
LATIN GRAMMAR

FOR CHRISTIAN AND HOME SCHOOLS

STUDENT TEXT

Second Edition

Revised and Expanded

Douglas Wilson
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This book is dedicated to Luke,
whose commitment to the education of his children
has been exemplary.

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WHY LATIN?

As with many other valuable things there is difficulty associated with learning Latin. But unlike other subjects, before the process is even begun, there is an additional obstacle to be overcome. That obstacle can be summarized with the simple question—*Why Latin?* For many moderns, the attempt to study this language is nothing more than a quaint irrelevance. What possible reasons can be given for a serious study of Latin? It is a reasonable question. Here are just a few answers:

1. Approximately fifty percent of the vocabulary in our language comes from Latin. This means that students of Latin are not just learning Latin—they are learning to be much more proficient in their own language. It has been shown that verbal scores on standardized tests increase dramatically with the study of Latin. So even when students do not stay with the formal study of Latin after they graduate, it is still a great ongoing benefit to them. The study of Latin grammar is also a great help in understanding the nature of grammar, and that carries over into English as well.

2. The study of Latin provides an understanding of the impact the classical cultures had on our modern culture. We see this in our architecture, the names of planets and constellations, our political structures, Latin expressions that are simply carried over into our language, *et cetera*.

3. Students of Latin are trained in a method of rigorous analysis. The ability that is acquired in doing this is not limited to Latin. So the study of Latin equips young minds to encounter unfamiliar material in a disciplined way. Latin trains the student in the essentials of scientific method: observation, comparison, and generalization.

4. The study of Latin is a great help in developing an appreciation for great literature. Not only may the student be introduced to classical authors like Virgil, he will also be equipped to appreciate English literature much more. This is because many of the great writers in English were steeped in classical literature, and allusions to classical literature and life abound in their writings.

5. Latin provides a wonderful introduction to the study of modern languages. The Romance languages like Spanish, French, Italian, etc. are direct descendants of Latin (unlike English), and the study of Latin is a very appropriate introduction to modern language study.

PRONUNCIATION

REGULARITY

The pronunciation of Latin, unlike English, is very regular. The sounds represented by the letters of the Latin alphabet will never be more than two, while in English the number of sounds for a given letter may be up to five.

In addition, Latin has no silent letters—everything is pronounced. For example, in English the letter *e* on the end of *dare* is not pronounced at all. Furthermore, the word only has one syllable. But in Latin, the same combination of letters would give us two syllables, and the sound *dah re*.

ALPHABET

The Latin alphabet is easy to learn because it is virtually the same as the English alphabet. The only difference is that Latin has no *w*.

In ancient Latin, there was also no *j*, and the sounds of *u* and *v* were represented by one letter. If these are subtracted, we see that classical Latin had twenty-three letters instead of the twenty-six in English. And from these twenty-three, *y* and *z* were seldom used.

THE VOWELS

Latin vowels are the same as English vowels—*a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*. In Latin, they each have two sounds, long and short. In this book, the long vowels are marked with a *macron* above the vowel. If the vowel is unmarked, then it is short.

LONG

a = a in *father*

e = e in *obey*

i = i in *machine*

o = o in *holy*

u = u in *rude*

SHORT

a = a in *idea*

e = e in *bet*

i = i in *this*

o = o in *domain*

u = u in *put*

In the phonetic exercises, spell out the various vowel sounds this way:

A long *a* should be *ah*, as in *blah*.

A long *e* should be *ay*, as in *day*.

A long *i* should be *ee*, as in *see*.

A long *o* should be *oh*, as in *oh*.

A long *u* should be *oo*, as in *zoo*.

The short vowels can be represented in those exercises simply with their respective letters. The common endings *us* and *um* should be represented by *us* and *um* respectively.

DIPHTHONGS

A diphthong is a blending of two vowels in order to form a single sound. The most important for you to learn will be *ae*, *au*, and *oe*. Their pronunciation is as follows:

ae = This sounds like the *ai* in *aisle* or like the *i* in *like*.

The Latin word *caelum* would therefore sound like *keye lum*.

au = This sounds like the *ou* in *bound*.

The Latin word *aut* would sound like the English *out*.

oe = This sounds like the *oi* in *soil*.

The Latin word *coepit* is therefore pronounced *coy pit*.

Note: In words like *poēta*, the *ē* has its own syllable and is not part of the diphthong. There are three other diphthongs which are not as important. They are *ei*, which should be pronounced like the *ei* in *vein*; *eu*, which should be pronounced like the *eu* in *feud*; and *ui*, which sounds like the *ui* in *ruin*.

CONSONANTS

Generally the consonants will sound as they do in English. The consonants that sound just the same are as follows:

B, D, F, H, K, L, M, N, P, Z

You should also realize that the exceptions are the result of the *regularity* of Latin, and so they should not be hard to remember. Below is a list of the exceptions.

C and **ch** sound like *k*.

The word *centum* is pronounced *ken tum*.

The word *pulcher* is pronounced *pul ker*.

G has a hard sound, as in *go*.

The word *regio* is pronounced *re gi oh*.

J (if you ever see a *j* from more recent Latin) is like the *y* in *yes*.

So *jūdex* is pronounced *yoo dex*.

S has only the sound heard in *sill*.

T has only the sound heard in *ton*. It does *not* combine with *i* as it does in English to make a *sh* sound—as in *ration*.

V in Latin makes the sound of our *w*.

Vocō is pronounced this way—*wo koh*

X has only the sound of a *ks* and is pronounced with the preceding vowel.

