

RECITATION  
OF LATIN  
PROSE AND VERSE

by Brian Bishop  
*(Brennus Legranus)*

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DE PROSAE AC POESIS

RECITATIONE

IN LINGUA LATINA

a Brian Bishop  
*(a Brenno Legrano)*

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# RECITATION OF LATIN PROSE AND VERSE

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## 0. PREFACE

0.1 I have compiled this guide for anyone who enjoys or teaches or studies Latin, to do so through the ear and tongue as well as the eye in all kinds of reading. I also hope that it will provide criteria for both teachers and students in recitation competitions (e.g. [www.arlt.co.uk/competition](http://www.arlt.co.uk/competition)).

0.2 Latin texts are often read and taught as though solving a puzzle, rather than seeking the meaning. However, Latin is a language like any other, and is best experienced and understood with the whole being. All languages have four aspects, (1) reading, (2) writing, (3) listening, (4) speaking. In Latin: (1) reading tends to mean translating long passages into modern vernacular to test understanding; (2) writing tends to mean translating short snippets from a vernacular into Latin, so as to exercise points of grammar and vocabulary; (3 & 4) listening and speaking are

## 0. PRAEFATIO

0.1 Hunc libellum exaravi, ut qui lingua latina fruatur aut eam doceat aut ei studeat, quum oculos tum os et aures adhibeat in omni legendi genere. Praeterea libellum regulas vel normas et magistris et studentibus in certaminibus recitationum praebiturum spero (e.g. [www.arlt.co.uk/competition](http://www.arlt.co.uk/competition)).

0.2 Textus latini saepe leguntur et docentur sicut enigma enodandum, magis quam res, quae etiam gaudium praebeant et penitus sentiantur. Attamen lingua latina non differt ab aliis linguis, et optime omnibus sensibus experienda et intellegenda est. Omnes linguae quattuor habent usus – (1) legere, (2) scribere, (3) audire, (4) loqui. Ex illis in lingua latina: (1) legere saepe solum significat textum longum in linguam vernaculam vertere, ut perceptio sensus aestimetur; (2) scribere saepe significat sententias breves e lingua hodierna latine vertere, ut regulae grammaticae vocabulaque

usually considered unnecessary, especially as they are not called for in examinations.

0.3 As well as the voice the whole body should be involved, including stance and gestures, the more fully to feel and express the whole meanings. This is outside the scope of this guide; but is dealt with by Quintilian *Inst.* 11.3 (v. footnote 9). In practice this aspect will depend on the natures of each individual teacher and student.

0.4 I have selected quotations by authorities over the centuries with greater minds than mine. They have expressed similar views and given good advice. Such voices are seldom heard these busy days. For reasons of space the longer or better known quotations are not always translated here.

0.5 I have taken a step unusual for these days of writing this not only in my language, English, but also in Latin. This assumes that a Latinist, as anyone dealing in a given language, will wish to use that language. It is also for the benefit of any Latinist who is less fluent in English.

exercitentur; (3 & 4) audire et loqui supervacanea haberi solent, praecipue quod in probationibus non postulantur.

0.3 Ut plenus sensus penitus intellegatur et exprimatur, praeter vocem, corpore et motu manuum pedumque utendum est. Hoc est extra scopum hujus libellum; sed tractatur a Quintiliano *Inst.* 11, 3 (v. adnotationem 43). In docendo hoc ex ingeniis singulis magistri et studentis pendeat.

0.4 Citationes omnium saeculorum depromptae sunt ex operibus auctorum me doctiorum ingeniosiorumque, qui opiniones similes expresserunt et consilia utilia dederunt. Tales voces raro his diebus negotiosis audiuntur. Ubi spatium deest, hic citationes longiores aut notiores non semper vertuntur.

0.5 Praeter consuetudinem hodiernam hunc libellum non solum lingua mea anglica sed etiam latine scripsi. Mihi in animo latinista versatur, qui, ut quivis in alia lingua, in sermone latino callere cupit. Hoc etiam facio ut prosit latinistae cuivis, qui linguam latinam melius quam anglicam calleat.

## 1. THE IMPORTANCE OF RECITING CORRECTLY

1.1. This study covers the sounds and rhythms of Latin prose and verse. It proposes a simple system of presentation of word stress, metric weight and phrasing, with normal word order<sup>1</sup>, for students and lovers of the Latin language. Although there are many publications on this subject, this study seeks to summarize the main issues. The principles apply to any prose or any Classical metre verse in Latin over more than two millennia up to the present. Questions, such as ecclesiastic or ceremonial pronunciations, are beyond the present scope. Translations of quotations from other languages are mine.

