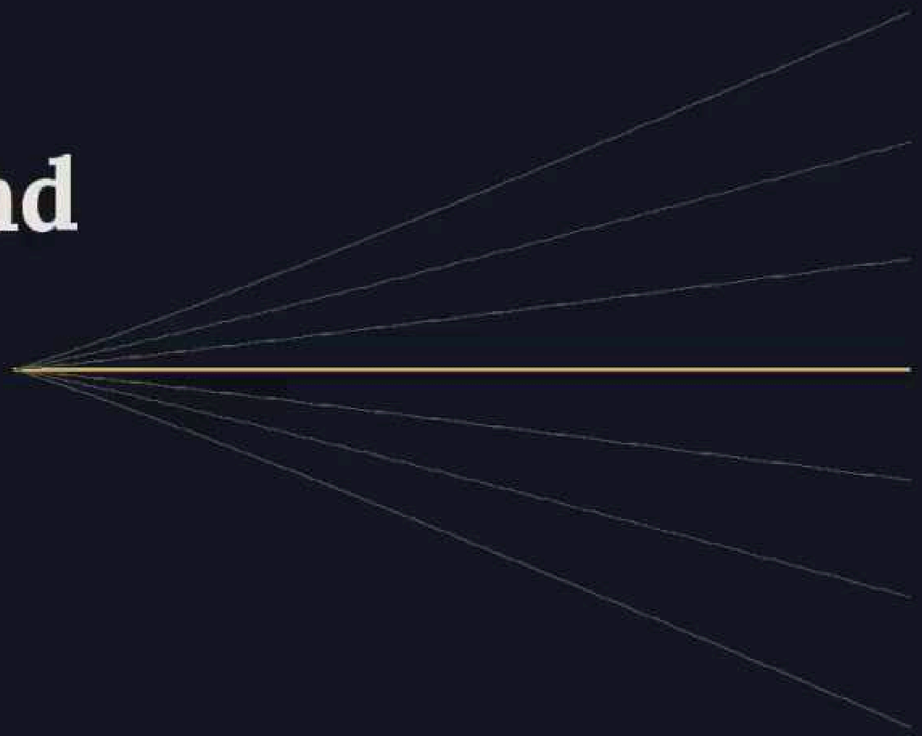
ANDERSON ACADEMY

LATN 101 B · Elementary Latin I (Brief course)

Lecture 1 · about 8 min

Why Latin, the Alphabet, and Pronunciation



A library of university-level courses

Questions or feedback: garyanderson@mail.grokbot.com · @garyanderson

Three questions

- Why learn Latin?
- Where did it come from?
- How did it sound?

¶ 1.1

Where did Latin come from, and how did it change?

Questions or feedback: garyanderson@mail.grokbot.com · @garyanderson

Why learn Latin

- Read Roman and later texts directly
- Understand English vocabulary
- Train careful reading
- Law, medicine, and science

¶ 1.2

It trains careful reading, because every ending matters.

Origins

- Latium, around Rome
- An Indo-European language
- Spread with Roman power
- Across the Mediterranean and western Europe

¶ 1.3

As Rome grew from a city to an empire, its language spread around the Mediterranean and across western Europe.

Periods of Latin

Before 100 BC	Old Latin, Plautus
About 80 BC to AD 14	Golden Age, Cicero, Virgil
AD 14 to about 200	Silver Age, Seneca, Tacitus
Later centuries	Late and Medieval Latin

¶ 1.4

Caesar, Virgil, and Horace.

From Latin to Romance



¶ 1.5

this spoken Latin developed differently in each region and became the Romance languages.

Two pronunciations

Classical

- Hard c and g
- v sounds like w
- Used in this course

Ecclesiastical

- Soft c and g before e and i
- v sounds like v
- Used in the Church

¶ 1.6

Ecclesiastical, or Church, Latin is still used by the Catholic Church, with a pronunciation closer to modern Italian.

The Roman alphabet

- Twenty-three letters
- No j and no w
- I and v as vowel or consonant
- Ancestor of our alphabet

¶ 1.7

The letter i could be a vowel or a consonant, like the y in yes,

Short and long vowels

Short

- Short a as in cup
- Short e as in pet
- Short i as in pit

Long

- Long a as in father
- Long e as in late
- Long i as in machine

¶ 1.8

Short a is like the u in cup; long a is like the a in father.

More vowels

- Short o as in pot
- Long o as in note
- Short u as in put
- Long u as in food

¶ 1.9

In textbooks, a long vowel is often marked with a short line above it, the macron.

Consonants

Sound	Example
C as in cat	Cicero as kick-er-oh
G as in go	Vidi as wee-dee
V as in wine	S always as in sing

¶ 1.10

V, when a consonant, sounds like w, so vidi, I saw, sounds like wee-dee.

Diphthongs

- Ae as in eye: Caesar
- Oe as in boy
- Au as in cow
- Ei as in day

¶ 1.11

Ei sounds like the ay in day, and eu is a quick e followed by oo.

The stress rule

Two syllables: stress the first

↓

Longer words: check the second-to-last

↓

If long, stress it

↓

If short, stress the one before

¶ 1.12

A syllable is long if it has a long vowel or a diphthong,

Questions or feedback: garyanderson@mail.grokbot.com · @garyanderson

Stress examples

Word	Why
Amicus, friend	Dominus, master
Long second-to-last syllable	Short second-to-last syllable

¶ 1.13

You do not need to master this rule today,

Latin and its descendants

Latin	Descendants
Aqua	Italian acqua, Spanish agua
Terra	Italian terra, Spanish tierra
Vita	Italian vita, Spanish vida

¶ 1.14

Vita, life, became vita in Italian and vida in Spanish.

Roman writing

- Capital letters only
- Dots between words
- Lower case came later
- K, y, z borrowed from Greek

¶ 1.15

The Romans borrowed the letters k, y, and z from Greek, but used them only rarely, mostly for Greek words.

Evidence for pronunciation

- Greek spellings of Latin names
- Roman grammarians
- Graffiti at Pompeii
- Puns and poetic rhythm

¶ 1.16

Spelling mistakes scratched on walls at Pompeii reveal how ordinary people spoke.

Questions or feedback: garyanderson@mail.grokbot.com · @garyanderson

Practising sound

- Read every word aloud
- Keep c and g hard
- Say v as w
- Sound helps memory

¶ 1.17

Even if you mainly want to read Latin,

Further reading

- Wheelock's Latin
- Allen: Vox Latina
- Recordings of classical readings

¶ 1.18

Sidney Allen explains the evidence for classical pronunciation.

Exercise

Say five words aloud

Hard c, v as w, ae as eye

Find three words from aqua

Next: nouns and cases

¶ 1.19

Then find three English words that come from aqua.

Questions or feedback: garyanderson@mail.grokbot.com · @garyanderson