

8 Reasons to Study Latin

At Veritas, we teach Latin for a variety of reasons – each of them confirmed by 1,500 years of educational experience and successful results.

1. Enhanced Vocabulary: Latin serves as the root, directly or indirectly, of about 60% of our English words. Note the Latin derivatives in the preamble to the U.S. Constitution:

"We the *people* of the *United States*, in order to *form* a more *perfect Union*, *establish Justice*, *insure domestic tranquility*, *provide* for the *common defense*, *promote* the *general* welfare, and *secure* the blessings of *liberty* to ourselves and our *posterity*, do *ordain* and *establish* this constitution for the *United States of America*." (Words derived from Latin are in *bold italics***.)**

Of the 39 words in the preamble, 25 of them (64%) are derived from Latin words. Students who learn Latin early have the tools to build their vocabulary more quickly than students who don't study Latin.

2. Mastery of English: Learning Latin is the surest way to gain mastery over one's own language, as it provides the grid upon which languages are built. Latin students actually learn English grammar more effectively and comprehensively in Latin than they do in English grammar class. Students who learn Latin do indeed learn a specific language, but they're also learning how all languages work by learning grammar functions and rules.

3. Improved Writing Skills: Latin also improves a student's writing skills. The great classical writers of Greece and Rome (Virgil and Cicero) were incredibly disciplined in their habits of expression. Extensive exposure to them and imitation of their style make students better writers and speakers. Our English-speaking ancestors' long exposure to Latin syntax and prose probably explains their ability to write prose and poetry far more accomplished than the best writers of our day. Reading and writing Latin is an exercise in brevity, precision and economy.

4. Greater Learning and Thinking Skills: The reading and translating of Latin requires much more than mere memorization of vocabulary and word endings. The translation of the simplest sentences entails the application of grammar rules, synthesis of dozens of bits of data, and the comparison and analysis of subtle differences and nuances in words. Latin requires precision of thought and attention to minute detail. As a result, the discipline of learning Latin trains students in analytical and logical thinking skills. Each sentence is an intellectual puzzle that must be solved by the analysis and synthesis of many pieces of information.

Tracy Lee Simmons, in his book *Climbing Parnassus*, explains the impact of Latin training on a student's thinking ability:

Every lesson in Latin is a lesson in logic . . . Taking the simple two-word Latin sentence *Vellum mortuos* ("I would that they were dead.) . . . understanding this sentence aright requires fourteen intellectual turns. "A student must know (1) the person, (2) the tense, (3) voice, (4) number, (5) mood of the verb *vellum*; (6) that it comes from *volo*, meaning (7) 'I wish'; and that (8) the subjunctive has here a particular shade of meaning. As to *mortuos*, he must know that it is (9) the accusative, (10) plural, (11) masculine, from (12) *mortuus*, meaning (13) 'dead'; (14) the reason why the accusative is necessary . . . A student who slips up on any one of these [steps] is bound to make a lovely mess when he comes to translate. . . In Latin you must be absolutely right, or you are not right at all . . . Can anyone seriously maintain that such a stiff training in just expression leaves no salutary marks upon the intellect of someone who, having successfully run its gauntlet, becomes captive to the habits of a precise mind? (p.177)

Being "captive to the habits of a precise mind" is the primary benefit of Latin and our primary reason for teaching it at our school. The precision of thought, attention to detail, and intellectual discipline of Latin gets carried over into other subjects and areas of life. Latin students, in short, become better thinkers, better speakers, and better writers, thus more articulate and effective communicators of their faith in Christ.

5. Foundation of Romance Languages: Latin is the basis of all of the Romance languages (Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, etc.). The argument is often given that students should not waste time learning a dead language like Latin, when they could learn a more useful and practical language like Spanish or French. The answer to this is given by Dorothy Sayers who asked, "Why should a child waste time learning half a dozen languages from scratch, when Latin would enable him to learn them all in a fraction of the time?"

6. Latin Allusions in Literature and Historic Documents: The literature and historic documents of Europe and the United States (e.g. Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, Thomas Jefferson and John Calvin) contain so many Latin phrases and classical allusions, that they often cannot be fully understood and appreciated without a background in Latin. Students of Western history, literature, law, philosophy, and theology frequently encounter phrases, sayings, titles, and quotes in Latin.

7. Cultural Legacy: Our society's mental infrastructure, its science, philosophy, politics, law, medicine, drama, and art are heavily influenced by the classical world. Reading the ancient writings of Greece and Rome helps us to understand many influences that have shaped our culture. Whether you are discussing the legal concept of *habeas corpus* or naming the bones of the human body, all 206 of which have Latin names, Latin is everywhere.

8. Higher SAT Scores: Students of Latin have significantly higher SAT scores than students of other foreign languages. The test results for the Verbal portion of the 2010 Scholastic Aptitude Test clearly shows the Latin advantage. 2010 scores are consistent with scores for every year for the past several decades.

Latin	678
All Students	501
French	633
German	626
Spanish	561
Hebrew	612

Numerous studies have demonstrated that Latin students may also have higher grade point averages, higher GRE scores, higher reading achievement, increased vocabulary skills, and better math problem-solving skills than students who have not studied Latin.

Rident stolidi verba Latina! – Fools laugh at the Latin language! (Ovid)