1.2. Insofar as this way of recitation follows the ‘restored’ pronunciation, perhaps it should be called ‘restored’ recitation also.

1.3. These words deserve especial consideration:

*“When we think of writing as more important than speech, we are putting the cart before the horse in every respect.”*

(Hall, Robert: *Leave your language alone*’ (1950).

*“Language is shaped air, a sign ¶ that cannot be seen. What you see on the page ¶ is writing, not language.”*

(Bringinghurst, Robert: *Selected poems*, Jonathan Cape, review by John Burnside, *The times*, ‘The review’, 21/8/2010.

1.4. **In teaching Latin as a live language**, whilst this study mainly considers reading and declaiming Latin, these words should be noted:  
*“Exercitium linguae loquendi in scholis ... omnino necessarium esse et sine magno discentium incommodo neglegi aut omitti non posse.”*  
*“Quomodo enim potest alios docere, qui ipse pure et emendate loqui non potest nec id ipsum loquendo et pronuntiando praestare, quod a suis discipulis requirit?”* [The practice of speaking the language in schools is absolutely essential and cannot be left out except at a severe disadvantage to the learners. How then can someone teach others who cannot speak clearly and accurately himself, and in speech and pronunciation demonstrate what pupils need?] (Posselius, Johannes, (1528-1591), *De ratione discendae ac docendae linguae latinae et graecae oratio*, §§274-275, 1594; quoted in Frisch, Andreas: *Lateinsprechen im Unterricht*, Bamberg, Buchner, 1990, ISBN 3-7661-5422-2, which German-speakers should read.

1.5. Similarly, Comenius (Komensky, Johann Amos, 1592-1670) wrote this amongst other important advice, that has been quoted by many: “*Omnis lingua usu potius discatur quam praeceptis, id est, audiendo, legendo, relegendo, transscribendo, imitationem manu & lingua tentando quam creberrime.*” [Every language is learned through practice rather than precept, that is by listening, reading, revising, copying out and trying to imitate with hand and tongue as often as possible.] (*Opera didactica omnia*, Amsterdam 1657, Pars I<sup>a</sup>, XXII.iii.11, p.129, <[http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/camenaref/comenius/comenius1/p1/Comenius\\_opera\\_1.html](http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/camenaref/comenius/comenius1/p1/Comenius_opera_1.html)>). Also in his *Janua Linguarum Reserata*, 1631 (p.17, §1): “*Qui intellegit, quod exprimere nequit, à mutâ statuâ quid differt?*” [He who understands what he cannot express is no different from a dumb statue.] <[http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=PFQTAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=PFQTAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)>

1.6. Even the British government in 1988 recommended: “*To relegate spoken Latin to the status of an optional extra, to be included if time allows, when “real” literature can be studied, is seriously to mislead pupils about how the Latin language operates, to ignore some of its most striking characteristics...*”<sup>2</sup>

1.7. The American Classical League with The American Philological Association published the following in 2010 in *Standards for Latin Teacher preparation*, p.14 –

“*Assessment should measure not only what students know about the language, but what students can do with the language in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.*”

<[http://www.aclclassics.org/uploads/assets/files/Standards\\_for\\_Latin\\_Teacher\\_Preparation.pdf](http://www.aclclassics.org/uploads/assets/files/Standards_for_Latin_Teacher_Preparation.pdf)>

See also Neumann, Jeanne Marie: *A poem in other words is a language lesson* – <<http://www.camws.org/CJ/neumann.pdf>>

1.8. **On reading Latin aloud**, Erasmus<sup>\*3</sup> wrote at length (§22<sup>4</sup>). Academics debate whether Augustine’s surprise that Ambrose of Milan read silently<sup>5</sup> and Plutarch’s comment that Caesar could read silently (*Brut.* 5) prove that silent reading was unusual in Ancient times and

since. Whatever the case, writings intend to excite the mind's ear and the other senses, and figures of speech are intended to be heard.

1.9. Friedrich Nietzsche wrote quite a lot about reading aloud in paragraphs around § 247 of his book *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* [Beyond good and evil]:

German: <[www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/7204](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/7204)>

English: <[www.gutenberg.org/files/4363/4363-h/4363-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4363/4363-h/4363-h.htm)>

1.10. Albert Manguel wrote extensively about reading aloud over the centuries in his *A history of reading*<sup>1</sup>, HarperCollins, 1997, ISBN 0-00-654681-1. He describes the “pleasure in the sound of words” (p.13). He notably recounts in the same book reading to the blind Jorge Luis Borges. In particular (p.17) he refers to the connection between the sound and the meaning of words in the article by Jorge Luis Borges <<http://www.ciudadseva.com/textos/teoria/opin/borges3.htm>>. Also in the chapter following *Being read to*, he looks at this question and mentions Pliny working on a text to dictate to his secretary (*Epistula*, 9.36). This all reminds us that the noun ‘reading’ is both active and passive. Moreover there are many literary festivals where authors recite their works. Audio books of all kinds for the blind and sighted proliferate.

