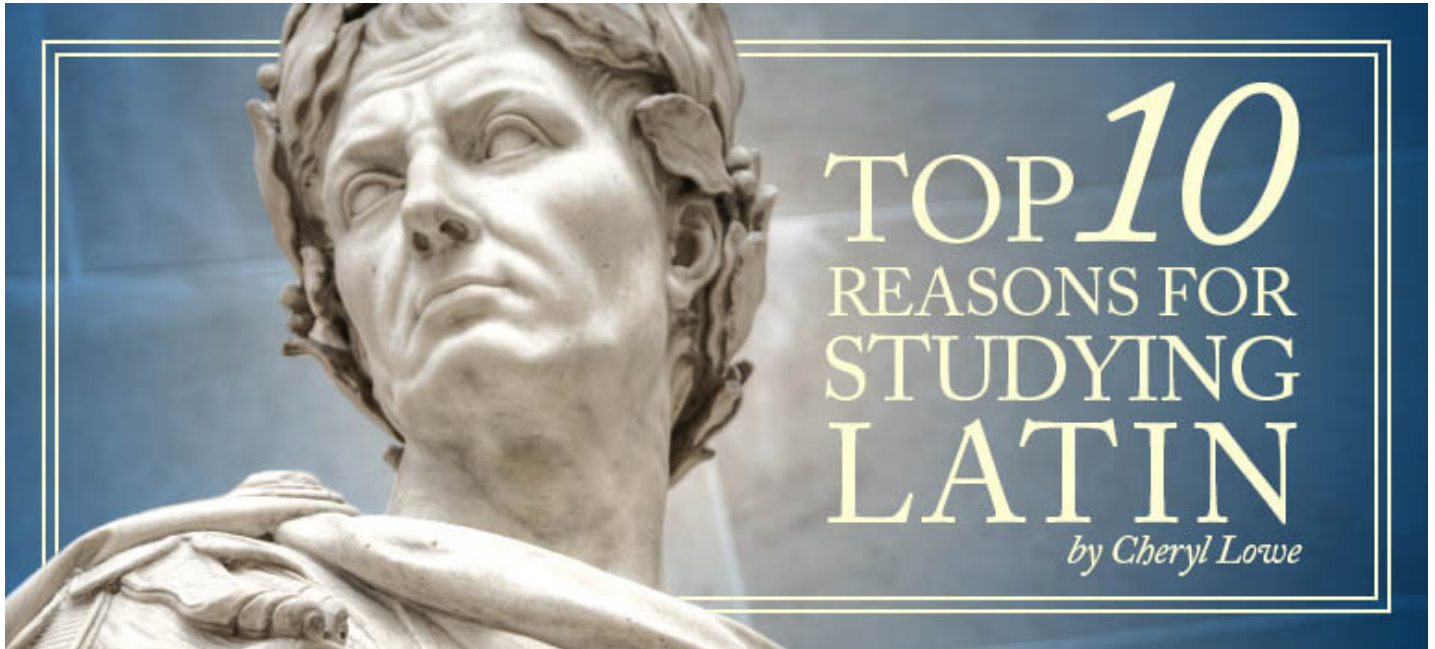


Top 10 Reasons for Studying Latin

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In this day of computers, and the triumph of science and technology, when there is so much to learn and so little time, why study a dead language? *Why not study something practical and useful?* Like Spanish, for instance. While we agree the study of Spanish is a very good thing, what I propose to show you here is that there is no subject most useful, more practical, and more valuable than **Latin**.

1.) Latin is the next step after phonics.

We all understand the importance of phonics, the systematic study of the English letters and their sounds. But **phonics** only covers half of our language, the English half, those good old concrete words that students learn to speak and read first. But then we stop, even though there is another half of English that has a whole new set of root words, spelling, and pronunciation patterns.

English, you see, is a hybrid language, a marriage of two languages—English and **Latin**. The name English comes from the Angles who, along with the Saxons and other barbarians, invaded Britain after the fall of Rome in the 5th century. English is a Germanic language and, the Germans being barbarians, had mostly concrete, common, everyday words, the words children learn to speak and read first in primary school.

