

THE TEN BASIC READING RULES FOR LATIN

RULE 1

A new sentence or passage should be read through completely, several times if necessary, so as to see all its words in context.

RULE 2

As you read, register mentally the ending of every word so as to recognise how the words in the sentence relate to one another.

Rule 3

Recognise the way in which the sentence is structured: its Main Clause(s), subordinate clauses and phrases. Read them in sequence to achieve this recognition and re-read the sentence as often as necessary, *without translating it*.

RULE 4

Now look up unfamiliar words in the dictionary; and once you know what all the words can mean, re-read the Latin to improve your grasp of the context and so clarify what the words in this sentence do mean.

RULE 5

If translating, translate only when you have seen exactly how the sentence works and what it means. Do not translate in order to find out what the sentence means. Understand first, **then** translate.

RULE 6

a. Once a subordinate clause or phrase is begun, it must be completed syntactically before the rest of the sentence can proceed.

b. When one subordinate construction embraces another, the embraced one must be completed before the embracing one can proceed.

c. A Main Clause must be completed before another Main Clause can start.

RULE 7

Normally the words most emphasised by the author are placed at the beginning and end, and all the words in between contribute to the overall sense, including those forming an embraced or dependent word-group.

RULE 8

The words within two or more word-groups are never mixed up together.

RULE 9

All the actions in a narrative sentence are narrated in the order in which they occurred.

RULE 10

Analytical sentences are written with phrases and clauses in the order that is most logical to the author. The sequence of thought is signposted by the placing of word-groups and key words.

RULE 11 (*advisory*)

Practise reading Latin regularly, and as often as possible, applying the Reading Rules throughout.

[A Roman baker's *decem*, obviously!]

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GUIDELINES FOR TRANSLATING

1 The Romans Didn't Know English (this rule is pronounced *TRiDiKEe*).

Since they didn't know English, Latin is not 'hidden English' in form or vocabulary or grammar. Don't treat Latin sentences as though they are in the same word order and layout as English. If they are now and then, it's entirely accidental. See Point **2**.

2 a Don't try to find an English meaning for each separate Latin word, to see if accumulating the separate words in English gives the meaning of the sentence. This method thinks of a Latin sentence as actually Hidden English, and yet *TRiDiKEe*.

b Don't believe that a Latin sentence is simply equivalent to English words in a mixed-up order, either. *TRiDiKEe*.

3 a Phrases, subordinate clauses, and main clauses are all Word-Groups.

This is a really important concept.

Word-Groups are as crucial in a sentence as the individual words. No, they are more crucial.

b The arrangement of word-groups in a sentence is crucial to the meaning.

c The order of words within a Latin word-group obeys logical patterns. Always.

d The order of word-groups in a sentence also obeys logical patterns. Always.

e You can *train your eyes* to recognise all these patterns, which are fundamental to the meaning of the sentence. This is how Romans sight-read Latin. (It is also how we sight-read English.)

f Read *and re-read* each sentence so as to understand its structure and its constructions, before you start to translate it.

4 a Each word in a sentence tells you about the grammar and sense of the words around it. Therefore each word is a ***signpost*** to other words.

b The endings of the words are as important as the beginnings. The endings tell you the grammar of the sentence, i.e. how the words

are related to one another. Motto: ‘The Endings Come First.’

5 How to recognise a subordinate clause word-group:

- It has to start with a conjunction like *cum*, *ut*, *postquam* or the like, or with a relative word like *qui*.

- It must contain at least 1 finite verb, i.e. a verb with a subject. (Sometimes the subject is implied, not given as a separate word—e.g. *libros lego*.)

- It cannot form a sentence by itself, but is subordinate to a main clause. Sometimes the main clause is implied but not given: e.g. *Cur fles?*—*Quia capitis dolorem habeo*. (= [*fleo*] *quia c.d.h.*)

- It obeys Point 7 **a-d**, like all word-groups.

6 How to recognise a phrase:

a A phrase is a word-group that does not have a finite verb. A phrase

[i] may be governed by a preposition, e.g. *ex urbe*, *ab urbe condita*, *propter gaudium*, *in Britanniam*, *ad urbem videndam*, *multa cum laude*

[ii] may consist of words describing a person, thing or event mentioned nearby, e.g. *urbem ingressus*, *librum legentes*, *capillis longissimis*, *multis annis*, *maximae pulchritudinis* (attached to *puella*, for example)

[iii] may be an Ablative Absolute phrase, a gerundival phrase of purpose, or the like. E.g. *Cicerone consule*, *senatu vocato*, *ad urbem pulcherrimam aedificandam*, *pacis petendae causa*

b You can easily recognise a phrase if it starts with a preposition, but to recognise other phrases you must practise Point 3 **a—f**.

7 a A word-group of any kind (main clause, subordinate clause, or phrase), once it has begun, has to be grammatically finished, before the writer can continue with the rest of the sentence whether this is short or long. [This statement is an example in English]

For the same reason, a sentence must be grammatically completed before the next one can start.

b The only exception to **7a** is that one word-group can ‘embrace’ another one. E.g. *Cicero, qui olim consul erat, nunc in senatum raro venit*. But **7a** still applies: the embraced word-group must be grammatically

completed, before the writer can go back to the ‘embracing’ word-group.

c Note carefully that **7a** & **7b** are unbreakable rules in Latin, for **7b** is not really an exception to **7a**: the content of an ‘embraced’ word-group is part of the Message of the embracing word-group. On Message, see Point **9**.

d A Latin phrase can ‘embrace’ a subordinate clause, and a subordinate clause can ‘embrace’ a phrase. E.g. *urbe quae magna erat condita*, and *ut Romam multis post annis iterum videret*.

e If one main clause embraces a second, the second one has to be in brackets or between long dashes.

8 a In *narrative* Latin sentences, all the events are reported in the proper event order, even when the various events are stated in various types of word-groups.

b In *descriptive* (non-narrative) Latin sentences, the various word-groups are written in the order that seems most logical to the author.

9 In Latin, every sentence carries a **Message**. The Message is not always given by just the grammar and vocabulary of the sentence: it also depends on the context around the sentence, the choice of words in the sentence and the placing of them. The Message is as important as the grammar and vocabulary.