1.11. But of greatest interest is the whole of chapter two of Albert Manguel's book, *The silent readers*, (pp. 40-53), to be found in its entirety on the Web –

<[http://www.stanford.edu/class/history34q/readings/Manguel/Silent\\_Readers.html](http://www.stanford.edu/class/history34q/readings/Manguel/Silent_Readers.html)>

1.12. William Harris deals with the same subject in *The sin of silent reading* –

<<http://community.middlebury.edu/~harris/LatinBackground/SilentReading.html>> See also by him *Two deadly sins for Latinists in Texas Classics in Action*, Winter 2002, pp.9-12.

1.13. See also the article by Peaks, Mary Bradford *The classical weekly*, vol. 5, no. 11 (Jan. 13, 1912), pp. 84-86, *The teaching of Latin composition in college*:

“One hears a great deal in these days about the value of oral work in the study of a foreign tongue. ... Even poor students sometimes show surprising enthusiasm in this sort of work.”

1.14. **Saying Latin out aloud while writing** is important. By definition Cicero’s orations were originally declaimed, and, in having them written out and polished after the event, he would have had the techniques of declamation in mind. We hear him in his letters (e.g. *Att.* 5.1, 13.42, 15.11, *Fam.* 12.30.1). Whilst Virgil recited his *Aeneid* in draft to Augustus, his sister swooned at the description of the death of her son Marcellus<sup>6</sup>.

1.15. Also worth reading in Albert Manguel’s book already mentioned (§ 1.10) is the chapter *The author as reader* (pp. 246-259) about authors, who used to recite their writings, among whom he mentions Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* 1.3, 1.13, 2.19, 5.12, 6.17, 6.21, 7.17, 8.12, 9.3, 9.11, 9.23; Juvenal *Satires* 7.39-47; Martial’s *Epigrams* 3.44; Jean de Joinville’s *Histoire de Saint Louis* (1309); Froissart reading *Méliador* to the Comte du Blois; Charles d’Orléan; Fernando de Rojas’ novel *La Celestina* (Prólogo: “*Assi que quando diez personas se juntaren á oyr esta comedia*”) (1499); Ludovico Ariosto reading *Orlando Furioso* to Isabella Gonzaga (1507); Geoffrey Chaucer *passim* (according to Ruth Crosby *Chaucer and the custom of oral delivery*, in *Speculum: a journal of medieval studies* 13, 1938); Molière; Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Alfred Lord Tennyson *Maud*.

1.16. Many modern prose writers write aloud: e.g. ¶Diana Athill, “*Read it aloud to yourself because that’s the only way to be sure the rhythms of the sentences are OK (prose rhythms are too complex and subtle to be thought out – they can be got right only by ear)*”. ¶Helen Dunmore, “*Listen to what you have written*”. ¶Esther Freud, “*A story needs rhythm. Read it aloud to yourself. If it doesn’t spin a bit of magic, it’s missing something*”. ¶Michael Morpurgo: “*How [the book] sounds is hugely important*” (*The guardian*, 20.2.2010). ¶Beverly Clearly (1916-), “*I read my books aloud before they were published*.” ¶Stephen Ambrose (1936-2002), “*Reading your own material aloud forces you to listen*.” ¶Helen Dunmore (1952-), “*Writing poetry makes you intensely conscious of how words sound*,



*both aloud and inside the head of the reader. You learn the weight of words and how they sound to the ear”.*

1.17. Sheila Hancock, English actress, *“I think poetry should be read aloud because only that way do you catch the rhythm. ... But even when I’m just looking at it I do find myself muttering it aloud. There is a metre and it has a beat that sometimes synchronizes with your heartbeat or whatever, and that can help you into the meaning, feeling and mood of the poem. Just say it aloud and very often it unlocks itself for you.”* (Radio Times 16-22 May 2009, 25.).

