



Understanding the Cambridge Latin Course

This section introduces the aims and principles underlying the CLC to help educators make best use of the Course. It is also important for students to understand how their textbook works and what principles are guiding their learning. For this reason, a student-facing version of some of this information is presented in the Introduction to the textbook, pages iv and v.

Objectives

The CLC presents language not as an end in itself but a means of gaining access to literature and to the culture from which it springs. Its major objectives are:

- 1 To teach comprehension of the Latin language so that students can read with confidence and fluency.
- 2 To develop an understanding of the historical context of the Latin language and the people who used it, with special reference to the first century AD.

Principles of design

Underlying the CLC are several guiding principles. The list below attempts to summarise these.

- 1 The Course attempts to present students with material that will engage and maintain their interest. It is hoped that the desire to find out ‘what happens next’ in the storyline or the curiosity sparked by evidence about Roman life will motivate students in their attempts to master the language and gain more knowledge and understanding of Roman culture and literature.
- 2 Language and culture are integrated from the very outset by using as much authentic Roman subject matter as possible. The Course is set firmly in the context of the Roman empire and frequently introduces historical characters. As well as reviewing the cultural background material academic experts also review the storylines and characters to reduce anachronisms or inaccuracies. This presentation of Roman culture is both a valuable part of general education and essential preparation for the reading of Roman authors.
- 3 Information about Roman culture is conveyed not only in the text of the Latin stories and the cultural background sections in English but also by the large number of pictures in the books. These provide the student with visual



evidence of the Roman world and are meant to be studied and discussed in conjunction with the text. To this end, illustrations are evidence based and drawn in accordance with detailed, historically sound briefs, and photographs are captioned with details about provenance, location and historical interpretations.

- 4 The Course draws a distinction between knowledge *about* language and *skill in using* language. Research has shown that many students who appear to understand linguistic information presented in isolation – for example those who rote learn tables of accidence – find it hard to apply that information in their reading (for more on this please see ‘Theoretical basis’ below). In the CLC, reading experience should precede discussion and analysis. Students see linguistic features in context before being asked to learn about their use and meaning. Comments on the language should be elicited from students as their understanding develops rather than presented to them.
- 5 Students are introduced from the beginning to common phrase and sentence patterns of the language which are systematically developed throughout the Course. Inflections and constructions are presented within these patterns in a controlled and gradual sequence. It is important that the students should understand the form and function of the words that make up a sentence or phrase, but equally important that they should develop the habit of grouping words together and treating the phrase or sentence as a single unit. Language learning consists of habit-forming as well as problem-solving.
- 6 The development of reading skill requires appropriate teaching methods:
 - a) Comprehension and literary analysis questions are used widely to assist and test understanding, paving the way for the later approach to literature.
 - b) Translation (here meaning the act of converting a Latin text largely word-for-word into another language) is a most useful learning and testing device, but it is not all-important and is sometimes unnecessary. Sometimes it is enough to ‘read for meaning’ rather than parsing every word. Translation should be used only when it contributes to an intelligent understanding of what is read; it is one available tool of many.
 - c) Vocabulary is best acquired through attentive reading and oral work in class, reinforced by review of selected common words in checklists. When testing students’ vocabulary knowledge, words should be presented in the context



of a simple sentence so that they can be read and understood rather than simply memorized and recalled.

- d) Similarly, memorization of the paradigm of a verb or noun should not be undertaken in isolation. It cannot contribute to reading skill unless students also learn to recognize the function of inflections in the context of a Latin text. Students should always be thinking about what words *mean* not just what they look like.

Benefits to students

One of the greatest benefits of reading methodologies like that of the CLC is their suitability for use with a wide range of students. Differentiation by outcome is a natural product of tackling stories and exercises which are designed to encourage students to develop their understanding in an individualised way; there is never any single 'correct' answer which must simply be committed to memory, instead students prioritise personal understanding of meaning over rote learning and recall. Those who acquire language readily can be constantly challenged and engaged by reading full passages of Latin containing new linguistic features and vocabulary, while those who might find it more difficult can read the same passages whilst focusing on basic comprehension and consolidation of previously taught concepts.

Understanding texts in context is a crucial element of their study and the CLC supports this by integrating Latin language learning with the historical context from Stage 1. This integration combined with the many opportunities for literary criticism equips students with the necessary skills to successfully read and interrogate Latin literature and authors later in their studies and provides an excellent foundation for examination success.

Not all students will go on to study Latin in an examination context, for those who do not the CLC provides a satisfying experience in which students feel they have learned about the Roman world as well as about its language. The historical skills developed as part of the course are also useful transferable to other school subjects, both classical and not.

Theoretical basis

The Cambridge Latin Course was instrumental in the development of the 'Reading Method' as an approach to the teaching of Latin. Previous materials largely focussed on the 'Grammar-Translation' method which emphasises memorising



linguistic features and using them to enable 'decoding' and 'translation' of Latin passages.

In contrast with the drill-based teaching of behaviourists such as Skinner (Skinner, B. F., (1957) *Verbal Behaviour*), prevalent in the 1960s, the Cambridge Latin Course adopted at its outset an innovative approach developed by Dr John B Wilkins, the linguistic consultant who guided design of the first edition. His insights drew on emerging modern language theories, adapting them to the differing aspirations and circumstances of ancient languages (Wilkins, J. B., (1969) 'Teaching the Classical languages: towards a theory I', *Didaskalos*).

