



Ten Reasons to Study Latin

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You may have heard that Latin is a dead language. This is a strong, negative pronouncement to most ears. Scholars, however, use the term in a technical sense that leaves plenty of room for life. A “dead” language is one that is no longer the native language of any community, even if it is still in use in other ways. An extinct language, by contrast, is one that no longer has any speakers or any written use. Some languages are also called liturgical languages, because they continue to be used in religious contexts, or classical languages, which continue to be studied and read through a rich body of ancient literature. Greek, Latin, Chinese, Arabic, and Sanskrit are all considered classical languages. Some would even include Hebrew and French in that list.

Latin is both a classical and a liturgical language, a dead language that never died. By this we mean that while Latin may not be the native language of any community, it is still spoken (even if only by a few) and is commonly studied and read for a variety of compelling, beneficial reasons.

Latin also has not died because it was reborn and renamed as French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Romanian—the five Romance languages. About 90 percent of the vocabulary of these languages comes from Latin. These Romance languages are actually forms of Latin that have evolved over the centuries in various regions with some interaction from other local tongues.

There are many good reasons to study Latin. Here is a top ten list:

1. **Becoming Multilingual:** As you might have already guessed, studying Latin is fantastic preparation for learning and becoming fluent in one or more of the Romance languages. Therefore, learning Latin is to begin a study of six languages at once.
2. **English Vocabulary and Grammar:** Studying Latin prepares students to master English. Students of Latin typically score the highest on tests on English vocabulary! This is no surprise since 50 percent of English is derived from Latin—with over 80–90 percent of our polysyllabic words derived from Latin. The regular grammar of

Latin is also ideal for shedding light on the way all languages, including English, work.

3. **The Professions:** Latin prepares students for several important professions that are steeped in Latin or English words derived from Latin. These include law, medicine, science, music, theology, philosophy, art, and literature.
4. **Writing and Reading:** An increased vocabulary and understanding of grammar enable students to write and read with greater ease and clarity.
5. **English Literature:** Latin enables students to have improved access to English literature prior to 1950, which is replete with references and citations in Latin.
6. **History:** Latin enables students to more fully understand and appreciate the Roman Empire, which has had profound and continuing effects on Western civilization. In addition, the history of art and architecture is filled with Latin, and monuments and art all over the world are frequently graced with Latin.
7. **Great Literature:** Latin enables students to enjoy some of the most influential literature the world—in the original language. Learning Latin well enough to read original Latin works is an attainable skill and imparts great satisfaction and enjoyment.
8. **Educational Virtue:** The study of Latin is an ongoing practice in linguistic puzzle-solving that generally helps students to become close and careful readers and writers. Many believe it also generally hones the mental faculties, cultivating careful analysis and attention. When one well-known cancer researcher, Dr. Charles Zubrod (who helped develop chemotherapy treatment for leukemia patients), was asked what had best prepared him for a life of medical research, he responded: “Studying Latin and Greek as a child.”
9. **Pleasure:** Deciphering the “secret code” of Latin, seeing the words behind words, learning to puzzle-solve, and reading great authors in their own tongue are all pleasures that will last students a lifetime.
10. **Simultaneous Learning:** As you can see, studying Latin is a way of doing advanced study in several subject areas simultaneously. This is why we regard it as a master art—like a tool, it enables one to master other things, other subjects. It is no wonder that it has been a required subject in schools for centuries.

I hope that as you review the list above you will see how Latin is still very much alive—it lives on your tongue now, asserting itself with every other word you speak. I hope you will take up the study of this language and introduce your children to it as well. While it will be a challenging study, it will bring life to learning and open a dozen different doors on as many adventuresome paths.



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