1.18. Charles Dickens (1812-1870), the famous English novelist, often read his books in front of well-attended meetings.

1.19. **Topics considered in this study** exercised Erasmus\*. They are explored more deeply and widely in other publications, such as Allen\* (1973, 1988). Length/quantity, stress/ loudness/ intensity, weight, intonation/ pitch in speech as relevant to this study are variously considered in Atkins\* (referring to German), Block & Trager\*, Isidorus\*<sup>7</sup>, Nougaret\*, Sweet\*, Varro. More simply, *“There are only three means whereby speech- rhythms can be expressed in reading or chanting, namely by variety in the loudness, or in the pitch, or in the duration of the syllabic units”* (Robert Bridges, *Ibant obscuri*). All these are studied by the English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins<sup>8</sup> in letters, particularly his New Rhythm. Alliteration as a metric device in Latin (e.g. Evans\*) and gestures<sup>9</sup> are outside the present scope.

1.20. Among other authors who have dealt with Latin prosody the following deserve mention:

~ Venerable Bede (673-675), *De arte metrica* –

<[http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z\\_0627-](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_0627-0735_Beda_Venerabilis_De_Arte_Metrica_Liber_Ad_Wigbertum_Levitam_MLT.pdf.html)

[0735\\_Beda\\_Venerabilis\\_De\\_Arte\\_Metrica\\_Liber\\_Ad\\_Wigbertum\\_Levitam\\_MLT.pdf.html](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_0627-0735_Beda_Venerabilis_De_Arte_Metrica_Liber_Ad_Wigbertum_Levitam_MLT.pdf.html)>

~ Eva Castro dealing with Bede in *De San Agustín a Beda: la estética de la poesía rítmica*, Universidad de Santiago;

~ Erasmus, *Dialogus ciceronianus*.

1.21. I highly recommend the book by Clive Brooks, *Reading Latin poetry aloud: a practical guide to two thousand years of verse*, ISBN 9780521697408<sup>10</sup>.

1.22. **How to indicate word-stress together with weight** in practice is one of the aims of my proposals, although not new. I owe much to Gerry Nussbaum's\* three publications, among others. Becker\* (2004) covers similar ground. Stroh\* and Bordelon emphasise the close interdependence of stress and weight in verse. Incidentally, I thank Hans-Chr. Schröter for his help and advice in the Latin of this exercise.

1.23. The stress and weight connection is affirmed in Raeburn\*:  
“Among the finer details, I specially valued his [West's] emphasis on the sound of the verse, not only the alliterations and assonances of the brilliant word-play, but the variations in stress within [Shakespeare's] iambic line, which recall the subtle counterpoint of metrical ictus [§2.9] and word stress which is crucial to our appreciation of Virgil”.

1.24. An analogy in reciting Shakespeare can be seen by comparing two well-known lines, firstly strictly observing the iambic pentametres (here acute accents) and then giving the words their meaningful stress (here underlined):

Once móre untó the breách dear friénds, once móre (*Henry V*, 3.1.);  
and

To bé or nót to bé, that is the quéstion (*Hamlet*, 3.1).

Does this happen in other languages?

1.25. Quintilian (11.3.108) feels the rhythm at the start of Cicero's speech *Pro Ligario*: “Language has certain imperceptible stresses, which we might call feet, to which the gesture of most speakers conforms. Thus there will be one movement each at novum crimen, at Gai Caesar, at et ante hanc diem, at non auditum, at propinquus meus, at ad te, at Quintus Tubero and at detulit”. See also Sonkowski\* *Ictus*.

1.26. The kinds of metres in poetry are dealt with by Dufter, Andreas, *Meter and prosody: comparing accentual and caesura restrictions in French and Spanish verse* –

<[http://www.uni-muenster.de/imperia/md/content/allgemeine\\_sprachwissenschaft/docs/dufter\\_dgfs\\_2010\\_ag\\_12\\_prosodic\\_typology.pdf](http://www.uni-muenster.de/imperia/md/content/allgemeine_sprachwissenschaft/docs/dufter_dgfs_2010_ag_12_prosodic_typology.pdf)>

1.27. The importance of the word-stress is seen on page 4 of Bennett, Charles E., *Quantitative reading of Latin Poetry* –  
<<http://www.archive.org/stream/quantitativerea00benngoog#page/n12/mode/2up>>  
<[http://ia351414.us.archive.org/3/items/quantitativeread00bennuoft/quantitativeread00bennuoft\\_bw.pdf](http://ia351414.us.archive.org/3/items/quantitativeread00bennuoft/quantitativeread00bennuoft_bw.pdf)>

1.28. Thus, both verse and prose should be read for sense, with the normal word stresses, from which the weight rhythm would, as Shakespeare's iambs, make itself felt subliminally of its own accord. In short, by ignoring the metre, but by pronouncing the words with correct weights and accents, the metre emerges enhanced of its own accord.

Marcus Fabius Quintilianus c.35-c.100

<<http://www.calagurris.es/fotos/monumentos/pages/quintiliano.html>>