog loves Mark.)
Amat canis Marcum. (The dog loves Mark.)
Marcum amat canis. (The dog loves Mark.)
Canis amat Marcum. (The dog loves Mark.)
Amat Marcum canis. (The dog loves Mark.)

In the English version you know who's doing what to whom based on which noun comes before or after the verb. The doer comes first, then the action, then the doee. In the Latin version, what comes first really doesn't matter. The position may change, but as long as the endings don't, the meaning remains the same. Inflected languages like Latin use word endings as flags to show who's doing what to whom.

ⓔ✪ Essential

Although word order is not crucial to Latin syntax, it does suggest a bit of nuance. A grammatical subject has immediate association with a verb. A topic, however, comes as if an answer to a question—the most important bit. *Marcum canis amat* would stress whom the dog loves. *Canis Marcum amat,* on the other hand, tells who loves Mark. Different order, same endings, different emphasis.

Learning Endings

Since Latin depends on endings for words to show their relationships to one another in a sentence, two things should be immediately clear. First, knowledge of English grammar is extremely important. There will be plenty of review along the way, so even if you are learning it for the first time, there is no need to worry.

Second, since there are many ways words can show their relationship to one another to make up a sentence, there will be a lot of endings. A whole lot. But again, not to worry! As you move through this book you'll encounter sets of endings bit by bit. While it may seem a little rough going at first, you'll be getting a feel for them and recognizing their patterns in no time.

Your best approach to learning endings is to take each set as they come, chapter by chapter; learn to recognize or even memorize them; and practice working with them in the exercises provided in each chapter. The more practice you get, the better your chances of internalizing them and making them virtually instinctual. Since the entire Latin language operates on a system of inflections (i.e., endings), these inflections cannot be dismissed as insignificant pains in the neck. They are the keys to understanding!

By now you may be wondering if you are up to the challenge of learning endings so well that they become second nature to you. Rest assured that you can. In fact, you already use endings without thinking about it. Here is a little experiment that will highlight the existence (and importance!) of word forms in English. Read this little sentence out loud and listen closely:

Me sended he Seth checks for we these morning.

Unless you're Tarzan, this sentence doesn't sound quite right. What makes it sound off kilter is that the forms are either incorrect or not there. Here is the same sentence with the endings adjusted to conform to the rules of English grammar:

I sent him Seth's check for us this morning.

Can you hear the difference? If you compare the two sentences, you will see that each contains the same words in the same order. The only thing that varies between them is word form. For example, "I" and "me" both refer to the same person. They aren't two different words; they are two different forms of the *same* word.

Fact

Inflected languages have a habit of slowly changing to analytical ones, then back again. A couple of thousand years ago (i.e., about the same time Latin was spoken), ancient English was also highly inflected. Over time it lost most of its endings and had to add helping words and count on word order for syntax. Now, in modern English, some of those helping words are becoming new endings. For example, look at the way the word "would" contracts to form "I'd," "you'd," "she'd," and so on.

Now that you can see how English has different forms and endings much like Latin does, how do you know which is correct? Read those two examples again and consider how you know which is the better sentence. When you read them, you didn't stop at each word to scrutinize

and analyze and recite grammar rules. You just knew, didn't you? The second attempt sounded right. The first one just sounded flat-out stupid. That is your "monitor" kicking in. Your monitor is your internalization of the way a language works, and that happens only with exposure to that language.

All babies acquire language the same way. Just repetition of sounds at first, then simple words, then two-, then three-word sentences, then generalization of the rules and forms ("Her goed to the store," then eventually, "she went"). Exposure and practice are the only ways to develop this internal sense.

Earlier in this chapter you saw an example illustrating endings in Latin swapping to turn the meaning of a sentence on its head. The subject of the sentence (the doer of the action) was written *Marcus* or *canis*, and the direct object (the receiver of the action) changed to *Marcum* or *canem*. In the sentence earlier, the noun "Seth" became "Seth's" in order to show possession. The English ending "–s" also appears in the word "check" to distinguish between singular and plural. The pronouns "I," "he," and "we" are only used as subjects. To make them objects, you have to change them to "me," "him," and "us," respectively. Not even adjectives escape inflection: "this/these." Verbs take endings as well, as in "send" becoming past tense by changing the final *d* to *t* (not adding "–ed" like most English verbs).

