

The Value of Latin: A Personal Perspective and Other Notes

By Katie Robinson, National Committee for Latin and Greek

The benefits of studying Latin are manifold. Students not only learn a language whose rich literature has had a tremendous influence upon the history of European writing in all genres, but they come face to face with classical culture. This culture is the basis for western civilization and helps students of all backgrounds understand our modern American institutions and the relationship of both of the Americas to Europe. Because the Roman world was a multicultural society within an empire made up of many provinces, students can also make many correlations to present day situations and events. The history and traditions of the Christian church are also tied to Roman culture and especially the Latin language.

Learning the language of Latin has also been proven to build student's verbal abilities as well as develop skill in critical thinking, problem solving, and analysis. The logical structure of the Latin makes one think about how language works, and we still use the poetic and rhetorical devices of Greco-Roman origin. Not to mention how allusions and borrowing from Greco-Roman myth and legend are common in our own writing. Ancient writers literally set the bar in almost every genre. Latin teaching methodologies and the increasing use of all forms of technology also help students build their 21st Century Skills, skills that will benefit them their whole life, no matter what career they choose.

Over half of English vocabulary is derived from Latin and 90% of English words longer than 2 syllables are Latin-based! This is why a knowledge of Latin and Greek roots is part of upper elementary and middle grades content standards in most states and stressed in the Common Core Standards. The extent of one's vocabulary directly affects communication skills, which have been shown to be the single most important factor to career success – no matter what job you choose. And of course in medicine and the sciences, there are literally millions of words, terms and names that are based directly on Latin. And Latin still provides common terminology for international communication. Many legal terms are Latin and our legal system has interesting connections to Roman law. Latin is also valuable, because it is an excellent base for learning other Romance languages, whose vocabularies are about 80% Latin.

Latin instruction across the nation is slowly growing on all levels in both public and private schools, even to the point that during the last decade some areas of the country have not been able to find enough teachers! Despite news of programs and electives being cut due to budget deficits, Latin numbers have continued to hold steady or rise. Over 155,000 students in the US and 20 other countries took last year's National Latin Exam. About 50,000 students are active in the National Junior Classical League, i.e., the Latin Club at junior and senior high schools. Latin texts have been updated and teachers employ all the newest methodologies, from oral usage to podcasting. Students attend regional, state and national competitions, showing that Latin is still very much alive around the country!

Author Weatherford, H. Jarold wrote for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics Washington DC. Educational Resources Information Center, "In addition, data from the Admission Testing Program of the College Board show a definite positive correlation between Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores and the study of foreign languages. In one recent test group, for example, students who.....had taken only one year of a foreign language had slightly higher scores in reading and math, whereas students with two years of foreign language showed more dramatic increases. Each additional year of language study brought a further rise in scores."

Jarold also stated that a "second language is now becoming a vital part of the basic preparation for an increasing number of careers. Even in those cases where the knowledge of a second language does not help graduates obtain a first job, many report that their foreign language skills often enhance their mobility and improve their chances for promotion. In addition to any technical skills that foreign language students choose to develop, they also have further tangible advantages in the job market. In a recent study that sought to ascertain which college courses had been most valuable for people who were employed in the business world, graduates pointed not only to career-oriented courses such as business management, but also to people-oriented subjects like psychology, and to classes that had helped them to develop communication skills. Foreign language students, whose courses focus heavily on this aspect of learning, often possess outstanding communication skills, both written and oral. Furthermore, recent trends in the job marketplace indicate a revived recognition of the value of liberal arts training in general in an employee's career preparation."

Novelist John Updike attributes the deterioration of writing skills in America to two generations growing up with less Latin: "In some curious way, the study of thisintricate language enabled writers to write a beautiful, clear idiomatic English." *Due to an interest in strengthening verbal and critical thinking skills, and the clear correlation between Latin study and improved academic performance, Latin instruction in elementary schools has doubled in the past ten years!* [Sources: NAEP Nation's Report Card: "Latin [is] on the rise. Among [public] elementary schools that teach languages, Latin instruction has increased from 3% to 6%." (NAEP results—or The Nation's Report Card—NAEP is part of the U.S. Department of Education and is mandated by Congress.)

