



INTRODUCTION

ALPHABET

The Latin alphabet was derived from the Etruscan alphabet some time before the seventh century BCE. The Etruscans were a people in pre-Roman Italy.

Their alphabet owes much to the Greek alphabet. In turn, the Greek alphabet was derived from the Phoenician alphabet. Phoenician traders had spread their system of writing throughout the Mediterranean region. The Phoenician alphabet itself can be traced to the North Semitic alphabet, which was used in Syria and Palestine as early as the eleventh century BCE, and is considered to be the earliest fully developed alphabetic writing system.



An Etruscan couple reclining on a funeral sarcophagus.

Look at the English alphabet in the left column, and at the Latin alphabet in the right one. The Latin alphabet is accompanied by the names of the Latin letters (in parentheses).

| English Alphabet | | Latin Alphabet | | |
|------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|-----------------|
| Uppercase | Lowercase | Uppercase | Lowercase | Letter Name |
| A | a | A | a | (a “ăh”) |
| B | b | B | b | (be “bay”) |
| C | c | C | c | (ce “cay”) |
| D | d | D | d | (de “day”) |
| E | e | E | e | (e “ĕh”) |
| F | f | F | f | (ef) |
| G | g | G | g | (ge “gay”) |
| H | h | H | h | (ha “hah”) |
| I | i | I | i | (i “ee”) |
| J | j | | | |
| K | k | K | k | (ka “kah”) |
| L | l | L | l | (el) |
| M | m | M | m | (em) |
| N | n | N | n | (en) |
| O | o | O | o | (o “ôh”) |
| P | p | P | p | (pe “pay”) |
| Q | q | Q | q | (qu “koo”) |
| R | r | R | r | (er) |
| S | s | S | s | (es) |
| T | t | T | t | (te “tay”) |
| U | u | U | u | (u “oo”) |
| V | v | V | v | (u consonant) |
| W | w | | | |
| X | x | X | x | (ix “eex”) |
| Y | y | Y | y | (upsilon) |
| Z | z | Z | z | (zeta “dzayta”) |

The English alphabet is derived directly from the Latin alphabet. This accounts for the great similarities between the two alphabets. There are 26 letters in the English alphabet and 24 in the Latin. The differences are the following:

- The letter **W, w** (which is the doubled letter **v**) is missing in the Latin alphabet.
- The letter **J, j** is a more recent invention. In fact, it appears in Latin texts written during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as well as in many modern editions of ancient Latin texts. It is used to indicate the semi-vowel **i**, sometimes called consonantal **i**. The consonantal **i** is



the *i* at the beginning of a word before a vowel, or *i* between two vowels. According to this method, for example, *Iūlius* is written *Jūlius*, and *Āiax* is written *Ājax*. In this book, the letter *J, j* will not be used.

- The distinction between the vowel *U, u* and the consonant *V, v* also belongs to later times. Initially, there was only one letter *V, u* used both for the vowel and the consonant, e.g., *Vrbs*, “The City,” (i.e., Rome), or *uictor*, “the winner.”
- However, in accord with the prevailing practice of expressing the vowel with *U, u*, and the consonant with *V, v*, in this book the two letters will be distinguished.



The Latin words *senātus*, *rēgēs*, *ulla*, *gentēs*, and *primus* are engraved on this stone.



Sign from Pompeii carved on stone with Latin letters.

PRONUNCIATION OF LATIN

VOWELS

There are six vowels in Latin and their pronunciation is as follows:

