

Top 10 Techniques to Master Latin & Greek



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The Lukeion Project www.lukeion.org

Classical Education Expertly Taught Live Online

*Are you trying to learn Latin or Greek but are worn out, fed up and floundering around while you make no real progress? Learn how to make your efforts pay off with big dividends in language mastery. Apply these 10 **tried-and-true** techniques to become more adept at Latin, Greek or any language at the high school level and above.*

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What is The Lukeion Project?

My husband and I launched The Lukeion Project in 2005. As veteran archaeologists, experts in ancient languages and history, we are also home educators of three very smart (and adorable) kids. We offer a unique educational approach that fosters excellence, enthusiasm and college preparedness. Our teaching staff has now expanded to include Dr. Sue Fisher and Jason Fisher who, as fellow Classicists and archaeologists, share similar expertise and enthusiasm for the Classical world. All four of us have a claim to fame: we've all excavated at sites belonging to both sides of the Trojan War according to Homer (Medea, Greece and Troy, Turkey).

At the Lukeion Project we specialize in the Classical world. We offer college-preparatory courses in Classical [Latin](#), Classical [Greek](#), Classical [literature](#) in translation, Greek & Roman [History](#),

[mythology](#), word [roots](#), English [grammar](#) and [research writing](#) to learners around the globe through live, online classes. We also have [wonderful 4 session workshops](#) on everything from ancient warfare to bizarre ancient languages and alphabets. Our courses *are not* recordings, chat rooms, or do-it-yourself distance learning. They are interdisciplinary, vividly illustrated and interactive.

Why do we know so Much About Latin & Greek?

My husband and I are two Classical archaeologists who traveled extensively and excavated at Classical sites in Jordan, Greece and Turkey at the famous site of Troy and the Trojan War. In 2005, we combined our years of education in Latin, Greek, history, Classical literature and archaeology with our skills in online training and graphic design. As home educators of three, we recognized the real need for accessible, challenging education on Classical topics. Innovations in live online classroom technology provided everything else we needed to deliver high quality, challenging instruction to everyone with interest and high speed internet connection.



Pioneers in online education

When we first opened our virtual doors with a series of workshops online early in 2006, people didn't know what to expect. At the time very few educators were providing live education online. Our classes were met with skepticism by some, curiosity by others. *Webinars*, as they've come to be known, were reserved for large multinational corporations and online education was limited to correspondence courses by email. When we opened our virtual doors, we were among the first to combine the benefits of taking a live class with a real teacher and the convenience of sitting down at a computer at home to take a college preparatory class. We've been expertly teaching the Classical world live online since the start of 2006, and I dare say we do it better than anyone else. [Read more about our credentials](#)

Latin and Greek are *foreign* languages

We know that people spoke and wrote Greek at least as early as the middle Bronze Age (2500 B.C.) using a writing system known as "Linear B." Hundreds of years later they would create a new writing system to match an already old language. That alphabet is still used in Modern Greek more than 3000 years later. The Romans picked up the language torch and claimed an influential spot on the planet for over a thousand years. Their language became the common tongue among the educated classes. In the 2800 years since it started, Latin has been reinvented, demolished, and reconstructed by hundreds of thousands of people as they've turned Latin into French, Italian, Spanish and other Romance languages. During that time, the Romans looked to the Greeks for literary inspiration as they developed their own writing brilliance. The vocabulary and literature of the Greek and Roman people are complex expressions of their rich heritage...*but they are completely foreign to you.*

You could spend a lifetime decoding and translating the subtleties of Greek & Latin expression. This will not happen instantly and dramatically. You can only accomplish it with patience and determination. Don't waste time being indignant that Latin or Greek work differently than your native tongue.

Enjoy the mysteriousness of mastering a language that is importantly old instead of sulking that it is not more like English.

You will have to work hard to master these languages

If we had a nickel for everyone who “just wanted a fun and easy approach” to these languages...we’d have a lot of nickels. Don’t get me wrong. Most students in our classes actually enjoy learning these languages and consider them one of their favorite subjects. They are thrilled to decode ancient words into beautiful flowing English. They get excited when the light bulb turns on and they better understand Latin, Greek and English at the same time. It is fun to master challenging new things and then, with practice and effort, begin to do them well. Much is expected and so much is gained. Many educators mistakenly believe that the key to academic success is to make it everything “fun and easy.” I learned long ago to take my language students seriously. They usually respond in kind.

Learning any new language is hard work. I've known dozens of very bright (even gifted and profoundly gifted) students give up on Latin or Greek quickly because they must work at it. This comes as a surprise to many intelligent students who are accustomed to hard things coming easily. They incorrectly interpret a need to work at something as being bad at it. Everybody is bad at it at first because these are *foreign* languages. Determination is the only thing that makes you good at them.

Don't be afraid to fail a little bit

All language learners must take linguistic baby steps. The early stages of language learning requires testing, trying, comparing, checking, failing, trying again, and having more success with each attempt. Success is a matter of failure paired with determination followed by increased success. If you find yourself saying "I'm not good at Latin or Greek," you have the wrong mind set and an attitude that will assure a bad experience. When you first learned to speak you didn't think in terms of "I'm not good at speaking" but in terms of "I want in on this communication thing!" So get over the idea of being "good" or "bad" at language...just *get in on it*, no matter what it takes.

