

THE COMPREHENSIVE ADVANTAGES OF LEARNING LATIN (AND AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE)

<http://www.ccaeagles.org/elementary/upload/Why-Study-Latin.pdf>

#1 Knowledge of classical languages increases English vocabulary. About half of all English vocabulary comes from Latin and another 20 percent from Greek. These words tend to be the difficult, polysyllabic ones—“SAT words.” A thorough knowledge of classical languages will increase the student’s English vocabulary tremendously.

#2 Classical languages aid in the understanding of English grammar. Studying a highly inflected language—that is, one that marks grammatical changes with a fully developed system of case endings—gives students a better grasp of English grammar. In fact, generations of teachers have observed that Latin teaches English better than English by requiring students to accurately identify each part of speech for every word!

#3 Latin is the key to modern languages. Knowing Latin makes it much easier to learn the grammar and vocabulary of the modern Romance languages (e.g., Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian), since they take about 80 percent of their vocabulary from Latin. Both classical tongues (Latin & Greek) greatly aid in learning other inflected languages, such as German or Russian.

#4 Latin students perform exceptionally well on standardized tests and are sought after by competitive colleges. As a result of increased vocabulary and facility with English grammar, students of Latin consistently outperform their peers—including those who have studied modern languages—on the verbal portion of the SAT. Between 1997 and 2006, Latin students outscored the average by 157 points. Higher scores open doors to competitive colleges and scholarships.

#5 Several careers require knowledge of classical languages. The technical vocabulary of the medical and legal professions and the hard sciences rests on the foundation of Latin and Greek. Latin is still a required subject for some higher degrees, as is Greek for many entering the ministry.

The Cultural Arguments for Classical Languages

While the ancients did not emphasize utilitarian arguments in defending or explaining their educational system, they did argue for it on cultural grounds. Ancient education meant enculturation, the process by which the highest values of their societies were passed on to the next generation. This is as necessary for us as it was for them—perhaps more so in this age of relativism and anti-intellectualism.

#1 Knowledge of the classics increases cultural literacy. Just as Latin increases literacy in English, so does familiarity with Graeco-Roman culture increase cultural literacy. Along with the Bible, classical literature is the key to understanding English literature, as well as the literatures of Europe (e.g., Dante, English Romantic poets). Likewise, art and music are studded with classical references (e.g., Botticelli’s Venus, Handel’s Semele).

#2 Classical history is our history. As Westerners, we are all heirs to the cultural patrimony of Greece and Rome. Familiarity with the history of the classical world helps in understanding the foundations of our modern democratic society.

#3 The cultural experience of the ancient world is highly relevant to us today. The Roman Empire has been called the first great multiethnic society. Study of Roman successes and failures in this area is timely. Likewise, someone who is familiar with ancient warfare will have a useful perspective on more recent military conflicts.

The Formative Arguments for Classical Languages

The classical curriculum has an unsurpassed track record, not just in filling students’ minds with useful knowledge, but also in forming their minds and their spirits. Intellectual discipline, moral virtue, and appreciation of beauty are the regular results of running the classical race.

#1 The classical curriculum imparts exceptional intellectual discipline. Classical languages form the mind,

inculcating the habits of precision and attention to detail. “Every lesson in Latin is a lesson in logic.” Intellectual rigor prepares the student to discern what is True. It is the surest remedy for the modern ill of relativism.

#2 The classical curriculum inspires moral insight and virtue. The classical world first codified the great virtues of prudence, temperance, justice, and courage. Keeping before the student “the habitual vision of greatness” inspires and uplifts the mind and spirit toward the Good.

#3 The classical curriculum forms aesthetic judgment. Just as the vision of greatness inspires us in the moral realm, living in constant contact with the highest artistic achievements of the West cultivates a taste for the Beautiful. In time, the student will not just appreciate his culture, but will be able to emulate its best and brightest.

The Value of Latin for College and Careers

Latin enhances the English skills of students by offering a grammar that contrasts highly with English. Students acquire a sense of how languages work and a readiness to acquire additional ones, as needed. Latin is the mother tongue of English, contributing about 65% of all English words, and 90% of those over two syllables. Moreover, Latin is the basis of 75-80% of all Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese words. Hence, Latin provides a useful key to building vocabulary in English and other European languages. Unfortunately, Latin word roots and English grammar are skills to which many English teachers today give scant attention.