| Long Vowel Sound | Short Vowel Sound |
|--|---|
| <i>ā</i> is pronounced as in “father”: <i>ōrātor</i> “orator” | <i>a</i> is pronounced as in “alike”: <i>amō</i> “love” |
| <i>ē</i> is pronounced like the <i>a</i> in “rave”: <i>nēmō</i> “nobody” | <i>e</i> is pronounced as in “pet”: <i>bene</i> “well” |
| <i>ī</i> is pronounced like the double <i>e</i> in “seen”: <i>līmes</i> “boundary” | <i>i</i> is pronounced as in “pit”: <i>nihil</i> “nothing” |
| <i>ō</i> is pronounced as in “stove”: <i>videō</i> “(I) see” | <i>o</i> is pronounced as in “often”: <i>rosa</i> “rose” |
| <i>ū</i> is pronounced as in “moon”: <i>ūnus</i> “one” | <i>u</i> is pronounced as in “put”: <i>tum</i> “then” |
| <i>y</i> comes from Greek and is pronounced in length somewhere between the <i>i</i> in “hit” and the <i>u</i> in “mute”: <i>Pŷramus</i> “Pyramus” | <i>y</i> comes from Greek. Its sound, whether long or short, lies in between the sounds of <i>i</i> and <i>u</i> much as in the French “sûr,” but the sound of short <i>y</i> is less drawn out than that of long <i>y</i> : <i>lyricus</i> “lyrical” |



BY THE WAY

Everywhere in this book long vowels are indicated by macrons, i.e., *ā, ē, ī, ō, ū, ŷ*, while above the short vowels there are no signs. Sometimes two words differ from each other only in the length of the vowel. For example, *mālum*, with a long *a* means “apple,” while *malum* with a short *a* means “bad thing.”

► EXERCISE 1

Repeat these words aloud after your teacher pronounces them.

- | | | | |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| 1. alō | 7. lēnis | 13. probō | 19. sūtor |
| 2. alumnus | 8. sēdēs | 14. nota | 20. ūsus |
| 3. rāna | 9. iter | 15. pōnō | 21. syllaba |
| 4. rādō | 10. timeō | 16. dōnum | 22. Pŷrēnē |
| 5. teneō | 11. nītor | 17. ululō | |
| 6. petō | 12. mīrus | 18. lupus | |

DIPHTHONGS

Diphthongs are two vowels combined in one syllable and pronounced together as one sound. There are six diphthongs in Latin:

- **ae** much like the *y* in “sky”: *laevus* “left”
- **au** pronounced as **ou** in “our”: *aurum* “gold”
- **ei** pronounced as **ei** in “feign”: *oiei!* “alas!”
- **eu** pronounced **eo**, much as if in the two words “grey blue” you were to subtract the “gr-” and the “bl-” and combine the two vowel sounds: *Eurōpa* “Europe”
- **oe** pronounced as **oy** in “boy”: *proelium* “battle”
- **ui** pronounced nearly like “we”: *hui!* “oh!”

It is believed that quite early, still in ancient times, the diphthongs **ae** and **oe** began to be pronounced as **e**. If you encounter them written **āē** or **āĕ**, and **ōē** or **ōĕ**, this means that they are not diphthongs and the letters should be pronounced separately: *āēr*, *poēta*.

The diphthongs are always long.

► EXERCISE 2

Repeat these words after your teacher pronounces them.

- | | | |
|-----------|------------|------------|
| 1. aestās | 7. seu | 13. aēneus |
| 2. aequō | 8. moenia | 14. poēma |
| 3. raeda | 9. neu | 15. hei |
| 4. laudō | 10. poena | 16. huic |
| 5. aut | 11. neuter | |
| 6. aula | 12. Poenus | |