But, beginning in 3rd grade, students start to encounter the Latin half of English. Latin words are bigger, harder, have more syllables, more abstract meanings, and different pronunciation and spelling patterns. How do we teach the Latin half of English in a systematic orderly way like

we do phonics?



We don't. But we should. And the only

truly systematic way to continue the study of the English language after phonics is to teach Latin—the foundation of the Latin half of English.

2.) Half of our English vocabulary is made up of Latin words and roots.

Here's the problem. The child has learned the English word for *father*, but then as he progresses through school he meets a whole new set of words: 3-5 syllable, difficult, abstract words that come from the Latin word for *father*, **pater**, **patris** (*Figure 1*). How do we prepare students for these words? We don't. Do you know the meaning of *paternalism*, *expatriate*, and *patronize*?

Here's another example (*Figure 2*): The young student has learned the English word for *death*, but how does that prepare him for these abstract words that come from the Latin word for *death*, **mors**, **mortis**? How do we teach these Latin words masquerading as English? We don't.

Here are some Latin words that illustrate the Latin style of spelling and pronunciation:

DEM o crat dem o **CRAT** ic de **MOC** ra cy

Look at the shifting accent on these three Latin words and the vowel **o** that changes its sound. In the first two words, the **o** has the schwa **uh** sound, but in the last word **o** is in the accented syllable, and you can now hear the **short o** sound. There is nothing like this in the English side of English.

By the way, one way to help students spell these Latin words where the interior vowel is muffled is to try another form of the word. If you can't remember what the muffled vowel is in *dem uh*

crat, you **can** hear that the vowel is **o** in *de moc ra cy*.

Look at these noun and verb combinations of Latin words (*Figure 3*).

When *present*, *progress*, *record*, and *rebel* are verbs, the stress is on the root and the vowel in the first syllable is long. But when these same words function as nouns, the stress shifts to the prefix, and the vowel in the first syllable is short. In the English style of spelling, the vowel in an open syllable is always long, but in a Latin word it can be long or short. More than half of English words are Latin and observe spelling and pronunciation rules different from the English words students learn in primary school. Is this not one of the reasons for the failure of many of our students to advance beyond a 4th or 5th grade reading level? They are no longer reading English; they are reading Latin!

But there is more. There are many Latin words that come straight into English without any change, retaining their Latin endings and all.

Why is the plural of *memorandum*, **memoranda**; *datum*, **data**; *appendix*, **appendices**; *matrix*, **matrices**; *synopsis*, **synopses**? Why is a male graduate an *alumnus* and female graduate an *alumna*? The student who has learned Latin will never have to wonder at these strange endings. They are common plural endings in Latin (*Figure 4*).

FIGURE 1

pater patris

patriarch, patriarchal
patriarchy
paternal, paternalism
paternalistic
patrimony
patriot, patriotic patriotism, compatriot,
expatriate
patronize, patronizing

father

fatherhood
fatherly

FIGURE 2

mors mortis

mortal, immortal, mortality
immortality, immortalize
morbid, morbidity, moribund
mortuary, mortician
deaden
post-mortem
rigor mortis
mortify, mortification
mortgage
amortize, amortization

death

deathly
dead
deadly

FIGURE 3

To **present** a **present**
To **progress** with good **progress**
To **record** a **record**
To **rebel** like a **rebel**

FIGURE 4

Singular

memorandum
appendix
synopsis
alumnus
alumna

Plural

memoranda
appendices
synopses
alumni
alumnae

You see, Latin is the next step after phonics. It continues the systematic study of English throughout elementary school, right when children need it, right when they are encountering thousands of new words and building their vocabulary and reading skills.

Students who study Latin develop an interest in words. They learn something they had never thought of before. Words don't just drop out of the sky—they come from some place; words have a history, sometimes a very long and interesting history. Many words are world travelers, traveling from Greece to Rome to France to England. Words are fascinating.