Latin may have a lot of endings, but at least word order isn't much of a concern. English is a bear—it relies on both! If you can handle English, Latin will be a piece of cake.

Learning Vocabulary

The most obvious difference between languages is words. As you have seen, the really big difference between languages is syntax, which is not so obvious. You can look up words in the dictionary, but without knowledge of the way a language uses those words to create sentences, they're just words. The goal of this book is to teach you how Latin works. Once you know that, you'll be able to do something with the words you look up.

Latin's vocabulary isn't very large, only around 10,000 words. That may seem like a lot, but compared to English's quarter million (give or

take), it's nothing. On top of that is the fact that a great many of those words are the results of mixing and matching bases, prefixes, and suffixes. Master the elements and you're home free.

Parts of Speech

You are probably familiar with the parts of speech from your school days or watching the *School House Rock* lessons that used to be tucked in among Saturday morning cartoons.

- **Nouns:** person, place, thing, or idea (e.g., "buddy," "basement," "potato," "honesty")
- **Pronouns:** words that stand in for a noun (e.g., "she," "who," "those")
- **Verbs:** actions or states of being (e.g., "love," "hang," "go," "dream")
- **Adjectives:** qualities of nouns (e.g., "greedy," "colorful," "slick")
- **Adverbs:** qualifiers for verbs (e.g., "beautifully," "there," "fast," "yesterday")
- **Prepositions:** words that identify a relationship (e.g., "in," "about," "of")
- **Conjunctions:** words that join like things (e.g., "and," "because," "although")
- **Interjections:** exclamatory words (e.g., "Wow!" "Ouch!" "Yuck!")

As you will soon see, some parts of speech in Latin have "parts." English words do, too. For example, if you were learning English as a foreign language, the only way you'd know that the plural of "child" is "children," or the past tense of "put" is "put," is by learning those bits as you learn the words.

Essential

The little Latin-English dictionary in Appendix A contains the most common words in Latin literature. If you learn these, you will have 80 percent of all you need. They really are the essentials! It is still recommended that you use a Latin dictionary. There are many on the market, ranging from pocket size to monster size. Stick to the more modest size and you'll do fine.

Helps and Hindrances

Learning anything new has easy parts, challenging parts, and just plain hopelessly boring parts. Learning endings, for example, is basically straight memorization. There are some patterns among the endings that help, and they will be pointed out as they come, but on the whole, it's pure drudgery. On the vocabulary side, however, there are some things that can grease the skids for you.

Derivatives

You will find it a blessing that what makes Latin useful to know also makes it easy to learn. Around 60 percent of English vocabulary comes from Latin. English words that come from Latin words are called derivatives. Some of these derivatives are of the disestablishmentarianism variety, but there are also many very common ones, such as the word "common," from the Latin word *communis*, which means—you guessed it—"common." The majority, however, are simply five-dollar words for things we already have English words for. Earlier you probably weren't surprised to see that the Latin word *canis* means "dog." You know what a canine is! That being the case, it probably wouldn't surprise you to learn that the Latin word for cat is *felis*.

ⓔ✪ Essential

The English-to-Latin translation exercises in each chapter are the most challenging. They are useful because they force you to apply everything you have learned. Do not, however, judge your progress by how well you do on them. Always remember that your ultimate goal is to be able to read, not speak or write. You should focus your energy on being able to *recognize* endings, grammar, and vocabulary.

There are no exact one-to-one equivalents between English and Latin words. Languages draw arbitrary lines and have words that reflect how their speakers see the world. As you learn your Latin vocabulary, you will notice that almost all Latin words have a range of possibilities to pick from for translation. A Latin word really means the intersection of *all* the possibilities you find in the dictionary. In order to translate Latin into English, you have to pick one possibility, but any single one you pick is wrong since there are no one-to-one equivalents. If that's true, translations are nothing more than interpretations of the original.