One of Wilkins' great breakthroughs was the recognition of the interconnectedness of the three skills he considered it desirable for Latin students to attain:

- the ability to process the information conveyed in unseen texts suitable to their level
- an awareness of the cultural context of the use of the language
- appreciation of the literary conventions characteristic of the literature

(Wilkins, J. B., (1969) 'Teaching the Classical languages: towards a theory I', *Didaskalos*). These skills were not to be taught separately, but through a coherent approach where the CLC 'texts' (including model sentences and stories) provided not only a means of learning to comprehend the language, but also of accessing the literature and the culture in which it was originally situated.

Recognition of the importance of integrating culture and literature with language learning is now evident in MFL scholarship and in the development of school and university level courses (e.g. Nutall, C., (2005) *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*; Lloyd, M. & Robson, J., (2019) 'Staying the distance: transforming Latin pedagogy at the Open University', *Journal of Latin Linguistics*; Paran, A., (2008) 'The Role of Literature in Instructed Foreign Language Learning and Teaching: An Evidence-based Survey', *Language Teaching*).

These principles have continued to guide subsequent publications and culture and stories are even more intimately enmeshed in the latest edition through allowing the characters to speak with English as well as Latin voices.

A key insight of Wilkins' work, inspired by the success of children learning their first language, was that it is better to let students develop their own 'personal grammar'



(or way to competence) rather than imposing a pre-analysed ‘pure grammar’ on them. He claimed that mastery grew from encountering gradually more complex texts that facilitated continual refinement of an initial ‘tentative grammar’ (Wilkins, J. B., (1969) ‘Teaching the Classical languages: towards a theory I’, *Didaskalos*). In some ways, this idea pre-empted Krashen’s insights about the ‘acquisition’ (as opposed to formal ‘learning’) of language through the processing of ‘comprehensible input’ that increases in difficulty in manageable steps (Krashen, S., (1981) *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*) and subsequent editions of the CLC have maintained careful sequencing of language features, introducing first those that will be most readily understood by English speakers and progressing gradually to less familiar constructions. This means that, as well as constituting an ideal reading course, the CLC materials can readily be adapted to support those teaching Latin using Comprehensible Input principles (see for example Toda, K., (2018) [How to CI a Latin Textbook Chapter Reading](#); Ramahlo, M. (2019) ‘On starting to teach using CI’ *Journal of Classics Teaching*).

The carefully designed linguistic progression of the CLC enables students to focus on the use of grammar within a meaningful sentence rather than rote learning of paradigms in isolation. This promotes linguistic competence in reading and understanding the meaning of the Latin. The processes involved in developing comprehension skills are met, nurtured, and practiced in a careful and controlled manner, and over a period of time become automatic:

- Each Stage begins with the key linguistic feature being encountered in a carefully constructed and illustrated sequence of sentences. The illustrations help students to understand the meaning of the sentences, so (with teacher support) students can subsequently identify for themselves how the new language feature might work; ‘I know this sentence must say... how is the language conveying this?’
- The initial story in the Stage then expands upon this, including examples of the new feature but embedded in an extended text of a suitable level for the student. At this point the new feature may be analysed and consolidated.
- The subsequent narrative increases in linguistic complexity across the Stage with the new feature being used regularly so that it becomes familiar and meaningful.
- The feature will then recur regularly across subsequent Stages.



Linguistic features may be met in the context of a story long before they are targeted as a 'key' piece of linguistic learning in a stage, perhaps the most famous example being the ablative of *Caecilius est in horto* which opens the first story in Stage 1, despite the ablative not being formally taught until Stage 11. Some will not be explicitly targeted at all, instead students will become used to seeing them in context and understanding their meaning; for example causal clauses with **quod**.

These varied encounters with vocabulary and language features will lead to a growing 'recognition vocabulary' and an understanding of grammar as a system that signals that convey 'how the text is to be understood more precisely' rather than as a 'set of arbitrary rules and structures to be learned' (see Grabe, W., (2008) *Reading in a Second Language: Moving from Theory to Practice*, Chapter 2). The introduction of linguistic features with decreasing levels of comprehension support through images and glossed vocabulary is consistent with sociocultural MFL theories such as Vygotsky's ideas of 'scaffolding' and the 'zone of proximal development' as applied to language learning by, for example, Lantolf, Thorne, and Van Patten.

Another theoretical consideration that underpins each new edition of the CLC is the role of intrinsic motivation (that is motivation through the 'inherent enjoyment' of the learning experience itself (Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000) 'Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being', *American Psychologist*). The importance of this has been form of motivation in language learning has been highlighted by, among others, Gardner (Gardner, R. C., (1985) *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*) and Gambrell (Gambrell, L. B. (2011) 'Seven Rules of Engagement: What's Most Important to Know About Motivation to Read', *The Reading Teacher*, 65(3), 172-178), although the latter is in reference to learning a first rather than a second language. In designing each edition of the CLC reading course, it has been considered essential to present students with the intrinsic motivation of a well-written and engaging narrative. Student production of online memes and fan fiction expressing their continuing enjoyment of CLC characters and plot is testament to the success of this aim.

More recently, with the growing adoption of communicative approaches to support ancient language learning (Lloyd, M. and Hunt, S., (2021) *Communicative Approaches for Ancient Languages*), the early introduction of question phrases and character dialogue in the *CLC*, along with the emphasis on hearing Latin through audio and video materials, can support teachers wanting to supplement their teaching with some interaction in Latin (see Hunt, S., Letchford, C., Lloyd, M.,



Manning, L. and Plummer, R., (2018) *The Virtue of Variety*, *Journal of Classics Teaching*, 19(38) pp. 53–60).

In the latest edition, *CLC* designers have continued to rely on pedagogical research from both ancient and modern language specialists to inform continuity and innovation in all aspects of this well-loved course.