

Latin: A Foundation for Learning Other Languages

Some reasons why the study of Latin makes sense as a first language experience for Americans

- Which languages will students need for future careers, which may include multiple jobs or professions? As a first language, Latin builds linguistic awareness and skills with strong transfer value to English and modern languages.

Some 60% of all English words are derived from Latin and about 90% of those over two syllables are Latin-based.

About 80% of Spanish, French, Italian and Portuguese words are from Latin, since these are “late Latin” languages that developed in former provinces of the Roman Empire and represent some 800 million native speakers worldwide today.

- The study of Latin makes sense because it is a language with a logical and regular grammatical system that is highly phonetic and easy for Americans to pronounce.
- Grammar instruction is emphasized in Latin classes more than in most English and modern language classes, giving students perspective on how language functions.
- Latin is taught with lively, interactive and innovative programs that encourage questions and answers in the language and reading aloud. Techniques are similar to modern language instruction without demanding fluency in the language, which takes time.
- It is a language that contrasts highly with English in sentence structure, giving students ample opportunity to transform structures within Latin and between Latin and English. This strengthens their writing and communication skills.
- About 90% of scientific terminology derives from Latin and Greek. There are literally millions of Latin and Greek terms and names used in botany, biology, anatomy, chemistry, psychiatry, pharmacy, microscopy, bacteriology, etc.
- A highly inflected language, Latin introduces students to sentence patterns and word endings similar to strategic languages like German, Russian and Arabic. Oriental languages express the same grammatical concepts (i.e. nouns, verbs and tenses) in very different ways.
- Latin has a deserved reputation for academic excellence, fostering perceptions and study skills with proven transfer value to other academic subjects.
- Latin (and ancient Greek) are well regarded languages for university admission, because they demonstrate a high level of academic achievement and language skill that translates into success in higher education.
- The ability to use English well and to communicate effectively in a given language are the two primary skills that prepare students to compete successfully in the job market at home and abroad.

On page 2, more facts about Latin in the schools today!

Latin in the Schools Today

- Enrollments in the public schools and colleges nationwide have grown significantly over the past three decades because of increased emphasis on academics, language proficiency and literacy in English. Elementary public school Latin has doubled in the past decade!
- Latin is a mainstay in public and in academically-oriented private schools, which endeavor to give students an edge for college and careers.
- Latin-based programs are growing dramatically in the elementary and middle schools with lively, innovative programs that emphasize word roots of English and/or Spanish and Latin as an introduction to language arts. They have proven value for helping to raise verbal scores on standardized tests of English skills for average and disadvantaged students and having transfer value for other subjects in the curriculum.
- Students of diverse ethnic backgrounds find that Latin helps bring students into the mainstream of American culture and western civilization. It provides linguistic and study skills that promote success in the core academic subjects.
- Students who take Latin gain historical perspective through direct access to classical civilization and cultures that influenced the world in their own time as well as in ours. They learn ways of life, types of government, politics, a legal system, commerce and values that have similarities to and differences from our own.
- The Roman Empire was a widespread civilization of diverse peoples and cultures. Since culture study is a major component of Latin courses, modern students learn useful and relevant lessons about multiculturalism and ethnic diversity from comparing and contrasting ancient and current cultural history.
- Latin literature is one of the world's great achievements and it continues to influence many literary genres and our ways of viewing life. The Romans excelled at classical drama, history, biography, rhetoric, poetry and philosophy. By their third year of Latin, many students are reading Latin authors in their own words.
- Students are exposed to ancient culture, such as Roman art, architecture, archaeology, athletic games, family life, modes of travel and myths and legends of Greece and Rome. They gain a broad humanistic perspective while studying the language.
- In local, regional and national contests Latin students have the opportunity to demonstrate their command of the language, literature, rhetoric, word roots, art, mythology and ancient athletics. In the tradition of the ancient Olympics recognition and awards are given for excellence. Some students put on Roman banquets, markets, plays or musicals for students in their schools. Better students offer to tutor less able students so that they will do well in the competitions. Skills are reinforced with pattern drills, songs and word games.
- In 2009 over 137,000 students took the National Latin Exam in the U.S., Canada and ten other countries. 50,000 students joined National Junior Classical League Clubs.

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