

How to Actually Learn Latin

A growing number of students and adults today are expressing a desire to learn Latin.

For over a thousand years, this ancient language was one of the building blocks of Western education. But in recent decades, there has been a concerted effort to remove Latin from curricula in schools across America and Europe.

This purge caused a gradual decline in the quality of Latin instruction. As a result, most of those today who teach Latin—and even a good many of those who write Latin textbooks!—don't understand the language that well themselves, and aren't able to effectively instruct others in it. [*Nemo dat quod non habet*](#)... “No one gives what he doesn't have.”

I have firsthand experience of the consequences of mediocre Latin instruction. I had three years of Latin in high school and two years in college, and by the end of that time, still didn't possess the ability to translate much more than basic sentences.

And then I studied under [Fr. Reginald Foster](#) for just six months in Rome in 2000, and all the confusions of my previous Latin education were cleared up. That's what great teachers are able to do, and Foster is considered by many to be the greatest Latin teacher in the world today.

And now, at age 77, he's *finally* published a textbook that lays out his unique method of teaching Latin—a method that has helped thousands of students over the years actually learn the language. I have included a link to the book below:

Some brief background on Foster... For 40 years he served as the Vatican's chief Latinist, and is one of the few remaining people in the world who can actually speak Latin fluently. (If

you want to see what that looks like, click [here](#).) He's also a priest, a member of the strict Carmelite monastic order, and it has been rumored that he wakes up at about two in the morning.

He's also something of a paradox. In front of his students he wears the uniform of a plumber, speaks gruffly, and lets out the occasional profanity. And when he taught at the Gregorian University in Rome, he would usually swill from either a bottle of Heineken or wine during class. (He was also fine with students doing the same "as long as the Latin didn't suffer"!))

His textbook is titled [*Ossa Latinitatis Sola—"The Mere Bones of Latin According to the Thought and System of Reginald."*](#) At over 800 pages, this book introduces those who read it to the entirety of Latin grammar—and [it's only the first of five projected books!](#)

It also contains many of Foster's idiosyncrasies that make his method unique and effective. For instance, most Latin textbooks have you translate boring, made-up sentences that all follow a nice, neat pattern. The consequence is that when

you try to translate real Latin, you quickly find yourself frustrated. That's why, from the start, Foster uses *real* selections of Latin taken from writers of all ages. In fact, these selections of Latin alone make his textbook worth the \$38 price tag.

The series editor, Daniel McCarthy, writes the following in the introduction: "I am convinced that anyone who patiently follows [Foster's] path will acquire the ability to read, write, and speak Latin."

If you have any interest in actually learning Latin, I highly recommend that you purchase this book.

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