

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 55% 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.