CONSONANTS

- **c** is pronounced as in “come”: *clārus* “bright,” *censeō* “(I) deem,” *cārus* “dear.”
- When **b** is followed by **s**, as in *urbs* “city,” the sound of **b** approaches that of **p**: a sound we might represent as *urps*.
- **g** is pronounced as in “get”: *gaudium* “joy,” *gignō* “(I) beget, (I) bear,” *grātia* “favor, agreeableness.”
- Some think that the Romans of Cicero’s time (first century BCE) pronounced the two consonants **ng** as **ngn**: for example, the adjective *māgnus* “great,” would have been pronounced in a way that we might represent as *mangnus*.
- **k** is a very rare consonant. In fact, it appears only in two words: *Kalendae* “the first day of every month in the Roman calendar,” and in the personal name *Kaeso*.
- **q** appears always in combination with **u** and the combination **qu** is pronounced as in “queen”: *quattuor*, “four.”
- **v** has a sound similar to **w** (as in the word “wife”): *videō* “I see.”
- The consonant **u** in the combination **su** sounds like the English **w** in the following four words: *suēscō*, “(I) become accustomed”; *Suēvī*, a name of a German tribe; *suādeō*, “(I) advise”; *suāvis*, “sweet.”
- The letter **r** is trilled slightly. The sound has no exact equivalent in English, but is heard in many other European languages. The best way to make this sound is to pronounce **r** as in “rope,” but vibrate the end of the tongue slightly as you say it.
- **x** is a double consonant (equivalent to **cs** or **gs**) that sounds much like the **x** in “six.”
- **z** is another double consonant (equivalent to **dz**) and sounds almost like **z** in “zebra.” It begins with a slight **d** sound first, so in pronouncing this letter you should hear **dz**.
- **ph** sounds like **p** in “pen,” but with the addition of a slight breath of air represented by the **h**; **th** sounds like **t** as in “Tom,” but with the addition of a slight extra breathing represented by the **h**; **ch** sounds nearly like the combination **kh**. These consonants are borrowed from Greek and appear in Greek words: *zephyrus* “western breeze,” *chorus* “chorus,” *theātrum* “theatre.” When **p** and **t** are not accompanied by **h**, this slight aspiration is absent.
- When consonants are doubled, as in the verb *aggredior*, the consonantal sound is lengthened slightly.

► EXERCISE 3

Repeat these words after your teacher pronounces them:

- | | | |
|-------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. <i>cibus</i> | 7. <i>glōria</i> | 13. <i>phasēlus</i> |
| 2. <i>capiō</i> | 8. <i>Zeus</i> | 14. <i>charta</i> |
| 3. <i>cumulus</i> | 9. <i>bibliothēca</i> | 15. <i>cēlō</i> |
| 4. <i>crēscō</i> | 10. <i>philosophia</i> | 16. <i>antīquus</i> |
| 5. <i>gemma</i> | 11. <i>zōna</i> | |
| 6. <i>Gallus</i> | 12. <i>theōrēma</i> | |

ACCENT

A Latin word is made up not just of letters, but also of syllables. A Latin word has as many syllables as it has vowels or diphthongs (a diphthong works like a single vowel, since it is made up of two vowels pronounced together [see diphthongs, above]).

You will need to know the following terms, when learning about accent.

- ultima the last syllable in a word
- penult the second-to-last syllable in a word
- antepenult the third-to-last syllable in a word

So, in the word *ze-phy-rus* the vowel *u* is the ultima, *y* is the penult, and *e* is the antepenult.

RULES ABOUT THE STRESS ACCENT IN LATIN

1. The stress accent in Latin falls on either the penult or the antepenult.
2. The accent falls on the penult, if the penult is long. If the penult is short, the accent falls on the antepenult.
3. How to determine whether the penult is long or short.
 - a. If the penult contains a long vowel (or any diphthong), the penult itself is long. You often need to learn whether the vowel in the penult is long or short as a basic element in learning a new word. A macron above the vowel will tell you that the vowel is long, while the absence of a macron will indicate a short vowel. Pronouncing the word can help you remember the vowel lengths. For example, *vi-de-ō*, “I see,” is pronounced *vi’deō*; while *au-rō-ra*, “dawn,” is pronounced *aurō’ra*; and *po-pu-lus*, “people” is pronounced *po’pulus*.
 - b. If the vowel in the penult is followed by two or more consonants, the penult is long, **no matter whether the vowel in the penult is long or short**, and the accent necessarily falls on the penult. For example, *do-cu-men-tum*, “document,” is pronounced *documen’tum*.



BY THE WAY

The consonant *x* is double (*cs* or *gs*) and counts as two consonants when determining whether the penult is long.

