

Latin

“Quot homines tot sententiae; suus cuique mos - there are as many people as there are opinions; each one has his own view,” Terentius.

Latin has always been regarded as the language of scholarship; and as the quotation above makes clear, it often offers a brilliant idea in a pithy one liner – try looking on the internet and you will find a huge number of them still today. Rome and the Romans were a hugely influential culture, which has left its mark on nearly every aspect of our lives – so to study it at A level opens doors into a wide variety of options and subject areas.

Course content

The multi-disciplinary nature of Latin is a huge plus when you are deciding whether or not you want to study it further. Of course Latin A level will mean more Latin language work, in order to make you a confident reader of original Latin texts; but it also offers you the chance to think about literature, history and the nature of Roman society, all of which need to be understood for you to be a successful A-level student.

For the language side of the course, your Latin will improve until you become increasingly more confident and assured in your translation work, able to pinpoint specifically interesting words or phrases, and consistently precise in your detailed analysis of the grammar and syntax of a passage. Throughout the course, you will have the chance to sample a wide variety of different Latin authors, exploring not only their use of language but also their ideas, their interests and their widely different attitudes and tastes. Of course, you will need to consolidate and enhance your understanding of grammar and there will be some vocabulary learning to be done - but this will come through experience and consistency. You will also be given the opportunity to attempt some English into Latin work, which will definitely help you in your assimilation of the more complex aspects of the language.

In the literature lessons, you will have the opportunity to study both poetry and prose literature; and a substantial text of each. This year, the set texts are Cicero's *Pro Roscio Amerino*, Cicero's first public speech in defence of a man alleged to have murdered his own father, and Virgil's *Aeneid 4*, the story of the doomed love affair between Dido and Aeneas. Of course, literature work begins with needing to understand and translate the texts with accuracy and precision, but it will quickly progress as you move on to consider these works as both literary texts and social documents, reading them for what they can tell you about Rome, as well as what story they offer you. You will also have the opportunity to read more of Cicero and Virgil's works in English, allowing you to explore further and consolidate your understanding of their ideas.

Skills developed

As a Latin student, you will have an excellent training in rigorous analytical skills and detailed linguistic understanding; you will learn and understand a wide range of Latin words, and see how significant they are as the building blocks of English. You will build a full vocabulary and an excellent grammatical understanding of the language. Moreover, you will also enhance your literary critical faculties, gaining an appreciation of literature and the chance to explore Roman culture, which is at once so different from ours and yet so influential on it.

What a good Latin student looks like

There's a good chance that if you love Latin you probably love language, and all its infinite varieties. You might especially enjoy the literature, for its ideas or its interesting window on the Roman world; or maybe you just really love the way that you can see derivations from Latin words in such a wide variety of different European languages. Or perhaps you like the precision and accuracy Latin offers, and the opportunity to get full marks simply by learning something in detail and with focused determination.

Assessments

There are four examinations, all taken at the end of the two-year course. Two are language papers and two are literature papers.

The first language paper, worth 33% of the total A level, is 1 hour 30 minutes and is simply an unseen paper in which you are required to translate two original pieces of Latin literature, sometimes slightly adapted, into English, one prose, one poetry. The authors will be specified in advance (for examination in 2027 they will be Livy and Ovid). The second language paper, worth 17% of the total A level, will offer a choice: you can either do another shorter translation into English of a Latin passage of prose and then answer a number of comprehension and grammar questions on it, or translate a short passage of English into Latin. We start with an open mind, and see which is likely to be best for you; both options are equally valid and enjoyable.

The two literature papers, each worth 25% of the full A level qualification, both follow the same pattern, one focusing on poetry and one on prose. You will need to know your set texts well, in order to answer translation and analysis questions on each; and then to write an essay about the text, informed by your wider reading of an additional specified portion of the text in English translation.

Entry requirements including skills

You will need a GCSE in Latin to take this course, and ideally you will have enjoyed that GCSE, especially the chance accurately to learn the vocabulary and the precise patterns of verbs; you might also have loved the constructions or the way Latin expresses ideas with participles. You will have the skill of learning by heart; and you will be eager to express your ideas about literature, out loud as well as in writing. You will also be willing to argue with others about it, and to back up your points with specific and detailed textual references.

Beyond the classroom

Beyond the classroom, you are likely to have the opportunity to visit the British Museum in London as part of your course; we also make a point of attending any Classical plays in translation we can find being shown, as well as joint symposia and lectures with Winchester College. There's the opportunity to get involved with and even run a Classics society; and of course, to help the younger years with their work too.

Future Options

If you are taking a Latin A level, you could be thinking about doing a Classics degree. But of course you could also be considering a degree in a wide range of other subjects – your analytical skills and

your attention to detail will make you a strong candidate for many other options. Maybe you are a historian, who needs Latin in order to read about the period you want to explore; or perhaps you are passionate about philosophical or religious documents which can only be unlocked with a Latin key. Beyond degree level, you might be thinking about practising law or about going into the city, both areas with a healthy respect for the power and significance of a Latin qualification.

“Sic itur ad astra – thus one journeys to the stars,” said Virgil; did he perhaps have A level Latin in mind?

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