So, Latin is the next step after phonics because it continues the study of the Latin half of English vocabulary in a systematic, orderly way. Skip the vocabulary courses. Learn Latin. It will teach your children the history of words, and happy is the man who knows the causes of things.

3.) Latin provides the root words for all of the modern sciences.

We live in an age dominated by science, so parents often ask, “Why study something useless and impractical like Latin? What we need is more **science** and **math** education.”

We think science is important too—so important that we strongly recommend Latin to these folks. And here's why: All of the modern sciences began their development at the time of the Renaissance (about 500 years ago) when all educated people knew **Latin** and **Greek**.

A new science means a whole new set of words, a whole new vocabulary. Think of all the new words that came with computer science. Think of all of the big words in biology, chemistry, astronomy, psychology, sociology, and economics. The first task in learning a new subject is to learn the vocabulary. Learning the vocabulary is half the battle.

How will your child learn all of those big words in his science education? What preparation do we give our students to help them master the tremendous demands of learning the specialized vocabularies of the sciences he will study in high school and college? We don't! But we can and should. Latin provides the root words for the specialized vocabularies of not one, not half, but **all** of the modern sciences.

You see, new science terms have to come from somewhere. People don't just make up new sounds and words out of nothing. They all came from the ancient classical languages, Latin and Greek. Think of Latin and Greek as a big quarry where scientists go to dig out new words. Even the word *computer* comes from the Latin word *computo*, to count, to sum up.

Now what is the difficult part of learning a new science? What is the grammar of a science? The vocabulary. Learning the specialized vocabulary of each new science is half the battle.

FIGURE 5**Astronomy & Geology**

Vernal equinox	<i>ver</i>
Summer solstice	<i>sol</i>
Igneous	<i>ignis</i>
Sedimentary	<i>sedere</i>
Metamorphic	Greek

FIGURE 6**English Symbol Latin**

Gold	Au	Aurum
Silver	Ag	Argentum
Iron	Fe	Ferrum
Tin	Sn	Stannum
Lead	Pb	Plumbum
Sodium	Na	Natrium

FIGURE 7

<i>fungus</i>	fungi
<i>bacterium</i>	bacteria
<i>Acer saccharum</i>	sugar maple
<i>Quercus alba</i>	white oak

FIGURE 8**Mathematics**

Integer	integer	<i>whole</i>
Axiom	axios	<i>worthy</i>
Exponent	ex	<i>out of</i>
	pono ponere	<i>put, place</i>
Radical	radix radicis	<i>root</i>

LET ME ILLUSTRATE ...

Here are a few science terms that come up even in elementary school (*Figure 5*). The *vernal equinox* is the one day of spring when day and night are equal. *Vernal* comes from the Latin word for *spring*, **ver**, **veris**. You know, like **pasta primavera**, *spring pasta*. Or the *summer solstice*, June 21, the one day of summer that has the longest day and the shortest night, when the sun is highest in the sky. **Sol** is Latin for *sun*.

Or the three kinds of rocks that students learn in geology: *igneous*, *sedimentary*, and *metamorphic*. The Latin word for *fire* is **ignis**, from which we get *ignition* and *igneous rock*, molten rock, made from fire. And *sedimentary* rock that is laid down in *sediment* comes from the

Latin word **sedeo sedere**, to sit, to settle. And lastly, *metamorphic* rock, like marble and granite, is rock that has changed form under great pressure. *Metamorphic* comes from the Greek **meta**, to change, and **morphe**, form, through Latin, to change form.

Do you watch your sodium intake? Ever wonder why the symbol of *sodium* is **Na** or the symbol of *Iron* is **Fe**? (Figure 6) Your child will see many of these symbols for common elements on package labeling today. There are about six elements which were known to the ancients, and their chemical symbols come from their Latin names. By the way, did you know that *Argentina* comes from **Argentum** because it was a land where great silver deposits were found?

Happy is the man who knows the causes of things. We naturally want to know the reasons why. Most reasons are hidden in history and come to light through the study of Latin.

