

Latin in English

Kron

Latin

- The Ancient Romans were great borrowers; they are more distinguished for their military exploits and legal traditions than their cultural values or artistic accomplishments.
- The Roman Empire was acquired by dint of superior fighting force and rigorous military discipline, but was maintained by Roman law.
- Thus, we should not be surprised that so many Latin legal terms have been carried over into English.
- While the Empire stretched as far north as Scotland, as an occupying force the Romans did not integrate with the native population to make a notable impression on the language during the centuries-long Roman presence in ancient Britain, even though the remains of their civil engineering feats – roads, forts, aqueducts, baths, and walls – still survive in England today.

- The Latin influence on the English language comes primarily through the Romance languages, particularly French and to a lesser degree Italian, as well as through the borrowings associated with the renewed interest in classical sources during the Renaissance.
- Not all of the following terms are strictly legal, but they suggest the precision and particularity of the Latin mind and will also help you to clarify your speech and writing.

ad hoc (ad hok', hōk') for a specific or particular purpose.

antebellum (an'tē bel'əm) prewar.

caveat (kav'ē āt') a warning or caution; admonition.

decorum (di kōr'əm) dignity; proper behavior, manners, or appearance.

de facto (dē fak'tō, dā) in fact; in reality; actually existing.

de profundis (dā prō fōn'dis) out of the depths of sorrow or despair.

dementia (di men'shə) madness; insanity; severely impaired mental function.

desideratum (di sid'ə rā'təm, -rā'-) something wanted or needed.

dolor (dō'lər) sorrow; grief.

ex cathedra (eks' kə thē'drə) from the seat of authority; by virtue of one's office.

exemplar (ig zem'plər, -plār) model or pattern; example or instance; original or archetype.

exigent (ek'si jənt) urgent; pressing.

ex nihilo (eks nī'hi lō', nē'-) out of nothing.

ex post facto (eks' pōst' fak'tō) after the fact; subsequently; retroactively.

factotum (fak tō'təm) assistant or aide; deputy.

imprimatur (im'pri mǎ'tər) sanction; approval.

in toto (in tō'tō) in all; completely, entirely; wholly.

literati (lit'ə rǎ'tē) intellectuals or scholars; highly educated persons.

mea culpa (mā'ə kul'pə) my fault; an admission of guilt.

modus operandi (mō'dəs op'ə ran'dē, -dī) way of operating; method of working.

non compos mentis (non' kom'pəs men'tis) of unsound mind; mentally incompetent.

nonsequitur (non sek'wi tər) something that does not follow from the preceding series; illogical conclusion.

odium (ō'dē əm) intense hatred or dislike; reproach or discredit.

pro forma (prō fôr'mə) done perfunctorily; done as a formality.

prolix (prō liks', prō'liks) wordy; talkative; tediously long.

quidnunc (kwid'nungk') busybody; a person eager to know the latest gossip.

quid pro quo (kwid' prō kwō') equal exchange; substitute; something given or taken in return for something else.

rara avis (râr'ə ā'vis) a rare person or thing; anything unusual; rarity.

sanctum sanctorum (sangk'təm sangk tōr'əm) sacred place; the holiest of places.

sine qua non (sin'ā kwä nōn') an indispensable condition; prerequisite.

status quo (stā'təs kwō, stat'əs) conditions as they are now; the existing state.

sub rosa (sub rō'zə) confidentially; secretly; privately; undercover.

sui generis (sōō'ē jen'ər is) of its own kind; unique; one of a kind; unparalleled.

terra incognita (ter'ə in kog'ni tə) unknown territory; an unexplored region; uncharted ground.

viva voce (vī'və vō'sē) aloud, orally; by word of mouth.

vox populi (voks' pop'yə lī') popular opinion; the voice of the people.

EARLY LATIN INFLUENCES

It would be not unreasonable to imagine that a significant number of Latin words became established in Old English through the Roman conquest of Britain in AD 43, especially since the island was under Roman rule for around 400 years after that. Surprisingly, there are very few. Although Latin was the official language, and that of the ruling elite, its use could not have been sufficiently widespread among the ordinary population to ensure its survival. It is likely that Latin fell into disuse not long after the withdrawal of the Roman troops around 410, and was certainly incapable of surviving the turmoil of the Germanic invasions which began some 40 years later. When the Angles, Saxons and Jutes arrived in Britain, they completely submerged the Celtic culture that existed there at that time. Thus, from the store of over 600 words that the Celts had taken from Latin, very few were passed on:

port, 'harbour', 'gate', from Latin *portus*

torr, 'tower', 'rock', from Latin *turris*

munt, 'mountain', from Latin *mons*

wīc, 'village', from Latin *vīcus*

ceaster, 'camp', from Latin *castra* (evident in place names such as Chester, Lancaster, Gloucester, Manchester, etc.)