ⓔ✔ Fact

Unlike English, Latin is perfectly phonetic—everything is spelled exactly as it is pronounced; there are no silent letters. Every letter has one sound value. Learning Latin pronunciation is important to help you learn and appreciate Latin as a language. Try *not* to pronounce Latin words using English rules. Latin rules are easier anyway!

The Roman Alphabet

Speakers of modern languages tend to pronounce Latin words using the rules for pronunciation for their own language. By studying how sounds change over time and examining ways other ancient languages with different alphabets wrote Latin words, scholars have deduced how Classical Latin (i.e., the Latin of Caesar's time) probably sounded.

The biggest difference between our alphabet and the Roman one is that, for the Romans, each letter represented only one sound, making Latin a truly phonetic language. Apart from that, there aren't many

differences between the two. In fact, our alphabet is properly called the Roman alphabet! When the Romans borrowed it from their neighbors to the north, the Etruscans, they adapted it to suit the sound system of Latin. The Etruscans had done the same thing when they got it from the Greeks, who got it from the Phoenicians, who had adopted it from their neighbors, the Egyptians. Quite a pedigree!

Table 2-1

▼ **THE ROMAN ALPHABET**

Roman Letter	English Sound	Latin Example	Pronunciation
a	M*a*	*animal*	AH-nee-mahl
b	*b*ig	*bibo*	BEE-bo
c	*c*ake	*cecidit*	kay-KEE-diht
d	*d*og	*dona*	DOE-nah
e	fianc*é*	*edimus*	AY-dee-moos
f	*f*ood	*facile*	FAH-kee-lay
g	*g*et	*gerere*	GAY-ray-ray
h	*h*ound	*hora*	HO-rah
i	mach*i*ne	*ii*	EE-ee
k	*k*ibble	*kalendae*	kah-LAYN-di
l	*l*ab	*lavitur*	LAH-wee-toor
m	*m*inute	*monitus*	MO-nee-toos
n	*n*orth	*nihil*	NEE-heel
o	n*o*te	*opera*	O-pay-rah
p	*p*ail	*poposcit*	po-POS-keet
q	*q*uake	*quid*	KWEED
r	*r*ide	*robur*	RO-boor
s	*s*alad	*discamus*	dees-KAH-moos
t	*t*one	*tutus*	TOO-toos
u	t*u*be	*ululare*	oo-loo-LAH-ray
v	*w*ine	*video*	WEE-day-o
x	e*x*it	*exit*	AYX-eet
y	t*oo*th	*zephyrus*	zay-FOO-roos
z	*z*ip	*zona*	ZO-nah

You may have noticed a couple letters missing, namely *j* and *w*. *J* was added to distinguish between Latin's vowel *i* and the consonant *i*. The letter *w* was added to do the same thing for Latin's consonant *u*.

Vowels

The vowels in Latin are the same as in English (*a, e, i, o, u*), but their pronunciation is a bit different. If you say the sentence "Ma made these old boots," then repeat it saying only the vowels, you will be able to remember how Latin vowels sound. (*Y* occurs only in words borrowed from Greek, to represent the Greek letter upsilon. Don't worry about it.) The Romans didn't use any accent marks, little dots, or squiggles. Actually, they didn't even use punctuation! We modern students of Latin, however, use a long mark called a macron over vowels to show that they are long. The only difference between a long and a short vowel in Latin is that you hold a long vowel twice as long as you do a short one.

Latin also has a few diphthongs. Diphthongs are two vowels that sit right next to each other and are pronounced so quickly that they blend into a single, new sound.

