

Why Study Latin

by Cheryl Lowe

Have you ever wished you had a good answer for those people who ask why you would spend your valuable education time studying Latin, when you could be spending it on something more “practical?”

There are three reasons Latin has long been considered the one master subject before which all others must bow.

First, Latin teaches English better than English teaches English. “The study of one’s own language,” said classicist Charles Bennett, “is achieved incomparably better by the indirect method of studying another language ... It is because translation from Latin to English ... is so helpful to the student who would attain mastery of his own language ... that I find the full justification for the study of Latin.” In other words, education based on the study of the child’s own language is inferior to one based on Latin.

Second, the mental discipline Latin instills in students makes it the ideal foreign language to study. Latin originated with the Romans, and their character pervades the language they created. The Roman, said R. W. Livingstone, “disciplined his thought as he disciplined himself; his words are drilled as rigidly as were his legions, and march with the same regularity and precision.”

Latin is systematic, rigorous, analytic. Its sentences march “serried, steady, stately, massive, the heavy beat of its long syllables and predominant consonants reflecting the robust, determined, efficient temper” of the Romans themselves.

Latin is clearly superior to other languages in this regard. Like English, modern languages are “lax and individualistic,” reflecting the modern temper of those who speak them. Thinking that you can get the same benefit out of studying them is, in Livingstone’s words, “like supposing that the muscles can be developed by changing from one chair to the other.”

Third, Latin is the ideal tool for the transmission of cultural literacy. Latin is, in fact, the mother tongue of Western civilization—a language that incorporated the best ideas of the ancient Greeks, and which then, after the conversion of Rome, put them into the service of Christian truth.

Rome fell into ruin, but the dying language of the disintegrating empire was infused with new life. Harnessing the power and precision of the old Latin, Christianity

transformed the tongue of conquest into the tongue of conversion, and Latin became the very language of the Christian Faith for over a thousand years.

Christian Latin takes the intellectual discipline of classical Latin and adds another element: simplicity. Although the basic grammar and vocabulary of Christian Latin are the same as the classical, Christian Latin authors emphasized the transmission of Christian truth, striving for clarity and simplicity above all else. Because Christian Latin is easier to read, it is the perfect gateway to the more difficult classical Latin of Caesar, Cicero, and Virgil.

Memoria Press' [Prima Latina](#) and [Latina Christiana](#) programs are Christian Latin courses designed to introduce your child to the rich heritage of the Christian tradition, and will provide you, the teacher, with the necessary core component for your Latin-centered curriculum.

Need a short answer?
Mean Verbal SAT scores for 2001:

LATIN STUDENTS: 665

Spanish Students: 583

French Students: 633

German Students: 625

Average for all students: 506

Top 10 Reasons to Study Latin:

1. Latin is the superior method for teaching English grammar
2. Over half of all English words come from Latin.
3. Latin students scored 159 points better than average on the verbal section of the 2001 SAT
4. Latin is rigorous and challenging and prepares students for higher levels of learning.
5. 61% of colleges surveyed said they view Latin students as “much stronger” or “somewhat stronger” than other applicants
6. Latin, the language used by history’s greatest minds, is the gateway to classical texts.
7. Latin is systematic, organized, and teaches students how to absorb information.
8. Latin is pervasive in the specialized vocabulary of doctors, lawyers, scientists, astronomers, economists, educators, politicians...
9. Latin grammar is rhythmic and fun to learn
10. “Latin is not dead, it’s IMMORTAL”-Chesterton.