The stock of Celtic words that came into Old English is equally meagre. That is not to say, however, that there was no more Latin influence on English until French arrived with William the Conqueror in 1066 and until the revival of classical scholarship and influence in later centuries. A second source came from

the invading Germanic tribes themselves. On the Continent they had had considerable trading links with the Roman Empire, resulting in a mutual exchange of words (see, for example, the entries COMPANION and MINT). When the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain took place, therefore, the language of the conquerors already contained a stock of Latin words.

From trade came words such as: *cēap*, 'trade', 'bargain', 'cheap' (L *caupō*, 'tradesman'); *mangere*, 'monger' (L *mangō*, 'dealer'); *mynet*, 'coin' (L *monēta*, 'mint', 'money'); *pund*, 'pound' (L *pondō*, 'pound weight'); *wīn*, 'wine', (L *vīnum*).

From everyday life: *cytel*, 'kettle' (L *catillus*); *pyle*, 'pillow' (L *pulvīnus*); *cycene*, 'kitchen' (L *coquīna*); *cuppe*, 'cup' (L *cuppa*); *disc*, 'dish' (L *discus*); *mortere*, 'mortar' (L *mortarium*); *line*, 'line', 'rope' (L *linea*); *cīese*, 'cheese' (L *cāseus*).

From communications: *stroet*, 'street', 'road' (L *strāta*); *mīl*, 'mile' (L *mīlia*).

The third, and greatest, influence of Latin on Old English came via the church. From the earliest mission in 597 to the end of the Old English period over 500 years later, a large number of borrowings took place. These were initially to do with church organisation, since Old English did not have equivalents of its own to draw upon: examples include *abbot*, *altar*, *angel*, *chalice*, *deacon*, *hymn*, *mass*, *nun*, *pope*, *provost*, *psalm* and many more. Also borrowed was a further stock of words relating to monastic life, including education and medicine, which then passed into general domestic use.

The stars and planets were once held to be influential in forming people's characters (see INFLUENCE). In his *MAG-ASTROMANCER, OR THE MAGICALL-ASTROLOGICALL-DIVINER POSED, AND PUZZLED* (1652), John Gaule, the puritan minister of Great Staughton in Huntingdonshire, denounced the *physiognomists, metoposcopists and chiromantists*, who believed that people are shaped by their stars and were intent upon *first judging and pronouncing the man, or the member, to be saturnine, jovial, martial, solar, venereal, mercurial, lunar*.

These adjectives may no longer hold astrological significance in modern English, but their present-day meanings reflect these ancient beliefs.

Jovial (late 16th cent) from French *jovial*, from Italian *gioviiale*, 'born under the planet Jove', from Latin *jovialis*, 'pertaining to Jove', from *Jovis*, 'Jove'. The Roman deity Jove, also known as Jupiter (a classical Latin contraction of *Jovis Pater*, 'Jove the Father'), was the majestic lord of heaven and the well-spring of happiness. The largest known planet was named in his honour and those born under its influence rejoiced in a cheerful, convivial disposition.

Martial (14th cent) from Old French *martial*, from Latin *mārtiālis*, 'pertaining to Mars', from Latin *Mārs*, (stem *Mārt-*) 'Mars'. Mars had a savage, passionate nature. In Rome, where he was worshipped as the god of war, he was second only to Jupiter, and his name was given to the blood-red planet. When the adjective *martial* was first borrowed into English it meant 'fit for war, belonging to warfare'. A person described as *martial* had the valiant character of a warrior. Today the adjective is widely used of anything war-like.

Mercurial (14th cent) from French *mercuriel*, from Latin *mercuriālis*, 'belonging to Mercury', from *Mercurius*, 'Mercury'. The name of this Roman god derives from *merx*, 'merchandise', since, amongst his other responsibilities, Mercury was responsible for commerce. He was also something of a thief and those who were *mercurial*, that is to say 'born under the planet Mercury', were eloquent and vivacious with a shrewd head for business and a tendency to

devious practice. In seventeenth-century English, however, *mercurial* started to develop the sense 'having a volatile or changeable nature'. Although this new sense initially arose out of the older one, it is commonly perceived as being influenced by the characteristics of the metal *mercury*, the planetary name given to quicksilver in medieval times.