- c. There is one exception to ‘b’ above. Sometimes, even when there are two consonants between the penult and the ultima, they still do not determine that the penult is long. This happens when the two consonants are a mute and a liquid.

The mutes are *p, b, d, t, g, c*.

The liquids are *l, r*.

So, in the word *pal-pe-bra*, “eyelid,” the antepenult is accented (*pal’pebra*); the vowel of the penult is short, since it is followed by a mute and a liquid. Of course, rule ‘a’ still applies: in the word *the-ā-trum*, “theatre,” the penult is accented (*theā’trum*), since it is naturally long, something we learn from the macron.



► EXERCISE 4

Repeat each sentence aloud after your teacher reads it. Pay attention to the pronunciation and stress accent of each word.

What it is Like to Live Over a Bathhouse!

(Adapted from Seneca, *Moral Letter 56*)

Ecce undique clāmor sonat! Suprā ipsum balneum habitō! Prōpōne nunc tibi omnia genera vōcum odiōsa! Fortiōrēs exercentur et manūs plumbō gravēs iactant, cum aut labōrant aut labōrantem imitantur. Gemitūs audiō, quotiēns spīritum remīsērunt. Sunt quoque ūnctōrēs et tractātōrēs. Audiō crepitum manuum umerōs ferientium: sonus quoque ictuum mūtātur: nunc enim manus pervenit plāna, nunc concava. Audiō clāmōrēs, sī fūr est in balneō dēprehēnsus.

Look, there is noise sounding all around! I live above the bathhouse itself! Imagine to yourself now all the hateful types of voices! The stronger ones exercise themselves and swing their hands loaded with lead weights, while they work out—or imitate a person working out. I hear moans, every time they let go a <pent-up> breath. There are also anointers and masseurs. I hear the slap of hands hitting shoulders and the sound of the blows changes: for sometimes the hands come flat, sometimes cupped. I hear shouting, if a thief is caught in the bathhouse.

A pool from inside the Roman Baths in Bath, England.



OVERVIEW OF ROMAN HISTORY

According to legend, Romulus and his twin brother Remus were set adrift on the Tiber River. A she-wolf nursed the boys until a shepherd rescued them. Upon reaching manhood, in 753 BCE, the twins founded a new city near the place where they had been found by the she-wolf, on the basis of an *augustō auguriō*, “a favorable sighting of birds.” But Romulus killed Remus in a dispute over who would rule the new city and became its first king.



A view of the Tiber River as it flows through the city of Rome.

Six other kings ruled after Romulus: Numa Pompilius, Tullus Hostilius, Ancus Martius, Tarquinius Priscus, Servius Tullius, and Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Proud). After the last of these seven kings was overthrown in 509 BCE, Rome became a republic, with a representative form of government headed by two consuls, elected annually. By 451 BCE, the first corpus of Roman law, known as the Twelve Tables, was created.

In the last century BCE, the Roman Republic was shaken apart by a series of civil wars. By 31 BCE an autocratic regime headed earlier by Julius Caesar and later by his great-nephew Octavian brought the Republic to an end. The years from 27 BCE—when Octavian assumed the title of *princeps*, “chief citizen,” as well as the name Augustus—to around 180 CE are known as the early principate, or empire. During this era Rome extended her boundaries to the British Isles in the north, North Africa in the south, Spain in the west, and the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the east.



From 180 CE onwards, in the period known as the late empire, the Roman state experienced severe economic problems and frequent invasions by Germanic tribes. Responding to the pressure of the first wave of migrations, as well as internal political unrest and economic difficulties, the emperor Diocletian (ruled 284–305 CE) had already divided the Roman Empire into an Eastern and Western half, each under its own emperor—an attempt to make the vast Roman state more manageable.