Technique #10: Wait

Wait 'til you are 12 to 15 years old (or older) to get started

Those who teach modern spoken languages generally agree that the earlier children begin to learn a spoken language, the easier it will be for them to achieve native or near native proficiency. Partnered with the first notion is the idea that students who begin language later will have a more difficult time and limited success. Educators and parents all fear their language-learning window of opportunity will pass at the end of elementary years, never to return again.

This *critical period hypothesis* was first put forth in a 1967 study which outlined the idea of critical windows for language acquisition. This 40+ year old hypothesis, which passes as fact in some circles, effects the decisions that we make about *when* it is best to attempt a new language, and *when* we should abandon hope for achievement.

Since we only offer Latin & Greek for students working at the high school level at The Lukeion Project, parents ask if their older child (12-18) is going to be at a disadvantage for starting Latin so "late" or, conversely, if there is an advantage for children to begin a Classical language during the elementary years. In addition, many adults have an interest in learning Latin but fret about their abilities to keep up with younger language learners and all those natural "language window" skills.

It is not only 'ok' to learn Latin & Greek after logic and maturity kick in ... it is actually preferable!

That 1967 study (and others like it) proposed that the human brain was equipped with learning windows for speech, reading, writing, and learning the sounds of a language. Any good parent knows that children are powerful mimics at a young age and this study confirmed that hunch. The researchers in this study also proposed that the learning window snaps shut at puberty. This claim has had a big impact on education in America, especially as parents blame themselves for missing *THE* window. Likewise older learners give themselves the excuse to quit language studies prematurely.

While the *critical period* hypothesis is now spouted as truth by some, detractors have been successfully poking holes in this theory for the past 30 years. More recent research in neurology has demonstrated that, while language learning is *not the same* in childhood and adulthood because of developmental differences in the brain, "in important respects adults have superior language learning capabilities" (Walsh and Diller, 1978).

The big advantage for teenagers and adults is that the neural cells responsible for higher-order linguistic processes, such as understanding semantic relations and grammatical sensitivity, *develop* with age. Especially in the areas of vocabulary and language structure, adults are actually better language learners than children. An experiment in 1973 with a group of American English speakers learning German, showed that adults did significantly better than children after 10 lessons. Another study in 1978 not only confirmed the first study (this time the language was Dutch), but added that *twelve to fifteen year old adolescents* scored the best, the adults came second, and children less than ten years old ranked the last.

Regardless of our ability to soak up a native-sounding accent, our brains are not equipped to think analytically about language and complex grammar until we are somewhere between the ages of 12 to 15 or even older. Even if a child works at French (or whatever language) from a fairly young age, he or she will not normally master complicated French grammar or read sophisticated French literature until he or she reaches the formal reasoning stage between ages 12 to 15, right around the time natural English speakers begin to comprehend more complicated language and grammar in their own language.

Even if mastery of proper accent can only be achieved at a young age (for which there is a diminishing body of evidence), remember that Latin and Classical Greek are not usually taught as spoken languages. They are intended to be read. The long list of reasons to take Latin or Greek does not normally include having speaking just like Sophocles or Caesar. *This is not to say that starting Latin or Greek at age 7 or 8 will do damage to a language learner (unless it is taught so that a student becomes bored or resistant) but the hard work of comprehension and translation will not usually take place until after he or she is 12 or older for the majority of students.*

The cognitive advantages to taking Latin or Greek later are numerous but mastering self-organization, self-control, and self-motivation are other good reasons to wait for a bit of maturity. Finally, a more mature student is better equipped to communicate well with the instructor and ask insightful questions so that he or she doesn't just mimic and memorize but actually understand.

If you have a student aged 13 or 14 or older...or if you as an adult would like to take these languages, rejoice! 'Older' is the perfect age to start Latin or Greek. ***NOW is the language learning window you have been looking for.***

Wait until you understand your first language better

Ever tried to put together a complicated model airplane without using the instructions? Have you ever started playing a video game at level 23 instead of level 1? Do you feel like you could jump into an advanced photography, gardening or science class before you've learned the basics? Jumping into Latin or Greek with few basics can be difficult and frustrating, even more so than other languages. While you might be able to distinguish the parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adverbs, etc.) you must also know how languages work before you can put the whole puzzle together. You will need the language basics.

Though many people will become phenomenally good at English grammar after they learn Latin or Greek, the road goes both ways. Before taking those first few Classical language lessons, make sure you understand English using the terms you'll soon need to master Latin and Greek. Go beyond verb and noun. What is transitive and intransitive? What is a predicate? What do you know about subjects, direct objects and indirect objects? Get to know the basics and then you will understand Latin and Greek better from the start. We'll talk more about *becoming a mechanic* below plus how you might get some help.

More information:

Critical Period Hypothesis Eric Lenneberg, *Biological Foundations of Language* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1967

Older learners learning language Mary Schleppegrell, [Age and Language Learning](#), ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics Washington DC, 1987.