Saturnine (15th cent) from unattested medieval Latin *Sāturnīnus*, 'of Saturn', from Latin *Sāturnus*, 'Saturn'. The establishment of civilisation (springing from agriculture, of which he was god) was attributed to this deity. In spite of the riotous revelry which took place at his festival Saturnalia (see CARNIVAL), Saturn had a dour and taciturn nature, which he generously passed on to all born under the influence of his planet. A *saturnine* person is a gloomy person.

Solar (15th cent) from Latin *sōlāris*, 'pertaining to the sun', from *sōl*, 'sun'. According to astrology, the *solar* man was impressive and did everything on a grand scale. He was dignified, magnificent, proud and generous. Sadly we no longer describe distinguished, energetic people as *solar*; the adjective is confined to things pertaining to or coming from the sun: *solar eclipse*, *solar heating*.

Venereal (15th cent) Middle English *venerealle*, from Latin *venereus*, from *Venus* (stem *Vener-*), 'love, Venus'. Beautiful Venus was the Roman goddess of sexual love. The Latin adjective *venereus* meant 'concerning sexual desire or pleasure'. This was borrowed into Middle English as *venerealle* with the same meaning. It is still occasionally found today in this sense. Those born under the influence of Venus were said to be 'lecherous and lustful', but *venereal* was rarely applied in this way and this sense has been obsolete since the eighteenth century. Today the word is most commonly found in the coupling *venereal disease*, which has been current since at least the second half of the seventeenth century. This term, however, though still current, is gradually being supplanted by the more explicit *sexually transmitted disease*, which dates from the 1960s, the era of sexual liberation.

What the Romans did for us

As well as education, wine, roads, under-floor heating, and the fresh water system, the Romans gave us words and phrases. Far from being a dead language, **Latin** is alive and well, and may be found in a sentence near you.

ENGLISH is full of words of Latin origin that came into the language by way of the French-speaking Norman invaders of 1066. But we also use many phrases that came into English later, typically in the 17th and 18th centuries, and remain in their original Latin form.

In Latin **index** referred to the 'forefinger' or 'index finger', with which you point. From this we got our term for a list of topics in a book which 'point' to the right page. When we decide to leave by a door marked **exit**, we may not know that in Latin this meant 'he or she goes out'. The phrase **in flagrante delicto**, literally 'in blazing crime', means in English 'in the very act of wrongdoing', and particularly refers to sexual misconduct. If someone is caught *in flagrante delicto* they are generally found in bed with someone else's partner.

If we want to say that someone really knows about something we might say that they are **bona fide**, Latin words meaning 'with good faith'. A remark that has no logical connection with a previous statement is a **non sequitur**—literally, 'it does not follow'. A particular stipulation or condition is a **caveat**, a word which means literally 'let a person beware'. If a person is preparing to buy something, you might say **caveat emptor**, 'let the buyer beware', to remind them that it is the buyer alone who is responsible for checking the quality of the goods before the purchase is made.

Someone who dislikes sailing might be very glad to find themselves back on **terra firma** or 'firm land'. If they had heard too much of the delights of the sea, they might say that they had been lectured about it **ad nauseam**, or 'to sickness'. They might be wary of decisions taken on an **ad hoc** basis, Latin for 'to this', used in English to mean 'created or done for a particular purpose'. Sometimes you have no chance to influence what happens, as things may be done in your absence, or **in absentia**.

In 1992, following the marital troubles of her children and a disastrous fire at Windsor Castle, the Queen said in a speech that it had turned out to be an **annus horribilis**. This term for a year of disaster or misfortune is an alteration of an established Latin phrase **annus mirabilis** 'wonderful year'.

Changes are often received with apprehension, especially by people who would prefer to preserve the existing state of affairs or **status quo**—literally 'the state in which'. The band Status Quo had their first hit, 'Pictures of Matchstick Men', in 1968 and are still going strong. Another band with a Latin name are Procol Harum, who released the enigmatic 'A Whiter Shade of Pale' in 1967. The band's name is a misspelled version of a Latin phrase

meaning 'far from these things' – it should really be *procul his*.

The legal world is full of Latin. If someone is not of sound mind they are said to be **non compos mentis**, literally 'not having control of the mind'. Journalists may sometimes feel frustrated at not being able to report freely on a case because it is **sub judice** 'under a judge'—under judicial consideration and so prohibited from public discussion.

Latin supplies a number of well-known mottoes. **E pluribus unum**, or 'one out of many', is the motto of the United States. In 1913 King George V approved **per ardua ad astra**, 'through struggle to the stars', as the motto of the Royal Air Force.