Table 2-2

▼ **LATIN VOWEL COMBINATIONS**

Roman Letter	English Sound	Latin Example	Phonetic Spelling
ae	*ai*sle	*aedificium*	i i-dee-FEE-kee-oom
au	no*w*	*audire*	ow ow-DEE-ray
eu	T*u*esday	*heu*	ue HUE
oe	b*oy*	*foedus*	oy FOY-doos

Consonants

Native speakers of English often have a hard time believing that Latin is phonetic. What you write is what you say, nothing more, nothing less,

and every letter has only one value. When you see a double letter, you say each of them separately, so *vacuum* ("an empty thing") is pronounced WAH-koo-oom, and *mitteris* ("you will be sent") is meet-TAY-rees.

Here is a list of a few consonants and consonant combinations to watch out for.

- *C* is always hard, as in English "cake."
- *G* is always hard, as in English "get."
- *I* can be a consonant as well as a vowel, just as the letter *y* in English can, and makes the same sound as in English "yes."
- *GN* sounds more like the *ng* in English "sing."
- *BS* sounds more like *ps.*
- *CH* sounds pretty much like a plain *c* with a whisp of air after it, as in English "deckhand." It never makes the English "ch" sound like in "church."
- *TH* just sounds like a *t* followed by an *h*, as in the English word "hothouse." It never makes the English *th* sound like in "think."
- *PH* sounds like a *p* followed by an *h*, as in the English phrase "up hill." It's not exactly an *f* sound, but it's pretty close.

Accent

The rules for accent in Latin are really easy. Every Latin word has as many syllables as it has vowels and diphthongs. The last syllable of a word is called the ultima, the next to the last one is the penult, and the one before that (the third from the end) is the antepenult. The rule is that if the penult is long, it gets the stress. If it's short, then the antepenult does, so the word *hominēs* ("people") would be pronounced *HOminēs*, but *hominēsque* ("and people") would be *homiNESque*.

Now that you've had a little linguistic theory and a bit of history, you are ready to embark on your journey into the ancient world. Language is a reflection of culture, and no culture has had more influence on us today than that of the Romans. *Valē!* ("Hang in there!")

The Importance of Verbs

Verbs show actions or states of being and form the core of a complete sentence. All other words in a sentence serve to modify the core (i.e., the verb) in some way, either directly or indirectly. Verbs are the center of attention! Because of their importance, they are a very good place for you to start.

Studying Latin Verbs

Latin's verb system is just that, a system. It has many components that are sometimes quite confusing. Imagine having a huge pile of jigsaw puzzle pieces in a heap before you. Where do you begin? Not by picking up random pieces, assuming that they will immediately snap together. You start by becoming familiar with the picture on the box that shows what the finished image will look like.

In essence, this chapter is the picture on the box. The picture is not the puzzle itself, nor is it something you should feel compelled to commit to memory. The picture is merely a guide. As you pick up the pieces of the Latin verb system, keep coming back to this chapter and reviewing the big picture. Let this first part of the chapter wash over you and do not worry if it doesn't make much sense at first. It will soon.

ⓔ❗ Alert

The Anatomy of a Latin Verb

English verbs are pretty wimpy. They have only three forms that don't require helpers. For example, you can say "I drink." If the subject is "he," "she," or "it," the verb takes an s to become "drinks." There is also the past-tense form "drank," which never takes the s. (Of course, the forms "drinking" and "drunk" exist as well, but they are really verbal adjectives, so for now we'll set them aside.)

Latin verbs, unlike English ones, are bulging with distinct forms! In the previous chapter you were introduced to how Latin relies on endings to show who does what to whom. Verbs are in the inflection business as well, and they have endings for things you might never have thought a verb could have an ending for. Latin verbs have inflections to encode information for five characteristics:

Person

As a grammatical term, "person" refers to the relationship between the subject of a verb and the speaker. There are three persons in Latin, with the unoriginal names "first," "second," and "third." The first person is the speaker ("I" or "we"). The second person is the one or ones being spoken *to* ("you"). Finally, the third person is what or who is being spo-ken *about* ("he," "she," "it," or "they").

Number

Number is a fairly straightforward grammatical concept: A verb is either singular or plural.