Walsh, T.M and K.C, Diller, *Neurolinguistic Foundations to Methods of Teaching a Second Language*, 1978

Technique #9: Find out how *YOU* learn

We human beings have many ways to get the information we need to make sense of their world. We use all our senses to navigate the world around us in a remarkable symphony of coordination and fact finding. But human beings also have specific *preferences* about how they like to collect information. Some of us are **auditory** (we do better learning through listening), some are **visual** (we need to see it to before we can understand it), some are **kinesthetic** learners (we have to touch and handle things to learn about them). In almost all cases, people can mix and match these learning preferences a bit but do best using one approach over all others. This is how each of us is hard wired. Trying to make a visual learner master everything through hearing, for example, will only serve to confound and frustrate everyone involved.

There are a lot of wonderful well-meaning teachers that will tell you to spend hours chanting Latin paradigms or reading Greek aloud. This can be a great tool for auditory learners. In bygone eras, folks who learned best by hearing were the majority of learners. Story-telling and listening were the primary forms of information sharing and entertainment for much of world history.

The problem with relying on chanting as the memorization tool of choice is that only a quarter of us or less are now auditory learners. Even fewer people between ages 10-18 are auditory learners. They are a generation which has been treated to a feast of visual information from birth. Movies, games, television plus an unending supply of books have prompted the modern learner to strongly prefer visual data over all other forms of information-gathering. ***This fact is not a fault to be corrected but an asset to use powerfully in language acquisition.***

If you prefer visual data, chanting paradigms will be a waste of time. Tactile hands-on learners will be in the same boat. I'm a visual learner. I could chant something until my voice was raspy but I wouldn't remember any of it the next day. For the same reason, I can't remember the rules for card games or driving instructions if people explain them to me rather than show me. Once I get a look at the rules or the map I can remember just about anything. I can still remember recipes from cooking shows decades ago because the method was shown to me.

The reverse is true if auditory learners are asked to rely on looking at a book without hearing the material explained or the vocabulary pronounced aloud. Kinesthetic learners need to manipulate the information somehow. They can often learn something quickly through a game that would otherwise take weeks of explanations and charts. One's learning style is not a problem that can be fixed. We are hard-wired by life, experiences and even DNA to have a preference about how we learn.

Discovering your learning style can be a great revelation. Things that you weren't "good at" might suddenly make more sense if you find more appropriate ways to learn them. One-size-fits-all education has many drawbacks but failing to help different style learners is the biggest issue of all. An approach that integrates audible instruction, visual cues (charts, images, diagrams), and games is normally just the ticket. Everyone can learn if he uses his style of choice.

Diagnose what type of learner you are

Most people already suspect *how* they learn best, even if they've never heard of the three most common learning styles. If you want a fast inventory test of your own learning style, [go here](#). In the modern world, the majority of us are visual learners so many of my hints here will offer advice for you but don't despair if you do better by hearing or touching. Every type of learner can master a new language.

Once you discover your learning style...

If you have the option and luxury to do so, start changing how you learn new material. Find ways to *listen* to important topics if you are an auditory learner. Look for new ways to *draw, illustrate or diagram* facts and concepts if you are a visual learner. Find ways to *play with and manipulate data* if you are a kinesthetic learner.

Tips for Visual Learners

Visual learners are people who tend to enjoy looking at maps, charts, pictures, videos, books and movies; they tend to remember things they have seen rather than heard. This is by far the largest group of learners in modern America. From our youngest years we now viewed books, programs, movies and images to encourage a strong learning bias towards visual data. I recommend you:

1. Review English grammar by mastering **sentence diagramming**.
2. Use flash cards. Make additional cards for grammatical data and forms as well as vocabulary.
3. Attach images to vocabulary flash cards. (doodle a girl on the flash card for *puella*, for example)
4. Play online language review games.
5. Write out everything several times: draw, redraw and format charts or diagrams to help you remember tough grammatical concepts
6. Write things out while hearing the information. Be sure to return to your notes once you are done hearing information(while it is still fresh) to rewrite what you've heard more understandably.
7. **Never purchase pre-made flash cards**--making them yourself gives you an essential practice session.
8. Test yourself by writing charts and diagrams from memory and comparing them to the textbook answers. Repeat this process until you get everything just right.
9. Learn by going in reverse: go back and forth from English to Latin and Latin to English as much as possible.

Tips for Auditory Learners

Auditory learners are people who think in words instead of pictures and remember things better when heard rather than seen. Once the majority of learners (50+ years ago), they are now the minority compared to visual learners. Many who were born in a pre-television era (or who now live in a video and television-free home) might be auditory because entertainment hours are spent listening to radio, recordings and story-telling with little visual data. I recommend you:

1. Create audio flash cards for vocabulary and grammar. Wheelock's Latin has audio 'flash cards' already available in digital form.

2. Take Latin or Greek from a live person who presents the material aloud.
3. Have others read the information aloud to you. Watch and listen to recordings of each session as you master new material.
4. Explain or teach the material aloud to others. Find a parent or younger sibling who needs a little language tutoring. Explaining it to somebody will help you verbally process it and then understand it.
5. Find and write mnemonic songs or jingles about the Latin you are learning. Come up with a new song for each important set of data you come across?