Exemplar is pronounced *eks em plar*.

Bs and **bt** are the same as *ps* and *pt*.

Urbs is pronounced *urps*.

Ph and **th** have an almost invisible *h*, so that they sound like *p* and *t*.

Pantheon is pronounced *Pan te on*.

SYLLABLES

In Latin, a syllable must always contain a vowel or a diphthong. Here are two basic rules for division of syllables.

If there is a consonant between two vowels, the consonant is pronounced with the vowel that *follows* it. For example, *habeō* is divided this way—*ha be ō*.

If there are two consonants between two vowels, then the first consonant goes with the vowel that precedes, and the second goes with the vowel that follows. For example, *terra* is divided this way—*ter ra*.

ACCENT

In English, learning how to accent a word is a matter of sheer memory. But in Latin the accent falls according to definite and set patterns. Here are three basic rules.

1. All words of two syllables are accented on the first syllable. For example, *A mō* and *POR tant*.
2. In a word of more than two syllables, if the next to last syllable contains a long vowel or diphthong, for example, *lau DA mus*, or if its vowel is followed by two consonants, then the accent falls on that syllable, for example, *im POR tant*.
3. In a word of more than two syllables, if the next to last syllable contains a short vowel, and it is followed by only one consonant, or another vowel, then the accent falls on the third from the last syllable. For example, *e PIS tu la*.

EXERCISE ONE

A. The purpose of this exercise is pronunciation only. Next to each word, phonetically spell out how each word sounds in English. Do not be concerned with the meanings of the words.

1. agricolam
2. poētae
3. fēminās
4. dōnum
5. dabant
6. dabāmus
7. videō
8. vidēmus
9. habent
10. rem
11. diēs
12. diēbus

13. laudant
14. manibus
15. īnsulārum
16. gaudium
17. nāvīgāvit
18. amīcus
19. vulnerō

BASIC GRAMMAR

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING PARTS OF SPEECH

When a student begins the study of a new language, he usually does not have the luxury of learning it the same way he learned his native language. When he was little he learned the basic rules of his own tongue “by ear.” Only later, when he was already fluent was he instructed in the formal rules of his language.

But it is different with a new language. Some things can still be learned by ear, but this is not the most efficient way to learn a second language. At some point, it is a great advantage to learn the rules of grammar.

The basic parts of speech listed in this lesson are found in both English and Latin. Their appearance, of course, is different, but the role they play in establishing the meaning of a sentence is the same. Learning (or reviewing) these parts of speech will therefore be an advantage in both languages.

This is provided as a reference for later work. It is *not* intended as a thorough study of grammar, but is assuming that the student has already had basic grammatical instruction.

NOUNS

A *noun* is a word which refers to a *person*, a *place*, or a *thing*. Consequently, words like *dog*, *cat*, *house*, and so forth are all nouns. Words which refer to *abstract things* like *truth*, *love* and *beauty* are also nouns.

VERBS

A *verb* is a word which shows *action*. Thus, when we say *The preacher speaks* the word *speaks* is the *verb*. It shows the action.

Some verbs also show *existence* or *remaining in a place* instead of action. A sentence like *He is in the Navy now* is a sentence like this. The verb here is *is*. *We shall remain in town* is another. The verb here is *shall remain*.

ADJECTIVES

An adjective is a word which describes a noun. If we were to say *The tall preacher speaks*, the adjective here is the word *tall* because it describes a noun—*preacher*.

Sometimes an adjective will describe a noun which is not there, but is understood by implication anyway. We see this in the cliché *The good die young*. The word *good* is an adjective, even though the noun it describes (people) is absent from the sentence. We also see this in the words of our Lord—*the meek shall inherit the earth*.

ADVERBS

An adverb is a word which describes a verb. When we say *The tall preacher speaks powerfully* the word *powerfully* helps to describe the verb, which is *speaks*.

PRONOUNS

A pronoun is a word which is used in the place of a noun. In the sentence *The woman saw the general and greeted him* the pronoun *him* is used instead of using the noun *general* a second time.

The word that is replaced by the pronoun is called the *antecedent* of the pronoun. In the sentence above the antecedent of *him* is *general*.

TYPES OF PRONOUNS

Some pronouns are called **PERSONAL PRONOUNS**. They are the pronouns *I, me, you, he, him, she, her, it, we, us, they, and them*.

Another type of pronoun is called the **INTERROGATIVE PRONOUN**. They are used to enable us to ask questions—*who, which, and what?*

And when these same pronouns are used in sentences which are not questions, we call them **RELATIVE PRONOUNS**. Consider the following:

The preacher who spoke powerfully was my uncle.

In this sentence, the word *who* is being used as a relative pronoun. In some sentences the word *that* is also used as a relative pronoun. For example:

The woman that just entered the room is my mother.

There are also **DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS**. They are the pronouns *this, these, that, those*. They are used to point out, or to show (to demonstrate!) a specific object which has been previously mentioned. Study the example:

Did he touch this yellow apple or that (one)?

In this sentence, *that* is being used as a demonstrative pronoun. It points out which apple the boy may have touched.

EXERCISE TWO

A. Please answer the following questions about parts of speech.

1. What is a noun?
2. Give three examples of English nouns.
3. What is a verb?
4. Give three examples of English verbs.
5. What is an adjective?
6. Give three examples of English adjectives.

7. Give an example of an adjective replacing a noun.
8. What is an adverb?
9. Give three examples of English adverbs.
10. What is a personal pronoun?
11. Give three examples of English personal pronouns.