A background in Latin is an asset to any student who is pursuing a career that demands literacy and/or a technical vocabulary. It is especially useful for such professions as law, insurance, medicine, fictional or technical writing, library science, or management. Students of Latin develop skills and strategies for

acquiring new vocabulary and sentence structures. Latin helps cultivate such mental processes as alertness, attention to detail, memory, logic, and critical reasoning. High technology and service companies that hire liberal arts majors seek prospective employees who can "think on their feet", write clear reports, and quickly master new concepts and technical vocabularies. In addition, those who are pursuing careers in teaching English, History, Philosophy, Comparative Literature, or Modern Languages find that a background in Latin, ancient Greek, or Graeco-Roman civilization can greatly expand the boundaries of their majors.

Of practical use to students is the academic edge that one has with Latin on his transcript, when applying to a four-year college or university. A [survey](#) of college admissions offices across the U.S., published in *Classical Outlook* in 1991, shows that over 61% of all colleges and universities viewed a student with two years of Latin or ancient Greek as either "somewhat stronger" or "much stronger" a candidate for acceptance than other qualified applicants. Why? Because Latin is widely recognized as a challenging elective that develops verbal skills, mental precision, and study skills. Moreover, an almost unanimous 98.6% of the universities surveyed recognize Latin as a language that meets their foreign language requirements for college entrance.

Year after year, Classics majors continue to outperform other language majors on the verbal portion of the Graduate Record Exam. In the past few years, however, comparative scores for individual languages have not been published by the ETS, only a generic score for all languages. In the 1991-92 *Guide to the Graduate Record Exam*, p. 74, the cumulative scores of Classics majors are listed in a chart besides those of other language majors:

Verbal Quantitative Analytic

Classics 628 589 609

French 535 526 550

German 563 558 581

Russian 582 573 595

Spanish 497 496 515

Another indicator of the enhanced verbal skills of Latin students nationwide is their consistently high performance on the SAT Achievement Test. In 1997 Latin students had a mean score of 647 on the SAT, *142 points higher* than the national average of 505. Furthermore, Latin students outperformed students of all other languages, including German and Russian, equally challenging languages, but ones that do not offer as many transferable skills for English. Spanish students scored 581 and French students 623.

It's a similar pattern year after year. Informed students are finding that Latin improves their speaking and writing skills and helps lay a firm foundation for future language study.

Nationwide, there has been a resurgence of interest in the Classics, including growth in language, literature, mythology, archaeology, and word roots courses. From 1985-1995 college Latin enrollments have grown from 24,000 to 26,000, an increase of about 8%. The last census by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) showed that Latin enrollments in public secondary schools increased 15%, from 182,000 in 1990 to 214,000 in fall of 1994. Moreover, there was *over 100 percent increase* in the number of students taking Latin in public middle schools from 12,000 in 1985 to 25,000 in 1994. A survey of private schools in the U.S. in 1994 with a response rate of about 15% by the National Committee for Latin and Greek established that at least another 44,000 students nationwide are studying Latin in private schools, many of which strive to give their students an academic edge. Recently the Montessori Schools and the Edison Project adopted Latin-based programs for their elementary and middle schools, respectively. They did so in order to lay a foundation for literacy in English and for the study of other languages.

Furthermore, thousands of students study Latin in urban city school projects across the U.S., for the simple reason that Latin raises the English vocabulary and reading scores of average and inner-city school children on standardized tests. These proven programs contribute significantly to literacy, cultural awareness and increased self-esteem. Over the past three years, students in the Kansas City Latin Magnet Middle School program (85% African American students) raised their test scores on standardized tests from the lowest to the highest in the school district. The school principal attributes the dramatic improvement mostly to the Latin courses now required of all students, from elementary through middle school. Similar success stories have arisen in Latin-based programs across the U.S. from Philadelphia to Los Angeles, where students improve their English and Spanish via Latin.

As a first language experience, Latin makes sense, because it is the key to 75-80% of the vocabulary of the five "Romance" languages, spoken by some 750 million people in the world today. Fifty-seven nations on four continents share the common linguistic heritage of the Greeks and Romans. A shared cultural heritage is a major factor in the growth of political and economic alliances in the world today. With a solid foundation in language arts, students are equipped to acquire additional languages, as needed.

The study of classical languages, literatures and ideas is a curriculum that appeals to the thoughtful student who is looking for cultural, historical, artistic, or intellectual roots and a sense of identity in a complex world. A major challenge faced by many colleges today is the task of aiding in the assimilation of people of diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds. A Classics program can make a substantial contribution to that effort by teaching the roots of western civilization, including the languages, history,

literature, mythology, political institutions, and humanistic values that we all share. With Latin there are no native speakers! Students who begin the language in college usually start more or less at the same point. Students who have studied French, Spanish, or Latin in high school have an advantage because they have acquired a knowledge of the basic structures of a Latin-based language.

So why not give your students the edge when it comes to English skills, language acquisition, and favored status for college and graduate school admissions? Students benefit from a language that offers so much.

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