Tips for Kinesthetic Learners

Kinesthetic people learn through moving, doing and touching. This is the smallest group because most natural kinesthetic learners are pushed to adapt to either auditory or visual styles, even though they may still struggle with subjects that are only heard or seen. For strong tactile learners, Latin and Greek are going to be challenging but not impossible. I recommend you:

1. Limit study sessions to 15 minutes, coming back to it throughout the day.
2. Make flash cards of various components of Latin, manipulate them to practice their meaning (i.e.. make cards with verb endings and cards with verb roots, move them into new combinations and translate)
3. Treat sentences as building blocks to be pulled apart and re-assembled to make English sense. Spend extra time learning the *mechanics* of the language. Be sure to answer questions about how and why your sentences do what they do so you are satisfied with an understanding of how it all works.
4. Turn your homework sentences into something that looks like a football game plan. Draw plenty of arrows, Xs, circles etc. to show the structure of the sentence as you translate. Pull the sentence apart completely, finding the subject and verb first, the direct object next and then putting together the rest of the puzzle.
5. English grammar should be learned by diagramming.
6. Play as many online review games that you can find.

Few learn using only one style of learning

All languages involve all the senses. Everybody should write out translation passages, say them aloud to the cat, dog or roommate. Circle verb endings, make notes to yourself about grammar. Make a mess with notes, lines, circles and arrows. Organize the mess into coherent English thoughts. Spend a few minutes playing a review game and teach some Latin to a sibling. Be sure you sample methods from all three styles until you find various approaches that work best for you.

TECHNIQUE #8: Plain Old Flash Cards

One thing that students must learn especially well is vocabulary. Words are bricks. You are getting ready to build a strong foundation in Latin or Greek with those bricks. The more words you truly know without having to flip through a dictionary to find, the better your foundation. Knowing more vocabulary will make Latin and Greek more fun. Mastering vocabulary takes work. You will have to

cater to your learning style and also learn new words using all of your senses (we'll talk about this below). Lucky for you there is a tool that works for just about everyone.

The best multi-sensory vocabulary-learning device is the mighty flash card. Flash cards *have* been



around since Caesar was a boy but that's because they work really well as long as you are sure to use these low-tech wonders effectively.

Flash cards are your friends: they are portable, ever-present, pocket sized and extremely affordable. They never need batteries and don't require ear phones. What could be better? Consider the number of forms that each Latin verb has. Ok, that's a trick question. If you are new to Latin or Greek you may not know that your run-of-the-mill Latin verb can have 133 forms! You should not be surprised that even an excellent Latin dictionary will only list a handful of forms for each verb.

A normal Latin dictionary will require you to look at any verb form and figure out (or backwards engineer) the first **principal part*** of the verb you are looking for. Since you have not yet

**PRINCIPAL PARTS are essential tools in both Latin and Greek. It is impossible to master Classical verbs unless you learn principal parts from the very start.*

even started to master verbs you might think this idea sounds pretty reckless: *I have to backwards engineer a verb I know nothing about in order to find out something about it...and get it correct?*

As you let this news settle in, let me encourage you NOW to take Latin and Greek verbs seriously. Memorize and

master each and every verb form as you are introduced to it. Some crazy Latin programs (and even crazier Latin teachers) will not make you master verb forms and principal parts. This approach will make you feel happy at first, *bitter and angry later*. In the end you will be completely clueless about Latin or Greek and will become aware that your time would have been better spent elsewhere, maybe learning welding or photography. If you are following an approach that doesn't require you to completely and fully master your verb forms, go find a new approach.

Words take work

Can you imagine how well you'd do in your native tongue if you could never think of a word without looking it up in a dictionary or chart? Rome was not built in a day, nor can you passively learn any Latin or Greek words by sleeping on your text book or by finding them in a chart every time you translate a sentence. This will not do. You will fail. Do not try it. Alarm. You MUST plumb the depths of your willpower to master the words of your new language.

Why flashcards? Are they not “so last century”?

The best way to learn any new language is to involve as many senses as possible. Many software companies make zillions of dollars by making the plain old flash card technique flamboyant and sparkly. The method remains essentially unchanged (though the price goes way up). Paper flash cards don't require electricity and you can make as many as you like very cheaply.

Flashcards can be created in a compact form and you can stick them in a purse, backpack or pocket to use whenever there is a lull in the action of your day (a commute or doctor's office wait, for example).

Students frequently ask me about purchasing pre-printed flash cards. **Save your money.** Unless your handwriting is completely illegible or if you are physically unable to use paper flash cards, *the process of creating the cards is part of the benefit of flash cards.*

How to create fabulous paper flash cards

1. Purchase **blank** cards. You can find the small version online (also available in different colors) if you look. Alternatively you can grab the larger ones cheaply at local stores (I recommend cutting them in half because 3x5 is too large). Cards can be stored in the box when not in use and easily shuffled like playing cards so do NOT punch a hole in them and put them on a ring.
2. Buy extra fine-point felt-tip or gel pens, colored pencils, *or anything that makes marks to your liking* (thicker markers soak through paper so be sure to avoid them). Feel free to create a color code: maybe blue for verbs, red for nouns, green for adverbs—doesn't matter which color choice, just be consistent. Sometimes the color reminder can help you load a vocabulary word into long term memory.
3. Write the most basic form on one side—this should be the “dictionary form” (the form of the word you will use to look up the word in a dictionary). Don't give yourself any other clues for this side of the card—less is more.
4. On the reverse side write all the other data including anything else that is helpful or a mnemonic device. BEWARE: a word may have a wide range of meanings. Video, for example, means: to see; observe, understand. Write the full range of meanings on the back of your card in small and neat words.
5. Don't be stingy: if you mess up a card, throw it away and start over.