This political division of the empire actually mirrored a cultural division too: the main language of the West was Latin, while the main language of the East was Greek. Shortly afterwards the emperor Constantine (ruled 312–337 CE) established a new capital for the Eastern empire at Byzantium, which he renamed Constantinople (“the city of Constantine,” today called Istanbul). But even after this reorganization, the imperial government ultimately proved incapable of stemming the tide of the migrations, in part because the Roman army was too widely extended and could not be in so many places at once. Indeed many of the invaders were given the status of *foederātī* or “treaty troops.” In effect, they were allowed to occupy segments of the empire in return for protecting it. So when Alaric, King of the Visigoths sacked Rome in 410 CE, he actually had a title as a commander in the Roman army!

Rome was sacked again in 455 CE by the Vandals, who had already occupied the Roman province of North Africa. The pillaging of the city of Romulus by the invaders made a profound impression on contemporaries, and to this day the term “vandalism” is a word in several languages for wanton destruction. While the Eastern empire (always more stable and economically prosperous than the West) continued to exist until 1453 CE, the Western empire was extinct as a political entity by 476 CE. In its place were Germanic kingdoms and tribes: Angles and Saxons in Britain, Visigoths in Spain, Ostrogoths in Italy, Franks and Burgundians in Gaul—to name only the major groups. The combination of these new societies with the previous inhabitants, who had been Romanized to varying degrees, would one day provide the basis for the cultures of modern Europe.

But the end of the ancient Roman Empire in the West was **not** the end of Latin. On the contrary, during the next 1200 years Latin not only flourished as the major literary language in the territories of the former Western Roman Empire, the use of Latin was extended to regions the Romans had never occupied, including Ireland, Scandinavia, and even the New World.

BEGINNINGS OF LATIN LITERATURE

Very few complete works of Latin literature produced before the mid-second century BCE (i.e., before 150 BCE) have survived. One reason for this loss was the tremendous popularity of the works produced in the following century by such authors as Cicero, Vergil, and Ovid. Their writings were so widely read and copied in subsequent centuries that the authors preceding them were gradually neglected.

Among the major figures of early Latin literature was a freed slave from the Greek city of Tarentum named Livius Andronicus, who lived from 284–204 BCE. He was known for his adaptations of Greek drama for Roman audiences, and his translation of Homer’s *Odyssey* into Latin verse.

THE ROMAN WORLD





PONTUS EUXINUS

PERSIA →

ASIA

PONTUS

BITHŶNIA

THRĀCIA

Byzantium/
Constantinopolis

ASIA PRŌVINCIA

Troia/Ilium

Antiochia

SYRIA

Babylōn

CYPRUS

CRĒTA

Alexandrĕa

AEGYPTUS

Internum

MACEDONIA

EPĪRUS

ITHACA

GRAECIA

Olympus Mōns

Thermopylae

Delphī

Athēnae

Sparta

DĒLOS

Mare Aegaeum

The Romans regarded Ennius (ca. 239–169 BCE) as the father of Latin literature. He wrote many kinds of literary works, including plays. His *Annālēs*, an epic poem about the early history of Rome, was particularly renowned, and perhaps the primary epic read in Roman schools before the time of Vergil. Only fragments of his writings remain.

One of Ennius' contemporaries was the famed Cato the Censor, also known as Cato the Elder (234–149 BCE), a rigidly conservative Roman senator. Most of his treatise on agriculture, called *Dē agrī cultūrā*, survives. It is the oldest work of Latin prose; among Cato's recommendations here are that field slaves be treated similarly to beasts of burden. Cato is also remembered for his statement *Carthāgō dēlenda est*, "Carthage must be destroyed," evidence for the Roman fear of the Carthaginians. The Romans fought three wars, known as the Punic Wars, against the Carthaginians. The first ended before Cato was born; in the second, against Hannibal, Cato served with military distinction; the third ended in 146 BCE, as Cato had demanded, with the destruction of Carthage. On this occasion the victorious Romans were said to have plowed salt into the Carthaginian soil.

Discussions about later authors and adaptations from their writings will be presented chronologically in the chapters of this book.



Ancient ruins at Carthage in Africa.