The Latin student does not have to wonder why the plural of *fungus* is **fungi** or the plural of *bacterium* is **bacteria**. These are just the masculine and neuter endings of Latin nouns. He won't have to struggle with biology terms. Trees that keep their leaves all winter are *evergreen*, an easy enough English word; but trees that lose their leaves are *deciduous*, a not so easy word—unless you know Latin.

The whole classification system of all living things, plants and animals, is based on Latin and Greek. Here are two examples: *Acer saccharum* and *Quercus alba*. **Saccharum**, from which we get *saccharin* and *saccharine*, is sugar in Latin; **alba**, from which we derive *albino*, is white in Latin. And *Quercus* was the Roman name for oak (Figure 7).

Even mathematical terms come from Latin. *Integer* means fresh, uninjured, whole in Latin, and thus, *integers* are whole numbers. *Axios* means *worthy* in Greek, and thus an *axiom* is a principle that all reasonable people accept even though it cannot be proven. Why? Because it is *worthy* of belief.

An exponent is a number placed outside of the writing line, and a radical is the root of a number. The square root of 9 is 3. Radicals, remember those? (See Figure 8) There is something about actually knowing the root word that not only helps you remember a new term but also deepens your understanding of its meaning.

4.) Latin is the language of law, government, logic, and theology.

Not only does Latin provide the root words for all of the modern sciences (Reason 3), but Latin is the language of law, politics, logic, and theology. While a large number of words in science

come from Greek, law is the exclusive domain of the Latin language. All legal terms are Latin. The Romans excelled in the practical arts of law and government, and it is from them that we derive our legal and political language. How many of these words do you know the meanings of? (*Figure 1*) Latin is invaluable for the business and law student. And although logic was first explained by Aristotle in Greek, it was really developed and systematized by the schoolmen in the Middle Ages—in Latin, of course.

FIGURE 1		
habeas corpus	subpoena	Quid pro quo
in loco parentis	Omnibus bill	Capitol, capital
de facto, de jure	veto	Ad hominem
amicu curiae	referndum	Non sequitur
caveat emptor	Plenary session	
pro bono	quorum	

And in the West, even Christian theology was worked out in Latin. (*Figure 2*) Many of the original words were Greek, but they were all filtered through the Latin language. In fact, everything that has come down to us from the ancient world was filtered through Latin. Jesus said, “Behold I do a new thing,” and thus Christians needed new words to describe these new things. Sometimes they grabbed existing Latin words and gave them new meanings, like grace which meant *favor* or *thanks*. Christians gave grace a new spiritual meaning—the undeserved favor of God, Christian grace. And sometimes they created new words, like the Latin word *Trinity*, a word not found in Scripture but one needed to express the doctrine of the three-in-one God. **Tres, tria** is *three* and **unus** is *one*, **Tri unity. Trinity.** Both three and one at the same time.

FIGURE 2		
Trinity	ex nihilo	crucifixion
grace	sacrament	ecclesiatical
salvation	immortality	benediction
justification	vocation	pastoral
sanctification	moral, immoral	Advent
imago Dei	divinity, deity	resurrection

Many well know theological concepts are in Latin. We are created **Imago Dei**, in the image of God, and **ex nihilo**, from nothing. **Sola fide** was the battle cry of the Reformation.

5.) Latin is the most efficient way to learn English grammar.

How many new grammar programs have failed to produce results? First it was *Easy Grammar* and now it is *Shirley Grammar*. The problem is not with these programs; the problem is with English grammar. Why is English grammar so difficult to teach? There are several reasons, the first of which is summed up by these observations:

- English grammar doesn't connect with students. It is difficult for students to analyze something they use instinctively because
- Students do not need grammar to use their own language, so
- English grammar, for most students, is useless and dull.