How to Use Flash Cards Effectively

Before we go any further, let's talk about using your flash cards. I can hear some of you saying, “Duh! It only has two sides! How complicated can it be?” Wrongo, tiny ones!

Let me make it clear to you that when it comes to using flash cards properly, **YOU ARE GOING TO BE YOUR OWN WORST ENEMY.** For some of you, an evil twin (or triplet if you are already a twin) will

WHY NOT JUST USE COMPUTER-BASED FLASHCARDS? There are many options for computer flash cards plus ways to make your own digital flash cards available online. I create a set for my own students for each chapter of the textbook. Is that enough? The students who take the extra steps necessary to analyze a word and write out a deck of flash cards are usually the ones who will take that deck of cards with them wherever they go. I can always tell which students make and use their own flash cards (in addition to online versions); *they have a much higher grade than students who just click through some pre-made versions online.*

frequently talk you into lazy flash card use. This will be your undoing because your Latin or Greek grade may depend on how often you listen to your evil twin.

scenario 1 in which your evil twin is in charge of the flash card study session

You spend 10 minutes scrawling new flashcards for the assigned chapter. You punch holes in the corners of each card and bolt them permanently into place with the other 40 cards you made earlier in the semester. You flip through the new cards and get 14 out of 20 cards *almost sorta kinda* correct. You flip through them a second time and get 16 out of 20 *correctish-sorta*. Good enough! You realize that you are thirsty and wander into the kitchen. Your flash card session ends unceremoniously and your quiz score is doomed.

scenario 2 in which you, *the budding linguist*, is in charge of the flash card study session

You spend 20 minutes creating new flashcards for the chapter using your cool color code for nouns, verbs, etc. and you say them aloud in an impressively booming tone that wakes your hamster, dog or cat (if you share a room with a sibling, choose a tone that will wake him or her as well). You pull your whole deck of flash cards out of your backpack or purse where you have them handy for dull moments during the day. You take the new cards and shuffle them mercilessly into the deck of well-known vocabulary words.

Now you go through each card with side 1 showing. Toss any card for which you hesitate for more than the count of three back into the review stack; victories get tossed onto a second pile that can be ignored until the next review session. ***Reshuffle the review pile mercilessly each time*** (you can't reshuffle your deck if you've punched holes and fastened them -- *so don't punch holes and fasten them. Rubber bands only!*) Repeat the exercise until you get down to a few stubborn words. For these you will need mnemonic devices (a.k.a. memory aids). For example, you can remember that *quid* means "what" because now you picture yourself getting attacked by a giant *squid* and shouting "What!?!"

Keep reshuffling until you get the meaning correct for all 60 cards (your original 20 plus all your old ones). You will have to be strict with your evil twin who has been urging you to go do something else, like text your friends or play with your pet rat.

after the first 15-20 minutes of actual study have passed:

Flip the deck so that only side 2 is up. Now work backwards from the word's meaning to the dictionary form. You will use a different set of brain muscles to make this happen. Repeat the process of sorting and shuffling until you get through them all successfully (can you SPELL the dictionary form, too). Fasten them all together with a rubber band, toss them into your backpack or purse, and get something victorious to snack on.

Never fasten your flash cards together. Some Latin teachers will disagree with me and tell you to mount them all on a big ring. Ignore them. How challenging is a card game that is always dealt in the same order? The game is neither challenging nor interesting because it won't take long until you realize that the ace of diamonds is going to appear right after the king of hearts and just before the eight of spades. If you learn your vocabulary and forms in the same order each time, you will

quickly become dependent on the sequence of words. You will fail to master the words as unique pieces of information.

Every time you go through your vocabulary, shuffle your vocabulary cards. Use card stock so they hold up well over time.

TAKE THE STREETLIGHT CHALLENGE (PASSENGERS ONLY)

1. The goal is to go through your set of flash cards in the amount of time it takes for a light to turn from red to green (periodically remove any cards that you get all the time without fail).
2. If you can't do this, you need more work. Study hard up until the next stop light and try it again until you can give yourself a 100% pass.
3. Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle. Sometimes you can remember a vocabulary word simply because of the card that precedes it. Who needs that? Shuffle!

TECHNIQUE #7: write a textbook

*Those that
write, learn
twice.*

I don't mean you *literally* need to write a textbook.

One of the best ways to learn a complicated language like Latin or Greek is to hear, read and analyze the new material as you make your way through the textbook. You can master a lot by simply rewriting the words in the textbook in a way that makes more sense for you. Also, reorganize the information in ways that will help you study. Students might collect all the first

conjugation verbs as they make their way through the textbook. They can then compare how their principal parts are the same. If they do the same for all conjugations, they will soon have no problem predicting how Latin and Greek verbs work, how they are spelled, and what they look like in different tenses, voices and moods.

What's the point of a textbook if you recopy it?

When you recopy class notes or charts, diagrams or paradigms (sets of all forms of a word giving all of the possible inflections of a word), you are forced to employ your best analytical skills. Spelling the forms correctly and organizing the information for yourself can make even very complex ideas a breeze. Organizing tricky information and then writing things out can be one of the best ways to mastering huge amounts of language data.