Look at the recent data! *The College Board data shows Latin in relation to other subject areas students have pursued. It also calculates correlations between SAT scores and the length of study of certain subjects, including English, math, biological sciences, physical sciences, and social studies and found the results charted below. Year after year, Latin students rank first in Verbal/Critical Reading and often first in Writing!*

On a higher level, results were also positive in favor of Latin for the GRE for college seniors testing for graduate school (last data:2008).*Classical Language/Latin majors scored the highest on verbal and quantitative sections of all language majors and the highest on verbal of all of 300 major college fields of study listed! (619 Ave. Verbal)*

2015 Data for College-Bound Seniors who took both SAT and Subject tests.
DATA TAKEN FROM COLLEGE BOARD SAT TOTAL GROUP REPORT, TABLE 19
Academic information - Course-taking patterns
Mean scores for Critical Reading (Verbal) and Writing

	Critical Reading	Writing
Literature	639	634
US History	642	639
World History	650	644
Mathematics Level 1	577	588
Mathematics Level 2	629	638
Biology-M	621	631
Chemistry	630	638
Physics	609	621
Chinese /Listening	596	616
French/Listening	641	646
German/Listening	635	634
Modern Hebrew	628	644
Italian	605	610
Japanese/Listening	588	608
Korean/Listening	578	620
Latin	680	676
Spanish	593	599

LATIN IS #1
 LATIN GIVES YOU THE ADVANTAGE!!

For students taking BOTH SUBJECT AREA tests and the SAT:
 => Latin ranks #1 among all subjects and languages in Critical Reading
 => Latin ranks #1 among all subjects and languages in Writing

Reading #1	Latin	680	30 points higher than the #2 ranked subject!
			39 points higher than the next ranked language!
Writing #1	Latin	676	32 points higher than the #2 ranked subject!
			30 points higher than the next ranked language!

(In 2014, Latin mean was **46 pts higher in Reading** than the next language and **39 points above** the next subject, and in Writing ranked **39 points higher** than the next language and subject.)

LATIN  A SOUND INVESTMENT

2015 College-Bound Seniors who took the SAT test but not subject area tests
DATA TAKEN FROM COLLEGE BOARD SAT TOTAL GROUP REPORT, Tables 14-17
Academic Information - Course-Taking Patterns for students with 4 years of study or AP in a discipline

Scores for individual languages are not differentiated by level of study but combine all levels in data.
 For students from all levels who took the SAT test ONLY:
 => **Latin average ranks #1 among all 11 languages in Critical Reading!**
 Reading #1 Latin 560 **14 points higher than the #2 ranked language!**

<=LATIN TOPS LANGUAGES

=> Latin average ranks (tied for) **#1 among all languages in Writing!**
 Writing #1 Latin 543 **16 points ahead of next ranked score!**
 (In 2014, Latin ranked #1 in Reading by 19 points and Writing by 6 points)

2014 College-Bound Seniors who took both SAT and Subject tests.
DATA EXCERPTED FROM TOTAL GROUP REPORT
Academic Information - Course-Taking Patterns:

Table 20: Mean Scores for SAT Subject Test Takers and for Students Who Also Took the SAT

Most, but not all, students who take SAT Subject Tests also take the SAT. This table provides SAT Subject Test scores for students who took SAT Subject Tests. It also provides the SAT scores for those students who also took the SAT.

	Critical Reading	Writing
Literature	638	633
US History	640	639
World History	646	643
Mathematics Level 1	580	592
Mathematics Level 2	627	638
Biology -E	616	623
Biology-M	621	633
Chemistry	629	639
Physics	608	620
Chinese /Listening	591	614
French	639	646
French/Listening	639	644
German	630	637
German/Listening	634	634
Modern Hebrew	631	645
Italian	608	620
Japanese/Listening	587	603
Korean/Listening	573	617
Latin	685	685
Spanish	592	602

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For students taking BOTH subject area tests and the SAT:
 => Latin ranks #1 among all languages in Critical Reading
 => Latin ranks #1 among all languages in Writing
 Reading #1 Latin 685 46 points higher than the #2 ranked language!
 Writing #1 Latin 685 39 points higher than the #2 ranked language!

For Latin students from all levels combined who took the SAT test ONLY:
 => Latin averages rank #1 among all languages in Critical Reading!
 Reading #1 Latin 561 19 points higher than the #2 ranked language!
 => Latin averages rank #1 among all languages in Writing!
 Writing #1 Latin 544

LATIN TOPS LANGUAGES

NB: Scores for an individual language are not differentiated for various levels of study.