The second reason is that English grammar is too abstract for the grammar stage. In my opinion it is about the same level of abstraction and difficulty as algebra. When Dorothy Sayers, in *The Lost Tools of Learning*, recommended grammar in the grammar stage, she wasn't talking about English grammar, analyzing and diagramming sentences; she was talking about memorizing the Latin grammar. I think we have all made a serious mistake by emphasizing analytical English grammar in the grammar stage. Memorizing, remember, is consistent with the grammar stage, not analysis, which belongs in the logic stage.

English grammar is abstract and invisible because of its lack of structure and inflection. But Latin grammar is concrete and visible *because* of its structure and inflection. What is inflection? Inflected languages have noun endings that tell you what the noun is doing in the sentence. Is the noun a subject, a direct object, or an indirect object?

Look at the first two sentences to see inflection (*Figure 3*). In the first sentence, 'queen' is the direct object because its ending *am* tells you so. In the second sentence, Mary is the direct object; its ending, *am*, tells you so. When Mary is the subject it ends in *a*, and when Mary is the direct object, it ends in *am*—similar to *he* and *him* in English. Do you see how the Latin grammar is visible and concrete? You can see and hear the difference between a subject and a direct object in Latin.

FIGURE 3

<i>Maria reginam videt.</i>	Mary sees the queen
<i>Regina Mariam videt.</i>	The queen sees Mary.
<i>Reginam videmus.</i>	We see the queen.
<i>Reginam vident</i>	They see the queen.

Inflected languages also have verb endings that tell you who is doing the action of the verb, and when. The personal pronouns, *we* and *they*, do not have to be expressed in Latin because they are contained in the verb endings *-mus* and *-nt*. Inflection makes grammar visible and concrete.

English grammar is abstract and hidden because it is uninflected. It is unsystematic, unstructured, unreliable, and inconsistent. We are a loose and freedom loving people. We break the rules. The Romans were the most disciplined, structured, organized people in history and so was their language; their conjugations and declensions march in disciplined rows just like their legions.

There is a third problem with English grammar: *English grammar!* Learning a foreign language is the most effective way to learn grammar. I have never given a talk when someone did not come up afterwards and say, “I never really understood English grammar until I took French (or Spanish, or German, or whatever).” It is difficult to analyze something you use instinctively. And what is more natural and hard to think about than your own native language? It is second nature. The child of three or four speaks in complete sentences with subjects and predicates, verbs, direct objects, indirect objects, prepositional phrases, possessives, participles, gerunds, and infinitives—all without instruction. You do not have to tell the child to put a predicate in his sentence, do you? Have you ever had to say, “Now don’t forget your indirect object,” or “Hey, what happened to that participle”? Of course not. So when the student tries to analyze something he uses naturally and has learned by imitation, he finds it rather useless and dull. Eyes glaze over.

But a foreign language is foreign. The student has to break it down to learn it. Learning a foreign language makes use of a technique that is guaranteed to open eyes and develop deeper understanding—contrast and comparison. We don’t really see something until we see it in comparison to something else. Contrast and comparison deepens understanding. It makes the subject come into perspective, come alive. Depth perception requires two eyes. Until we

see with two eyes we are like the Cyclops, one big eye that sees a lot but with little understanding. Learning a foreign language is seeing with two eyes; it is an eye-opener.

And lest we revert back to the “why not Spanish grammar” argument, when it comes to grammar, there is no grammar like the Latin grammar. Latin is the most orderly, logical, disciplined, structured, systematic, consistent grammar in existence. Every lesson in Latin is a lesson in logic. Latin is a grammar system that is unparalleled among all the languages. It has no equal. Spanish is a very admirable language, but when it comes to grammar it doesn't come close.

I won't say “skip English grammar” like I did the vocabulary courses, but I will say cut way back on your analytical English grammar and put that time into Latin. Latin grammar teaches English better than English teaches English.

6.) Latin is the best preparation for learning any language.

Which brings me to the 6th reason to learn Latin. Latin is the best preparation for learning a Romance language, or any language. Once you really understand how language works, the task of learning a new language will be more than cut in half. Why settle for just one language? Learn a dozen, but learn Latin first.

7.) Latin effectively develops and trains the mind.