Write and then re-write

Go buy a dry erase board and markers. You can test yourself again and again by writing out paradigms. After you finish, check your work. How did you do? Not so good at first? Erase and repeat until you get it correct. All the forests will thank you for using a dry erase board instead of paper.

Personalize your notes

Turn your class and reading notes, diagrams, doodles, mnemonic aids, and quotes, into a useful and lasting tool by keeping a well-designed notebook.

- Do you like scrap-booking? Get out the pinking shears and sparkly glitter pens.
- Do you enjoy using computer design and graphics, go digital. Format charts of splendor or make a computer wallpaper each week with the grammar and vocabulary at hand.
- Write a jingle or song to fit the concepts to be memorized. Keep a copy in your notebook to help you review for midterms and final exams.
- Arrange and order Latin or Greek in ways that makes sense *to you*.

Create recipe cards

As my 2nd year Latin students begin to advance into complex grammar like the ablative absolute, passive periphrastic or relative clause of characteristic, I ask them to master the “ingredients” of these grammatical constructions. If they do, they can recognize grammatical constructions in action and translate them accurately. Advanced students grow accustomed to writing about these constructions as though they are describing the ingredients and instructions in a recipe. Students should also collect examples of the grammatical constructions they find while translating their homework. Doing so creates a great way to pause and review the material quickly and easily.



TECHNIQUE #6: Study *after* the exam (too)

This method is highly effective yet 90% of students who study any academic topic fail to use it. The 10% who follow *technique #6* are usually the best at what they do. What is this mysterious system?

As soon as you get your homework graded or exam corrected, compare your work with the ‘real’ answers. How did you do? Were you on track or did you blow it? If you messed up or got off track, find out how. The purpose of all that memorizing and translating is to see how well you understand your new language. You could spend a lot of effort translating, studying and taking quizzes but if you don’t spend time carefully figuring out *what you did wrong afterwards*, you will make very little progress. Getting feedback about how you did with a language is very important but only if you learn from your own mistakes.

Languages are like any other cumulative subject. Like math or science, you will master basic ideas and then build on those ideas as you progress. If you totally blow portions of “the basics” and never return to study them, you’ll always be working from a deficit in information. Therefore, **study the material both before the exam and after**. Find out what you missed and swear to learn it on the spot so that the missing data finds a home in your long term memory. Every time you are tested or quizzed, just be sure to study what you missed. Each time you have a translation graded, or at least the correct answer provided, study what you missed. Never fail to take advantage of being corrected and then be sure to study what you missed.

TECHNIQUE #5: Use what you learn

Why are you taking Latin or Greek? You must answer this question before day 1. It is common for students to start one of these languages primarily because mom or dad think it is a good idea. If you are already familiar with the “*do it because it is good for you*” approach, you also know that some other motivations are necessary if you want to succeed. Nobody become an excellent athlete or famous painter purely because somebody else told them it was good for them. What’s your REAL motivation?

Every semester I have at least one student who believes that Latin is going to be a matter of memorizing some forms and getting them correct on the quiz. I’ve even had one student ask why I *make* him translate. Yikes! It is time to put down the workbook and back away if you think that learning any language is only a matter of mimicking back a few words here and there. So, why bother with Greek & Latin?

Reasons Greek & Latin are worth learning well

You will find language programs that only ask you to memorize a few Greek words or a couple Latin sentences. They may even reward you handsomely with a nice plump “A” grade. But, what have you accomplished if you can’t translate (aka *read*) anything? Your goal is to translate, translate, translate.

Nobody would take a high school Spanish or French course in which they are only expected to know the names of colors and fruit. Sure, it would be a breeze but it would be a big waste of time. Such a class would quickly become boring and *snoozeworthy*. For a language to do any good, students must actually learn it and, in the case of Latin and Greek, read the real deal.

Here are some more reasons Latin and Greek are worth it:

- Unlike most spoken languages, a Classical language student must always read everything syllable by syllable. His analytical skills will increase a thousand fold as he practices his powers of deduction to decode the ever-changing language puzzles at hand. **Learning Latin and Greek will make a student analytical and logical by necessity.**
- These subjects impact the quality of writing and composition skills, vocabulary, speech and comprehension. Estimates of how many words have entered English from Latin and Greek start with a conservative 60%. Legal, medical or scientific professionals say it is closer to 80%.
- The study of Classical language used to be the primary lens through which we could better understand the mechanics and vocabulary of English. This is why previous generations were so much better at our own language. Studies conducted by the Educational Testing Service show that Greek and Latin students consistently outperform all other students on the verbal portion of the SAT based on data from the past decade.¹
- Classics majors tend to have a higher GPA at the college level and have accelerated performance in nearly all other subjects such as math, music and history (*ibid.*).
- According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, students who major in Classics have a better success rate getting into medical school than do students who concentrate solely on science.² Classics majors also have the highest success rates of any majors in law school.

Reading is Fundamental

Your goal in studying Latin or Greek is to read in Latin or Greek. Why bother if this is not both your goal and method? You should begin reading Latin or Greek on the first day of lessons and continue to do so as often as possible. Your skills should continue to build so that in two years (three at the absolute longest) you can pick up any Latin author and, with a good dictionary and some determination, translate everything that writer had to say into pleasant clear English.

