

How to Master Ars Grammaticae

By Aisha Ahmad (Class of 2009)

- 1. Establish a Good Understanding of English Grammar:** Yes, you do know English; otherwise, you wouldn't be able to read this silly guide. But do you know what a direct object is? An indirect object? How about an adverbial clause? Well, if you don't have a clue about English grammar, chances are you will not understand Latin grammar. The first thing you should do is to find a brief yet comprehensive guide or textbook to English grammar. Find one you like and are comfortable with. It need not be fancy. Or try this website: <http://www.englishclub.com/grammar/>. LEARNING ENGLISH GRAMMAR SHOULD BE THE FIRST ACTION YOU TAKE.
- 2. Get Your Hands on a Helpful, Well-written Textbook and/or Grammar Book:** After developing a thorough understanding of English grammar, it is time to study LATIN. (Yay, hooray! Woot, woot.) Get a book. Northside provides *Jenney's*, which is a great textbook, but it may not be suitable for you. Just about anything, except for *Ecce Romani* (unless you wish to study at a snail-like pace), works. Try not to get something too old; the "Olde" English might confuzzle you. Allen and Greenough's *A New Latin Grammar* is recommended by the National Junior Classical League and little ol' me.
- 3. Set out a Good Amount of Time Just for Studying:** If you were willing to read this far into this guide, you must be pretty serious to study Latin grammar. If you have time on your hands, start studying Latin grammar. If you don't have time on your hands, make some time and start studying Latin. Latin grammar WILL NOT magically come to you. Yes, you have to study. And yes, studying includes reading a book. (Gasp!)
- 4. Read the Book:** Read the book. Read the book. Read the book. Don't dare to skim it. Skimming the book comes in handy for quick reviews (for example, right before a Certamen meet). Textbooks are great because the lessons come in a certain order. Grammar books scrunch up a lot of information into one chapter. So when you're learning grammar for the first time, I recommend you use a textbook.
- 5. How to Read the Book:**
 - Pace yourself. Do not move onto the next chapter until you thoroughly understand the current chapter. You need not memorize the lesson verbatim. Instead, grasp the gist of the chapter. The parts you have not absorbed will eventually come to you later on.
 - Memorize the forms. You will NOT understand the syntax without knowing the forms. Do not dare to believe that you can "get away" without memorizing the word forms. You will suffer.
 - Compare the Latin grammar to English grammar as you learn it. For instance, it is easier to understand the uses of the dative if you can recognize an indirect object in an English sentence.
 - Study all the provided examples. Examples might clarify any confusion you have. They also teach you how to form sentences. When you look at examples, try to understand how a sentence was translated and why it was translated in that manner.
 - Memorize the vocabulary. Since syntax is the "study" of forming sentences and phrases using words, it would probably help to know words in Latin. You do not have to memorize the whole Latin dictionary (although it's not a bad idea). Just learn the "common" words (e.g. *exemplum* and *gratia*).
 - Ask questions. When you're confused, ask an older Latin student or the teacher. When you ask questions and receive great responses, you learn more.

- g. Get some tutoring. We have great tutors at Northside. Take advantage of them!!!
6. **Apply Your Knowledge to Exercises and Quizzes:** Translate English sentences into Latin as often as possible. Make “mini quizzes” and worksheets for yourself. At first, practice on paper. When you master grammar, practice orally. Practice will keep everything fresh in your mind, and in many ways make the learning simpler. When you practice on paper, get someone to overlook your progress to make sure you aren’t making mistakes. Even the best Latin grammar students can make dumb errors, and more or less one error skews the meaning of a clause or sentence. (And since I am one of the worst grammar geeks, I have made this for you. How wonderful, eh?)
 7. **Do Your Translations:** Chester T. does not tell us to do our translations to torture us, he means well. Through your translations you learn how to, well, translate from Latin to English. When you do your translations, really you are saving time. Not only you’re practicing, you are *doing your homework* and studying for your tests. When you do your translations, you do not become embarrassed when it is your turn to translate during next class, you are prepared to answer any grammar questions in class, and you are being a good student.
 8. **Come to Certamen Practice:** If you need a good excuse for being a grammar geek, come to Latin Club. If you’re great, you’ll end up on the team. Or practice for the sake of practicing. At Latin Club, you’ll make friends who also love Latin and you’ll be happy (“Yay!”).
 9. **Develop a Good Character:** Do not become a stuck-up jerk when you are a grammar “genius.” No one wants to see you flail your arms around or hear you boast just because you knew the nominative singular of “puella.” Do not put other students down.
 10. **Relax:** It is silly to obsess over a dead language. Don’t overstress yourself because you do not understand something. When you are clutching your book and pulling your hair out, put all your study material down and go eat some garum with breadsticks. Even if you do not understand Latin grammar you will turn out fine. If you try your best every time, great job. If you are too “lazy” to even start, then why did you finish reading this entire guide?