I consider this to be the most important reason of all: mental training. Latin is the most effective tool we have to develop and train the minds of the young. Not only does it cut in half the task of learning another language, it makes learning any subject easier. How can that be?

The student who has learned how to learn with Latin will be a better student at all of his other subjects. Latin is an unexcelled system. Once you learn one system, you learn how to think systematically and approach any new subject with greatly enhanced learning skills.

You see, subjects do more than provide information. Subjects are *formative*. The subject forms the minds of students by impressing its own qualities on their minds. You have heard the expression *you are what you eat*. Likewise your mind becomes like what you study. Your mind takes on the qualities of the subjects that it dwells on. The *formative* aspect of subjects is as important, if not more important, than the information they provide. For instance, the subject of literature teaches insight, perception, and compassion for the human condition. The subject of history develops judgment, discernment, acumen, and wisdom; The subject of math teaches accuracy and logic. Those qualities of mind are priceless and what differentiates the educated

person from the uneducated. Likewise, the mind of the student that has been educated in Latin takes on the qualities of Latin: logic, order, discipline, structure. Latin requires and teaches attention to detail, accuracy, patience, precision, and thorough, honest work. Latin will form the minds of your students. Think of the mind like the body. Latin is a mental workout, and Latin is your mental trainer.

8.) Latin aids the mind in other ways ...

Latin is a unit study where the work is done for you. The appeal of a unit study is that everything is connected and integrated. Things stick together and make more sense. So much of learning is fragmented into subjects that seem isolated from each other. But creating a unit study is a lot of work, and unit studies are limited to a small section of knowledge.

Latin is a unit study where the work is done for you, where everything integrates naturally, where the connections are there for you to discover. There is no subject you can study that connects with every other subject more than Latin. Remember all of the connections with science and math, logic, theology, law? Everything from the ancient world has come down to us filtered through the Latin language. For 1000 years, the only language we had was Latin. When you learn Latin you are learning the history of just about everything. Learning is mostly words. Words, words, words. And most of them are Latin words.

Learning is making connections. The more you know, the more you can learn and the easier it is to acquire new knowledge because it will stick to something you already know. Latin gives you more stickies than any other subject. It is like academic velcro. It connects with everything.

9.) Latin is transformative.

Latin will change your curriculum and homeschool from good to great. Latin provides the missing element in modern education—the glue, the integrating factor. Latin does for the language side of the curriculum what math does for science. It provides the mental discipline and structure that the humanities side of the curriculum desperately needs.

The two most difficult and challenging subjects in the curriculum are mathematics and languages. Both subjects are necessarily cumulative. Everything must be remembered; nothing can be forgotten.

A cumulative subject builds year after year, requiring skills each year that are more and more advanced, higher and higher, deeper and deeper. By contrast, most subjects are topical, not cumulative. For instance, if you are studying history and zone out during the Revolutionary War

the first term and make a D, you can wake up and redeem yourself the second term for the Civil War and make an A. You can't do that with math and Latin. And that is why they are hard. So much of learning is superficial, shallow, on the surface. The only way to get out of the shallow waters is to dive deep into one subject. Students need that experience. We talk a lot about higher order thinking, but there is only one way to reach a high order of thinking, and that is to dive deep into one subject. The only subject that gives that experience now is math. We need that kind of experience on the language side of the curriculum. Latin is the answer.

10.) Latin is the language of Western Civilization.

If we plan to save Western civilization, we must study it. No one would think that we could study and preserve American civilization without studying and preserving English. The same is true of Western civilization. Latin is the mother tongue of Western civilization. The original thinkers in the ancient world were the Greeks and the Hebrews, but it was the Romans that summarized, synthesized, codified, and handed it down to us—in Latin. It could have been Greek or Hebrew, but it wasn't. In the providence of God, it was Latin. And now Latin has spread over the world in all of the sciences, law, five Romance languages and one hybrid: English. Latin is the most influential language in human history. Learn Latin! You will be doing your part to save Western civilization *and* transform your education from good to great. Latin is not dead; it's immortal.

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