

## Why Learn Latin?

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*Clear awareness of grammar.* Younger students become more aware of the grammar of language, if they study a language different from their own. Just as it is easier to study some traits in others that I cannot see clearly in myself, it is less confusing for the beginner to learn about the structure of language at arm's length, in a "dead" language. I learn what a "genitive" is from Latin, and then recognize genitives in my own speech.

*The mother tongue.* Latin is the parent of many European languages. Those who know Latin more easily become familiar with French, Italian, Spanish, English, and so on. (The Romance languages like Spanish are so called because they are "Roman.") Much grammar and many words in those languages derive from Latin.

*English vocabulary.* Even in English about 60% of all words derive from Latin. Common polysyllabic words inherited from the French Normans (like courage, educate, area, animal) are Latin in origin, as are many scientific, medical, and legal terms. A student of Latin quickly acquires a better English vocabulary.

*An instrument of rhetoric and thought.* In the West, most educated people before the twentieth century studied Latin to obtain models of clear, organized, and beautiful speech. The shape of Latin (and Greek) helped form our classic English exemplars, such as Shakespeare, the King James Bible, and Milton, as well as moderns like C.S. Lewis. We too can learn from the way Latin writers organize their thoughts and words. The discipline and orderliness of Latin may well be a reason why the average verbal SAT scores for Latin students are much higher (665 in 2001) than the national average (506).

*Traditional culture and education.* For many centuries in Europe, Latin was the universal language of culture and learning. It is no longer so, but many traces of learned Latin usage persist in educated writing (e.g., *per se*, *ad hominem*, ... *ad infinitum*). Even today, the intellectual culture of Europe and the West still connects profoundly to the pre-modern thinkers who wrote in Latin. Knowing Latin brings the modern citizen closer to the thoughts of such great minds as Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, Aquinas, Dante, Calvin, and Newton.

*Christian community.* Latin was the language of Christianity in the West for over a thousand years. It is the language of the first European Bible translation, the Vulgate. Latin was honed by the medieval schoolmen into a theological language of unparalleled clarity and precision. (Aquinas is still profitable to read today, even for those with little Latin.) Latin has always been used as a language of worship and praise, with a unique beauty deriving from its long centuries of use by the Body of Christ. The Apostles' Creed speaks of the communion of saints—we can enter into that communion in a deep way by using the language of the old saints.

*What about Greek?* The preceding observations apply, with adjustments, to Greek also. Most importantly, Greek is the original language of the New Testament. After a few years of Latin, students find that they can easily learn enough Greek in about a semester or two to begin Bible translation exercises.

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