Some Latin phrases lie behind our most familiar abbreviations. If we want to emphasize the importance of something, we may say or write **NB**—short for *nota bene*, or 'note well'. **QED**, pointing out that a fact or situation demonstrates the truth of what you are saying, stands for *quod erat demonstrandum*, 'which was to be demonstrated'. A long list of items may finish with **etc.**, standing for *et cetera* 'and the rest'. Advancing age may be referred to jokingly as **Anno Domini**, Latin for 'in the year of the Lord', which also gives us the abbreviation **AD**. The passage of time inevitably leads to **RIP**, short for *requiescat in pace*, 'rest in peace', although the same cannot be said to apply to Latin itself.

Latin

The influence of Latin on the English language is huge, with a vast number of common English words being ultimately of Latin origin. In addition, English-speakers make use of a great number of phrases that retain their original Latin form. Many legal phrases, in particular, are taken from Latin. Among those that appear as entries in this dictionary are *ad litem*, *amicus curiae*, *caveat emptor*, *doli incapax*, *ex parte*, *habeas corpus*, *in absentia*, *in camera*, *in re*, *lex loci*, *locus standi*, *mens rea*, *nolo contendere*, *non compos mentis*, *obiter dictum*, *pro bono publico*, *res gestae*, *sub judice*, *sui juris*, and *ultra vires*. Another area rich in Latin expressions is that of argument, debate, and reasoning. Examples include *a fortiori*, *a posteriori*, *a priori*, *ipso facto*, *non sequitur*, *prima facie*, *quod erat demonstrandum*, and *reductio ad absurdum*. Other Latin phrases that are part of everyday English include *ad hoc*, *ad nauseam*, *bona fide*, *ex gratia*, *in extremis*, *in situ*, *magnum opus*, *mea culpa*, *per se*, *pro rata*, *quid pro quo*, *sine qua non*, and *terra firma*.

Latin sayings and mottoes in use in modern English include *carpe diem*; *de gustibus non est disputandum*; *e pluribus unum*; *Et tu, Brute*; *in vino veritas*; *mens sana in corpore sano*; *multum in parvo*; *nil desperandum*; *o tempora, o mores!*; *quot homines, tot sententiae*; *sic transit gloria mundi*; *tempus fugit*; and *veni, vidi, vici*.

Latin words

How much English owes to Latin either directly or via French is evident from the etymologies in this book. However, as classical Latin and Greek were for centuries the main subjects taught in schools and any educated gentleman was expected to understand Latin, many words and phrases were adopted directly from Latin, particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries. Some have become fully naturalized, such as **bonus**, literally 'good', **exit** 'he or she goes out', **impromptu**, literally 'in readiness' but changed in English to 'spontaneous', and **alibi** 'elsewhere', hence evidence you could not have been at the scene of a crime. The psychologist's **ego** is simply the Latin for 'I' and **gratis** simply Latin for 'free'. Others remain obviously Latin. **Ad hoc** 'for a particular purpose' is literally 'to this', **de facto** simply 'of fact', and **per se** 'in itself'. The **re** on the subject heading replying to your email is Latin for 'about', and **terra firma** 'firm land'. Your old place of education, of which you were an **alumnus**, 'pupil', can be called your **alma mater** 'bounteous or nourishing mother'.

Someone or something genuine can be **bona fide** 'with good faith', while someone who acts **pro bono publico** is acting 'for the public good' rather than leaving things in the **status quo (ante)** 'the state in which (before)'. Someone asking for a **quid pro quo** 'something for something' may not be benign, for although it can be neutral, it often has a shady meaning, and is not the same as **vice versa** 'in turned position', often simply used for 'or the other way round'.

A remark that has no logical connection with a previous statement is a **non sequitur**—literally, 'it does not follow'—something that may be done **ad nauseum** 'to the point of sickness'. Something done when you are not there can be done **in absentia** 'in absence', often a legal term, as is **non compos mentis** 'not having control of the mind' so not fit to stand trial, while a court case may be **sub judice** 'under a judge' and therefore not to be discussed in the press, even if someone was caught **in flagrante delicto** 'in the heat of the crime', often referring to being caught in bed with someone.

Many Latin phrases are so imbedded they are simply abbreviated. Thus **i.e.** is *id est* 'that is', which purists insist should not be confused with **e.g.** *exempli gratia* 'for the sake of example'. **Etc.** is a shortening of *et cetera* 'and the rest', **NB** is for *nota bene* 'note well', and **QED** is *quod erat demonstrandum* 'which was to be demonstrated'. **AD** is *Anno Domine* 'in the year of our Lord', and **RIP** *requiescat in pace* 'rest in peace'

See also **DRAMA**, **INDEX**, **INNUENDO**, **INTEREST**, **INTERIM**, **ITEM**, **LARVA**, **LINCTUS**, **VOICE**, **WORD**.