There are piles of Latin and Greek passages geared to all levels of Latin learners. These are fun, challenging, rewarding and usually a mixture of all three. Many Latin or Greek texts are glossed so that you can translate them without flipping through a dictionary too often. Many hone their skills by translating the Septuagint, the Greek New Testament and the Vulgate versions of the Bible. This habit can hone your skills while you are edified at the same time. Don't stop there! If your efforts have paid off, you should be able to tackle the writings of Cicero, Aristotle, Sophocles or Vergil!



I like to keep a collection of memorable Latin quotations and post one near my desk as a motto. Just having these hung near a favorite work place means your brain is doing some Latin. This will also convince your family that you are making excellent progress toward being a genius.

You might even find that you become the local genius in residence, ready to handle quotes from art, literature and University seals.

Put yourself to the test

Although some national standardized tests have done as much harm as good, certain special tests are ways to set goals and reward your progress in your language mastery adventure. If you work hard and do well, you may also be rewarded with scholarships, medals, certificates and possibly college credits.

Every year the students in our language classes participate in the [National Latin Exam](#) and the [National Greek Exam](#) as proof of their language mastery. On average, 90% of our students take honors on this exam to demonstrate their ability to handle a wide variety of language challenges. Not only do these exams look great on transcripts, they also demonstrate a student's excellence in Latin or Greek to even the harshest critic (or college admissions dean). Students can win medals, certificates and, at higher levels, even scholarship money and additional honors. The National Latin Exam offers up to 6 years of tests above "Intro." The National Greek Exam offers five levels of exams.

3rd year Latin students should be ready to move on to sample a variety of Latin authors from many time periods. My students start with the easy Late Latin authors (Medieval and Patristic period)

and move in reverse chronological order to the more difficult Golden authors like Catullus, Caesar, Cicero and Livy. I encourage them to take the [SAT special subject test in Latin](#) after their 2nd year or, if they continue in Latin, after their 3rd year. This exam is geared only toward students who have had two to three years of “Classical” Latin (the language of Cicero, Caesar and Vergil).

4th year Latin is normally a student’s senior year (*I have many gifted students who take 4th year earlier than this*). If they have prepared well for the previous three years, this will be the perfect time for them to take the AP Latin Exam which is offered every year in May. If a student performs well on this very challenging exam, he or she may receive college credits at considerable savings of time and money. This exam is geared only toward students who have had four years of “Classical” Latin (the language of Cicero, Caesar and Vergil). Students who study Late Latin as is offered in some programs will not be ready for this exam without a great deal of extra preparation.

¹ Annual reports from College-Bound Seniors — A Profile of SAT Program Test Takers from years 1999-2005, 2007 available at <http://www.bolchazy.com/al/latadv.htm#sat>

² <http://www.princetonreview.com/Majors.aspx?page=1&cip=161200>

TECHNIQUE #4: Be a language mechanic

You don't have to be a professor of English to know that there is an educational crisis in America: *People don't know much about grammar anymore!* We can blame many things but as each generation passes, fewer people can write properly, express themselves in complete sentences or spell correctly even if they could.

Learning Latin or Greek is the perfect cure for this crisis. Latin and Greek disappeared from normal school curricula around the same time that grammar took a statistical nose-dive. Historically, the study of these languages has been foundational to educating reasoning, analytical, well-educated people. There is a direct correlation to these languages “going out of style” pedagogically and grammar falling off the tracks academically. Every day Latin programs are being cut from public and private schools by the dozen. Greek is no longer taught even in Bible colleges or seminaries.

There is much controversy about the ‘right’ way to learn Latin & Greek. Some say a student should start by memorizing mountains of data first so that he can someday hope to glue it all together into a translation...*someday*. The folks that promote this method say it has been done this way for hundreds of years (I’m not so sure). While the “*do it this way because it’s traditional*” argument works for some folks, it trivializes the importance of personal learning styles. It also ignores the dozens of great new learning methods invented during the last 2000 years.

Others say it is best to jump into a Greek or Latin sentence with gusto and then try to figure out what the sentence says. With enough analysis and a few clues, you will eventually be able to make sense of the language “naturally,” albeit with a greatly diminished understanding of *why* the Latin or Greek does what it does. This approach is supposed to be fun because students start reading right away without being bogged down with all those grammar and memorization chores.

I was taught Latin using this approach in college. I *did* think it was fun! “Yippie,” I thought; “We are reading big long passages of Latin in our first week of class!”

My professor was using our class as an experiment to see if this method worked better than the balanced grammar + reading approach that had been used at my university for decades (*her colleagues didn't think it was a good idea—she should have listened*). She gave me juicy “A” grades for all my glorious Latin efforts.

Armed with stellar grades as one of the top Latinists in the class, I applied to a Classics graduate program. When I started my first graduate Latin course I discovered I was actually the dumb kid on the block. All of my fellow students had learned Latin using a balance of grammar, memorization, and translation. I spent twice as much time translating half as well as they did, even though I'd been at the top of my “natural acquisition” Latin program in college. Pure determination compelled me to go back and relearn all the stuff that a *natural* approach failed to teach me: the mechanics of the Latin language.

Balance is your best bet. You must learn *how* and *why* at the same time you learn *what*. Students should know **how** the language works the way it does, **why** it functions that way, and **what tools** will be necessary to make that happen. The most effective Greek and Latin students are budding language mechanics.

As my husband and I have continued teaching through the years, we discovered that fewer and fewer of our students understand even the basic principles of English grammar, much less the grammar of Latin or Greek. While all of them will ultimately *become* good at English grammar via their study of Greek and Latin, half or more must be taught the mechanics of their own language in preparation for Latin and Greek. My teaching colleagues in both public and private institutions say the situation is much worse there than for homeschoolers : Grammar is an endangered subject.

What should a student know about Grammar before starting Latin or Greek?

It isn't enough to know the parts of speech. If a child's understanding of the English language is limited to identifying nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, he will struggle with Latin or Greek. His best bet will be if he can also understand and describe more complicated language relationships like:

- noun/verb agreement
- direct objects vs. indirect objects
- relative pronouns and antecedents
- active vs. passive voice
- transitive vs. intransitive
- tense vs. verbal aspect
- prepositional phrases

What's the best way to learn these sorts of things?

Hands down, the best system for understanding what is going on in English (and by transferal Latin or Greek) is the good old method of diagramming sentences. If you've never heard of this technique, you have been missing out on a truly effective resource for teaching language.

Through years of teaching and lots of experience with struggling language learners, we developed a semester class called [Barbarian Diagrammarian](#). It combines super vivid visual learning, lots of interaction and solid grammar. Our completely unique approach offers students the skills needed to start Latin, begin Greek, and claim ascendancy over the English language. They will master grammatical jargon, put nouns right where they belong, and get their hands on all the best weapons for defeating English grammar before it ever gets the better of them. This class is great for all at the high school level but especially recommended for 8th & 9th grade, namely those getting ready to start real Latin and real Greek.

TECHNIQUE #3: Teach to learn

*Homines, dum
docent, discunt
~ Seneca*

When I was a poor graduate student I started making money on the side by tutoring undergraduate Latin students. Not only did tutoring allow me to have enough money to expand my diet from just noodles and yogurt, I also started to really understand Latin grammar and vocabulary.

As a tutor I was expected to explain and re-explain all the tough language concepts that had driven those college students to spend the extra money to hire a tutor. Even back then in the dark ages, students weren't that good at English grammar so I had to teach that at the same time. I usually found that a combination of English and poor study skills were the actual problem. Did students need a good mnemonic device to remember a tough verb paradigm? I had to think of one to help them. Did I have to come up with new study strategies because their old professor gave them one that didn't fit their learning style? I had to think of that, too. I gained more from the process of tutoring than my student did. This proves Seneca's ancient saying, "People learn while they teach."

Any home educator knows this is true. The smartest people I know are veteran home educators. They've taught and learned 12 years of foundational education, frequently many times over.

Apply this principle to your young Latin & Greek student. Have him teach the subjects to a parent, sibling or friend. Not only will he learn quickly, you might even get a two-for-one deal that includes a younger sibling that breezes through his high school language requirements because her big sister was her tutor. This principal is usually a natural side-effect of language learning. In our classes we will frequently have siblings take the class together. One sibling usually pulls ahead in the race to master the language. Why? Not because one sibling is "naturally" better at Latin or Greek but because the slightly stronger Latinist starts to tutor the other. The gap will continue to spread until the weaker student becomes tutor to a younger one, and so on. Siblings that don't work together miss out on being each other's tutor.

TECHNIQUE #2: Use all 5 senses

Learning a new language rewires your brain, especially when you are learning to read it at the same time. You must use your eyes, ears, voice and hands to master it. Understanding how you personally learn things best will help you strategize about learning techniques (see technique #9). After you figure out how you learn best, it is time to get creative.

Instead of using one method day after day, try a variety of different ways to study language. You wouldn't lift weights with only one arm. Likewise you need to work out different parts of your brain by using all your senses. Get creative: read, write, draw, doodle, pronounce, act out your language. Here are some ideas that cater to different personalities:

- Use sidewalk chalk and illustrate new vocabulary flamboyantly on your sidewalk or driveway.
- Start a journal in which you push yourself to write stories (starting as short sentences) in Latin or Greek.
- Record yourself reading the textbook aloud (or talk a sibling or parent into the job) so you can hear it again while out and on the move.
- Seek out modern works that have been translated into Latin or Greek and try to translate them. You'll be surprised how many popular books are available in Latin.
- When in church, try to read along with the passage of the day in either Latin or Greek.
- Push yourself to try speaking in Latin when you can. This is a fun thing to do with another language student. Once you get over nervousness about "doing it wrong" you'll start to make real progress.
- Memorize famous passages in Greek or Latin and present them dramatically using your finest forensic skills.
- Tryout your creativity by making a real toga or following Latin recipes.
- Go out of your way to read things in Latin & Greek. There are many online resources to help.
- Join a local chapter of the [NJCL](#): they have monthly and yearly meetings with all sorts of fun activities and contests designed for folks who study Latin (sorry, not much for Greek but maybe you encourage them to include more).
- Travel to see famous Greek and Roman ruins. Travel is such a huge motivation to learn ancient languages and cultures with passion that we lead groups of students with their families to [Italy, Greece and Turkey each year](#). All of the super cool pictures of foreign places come from our trips abroad to the Mediterranean.

TECHNIQUE #1: Do some Language every day, every chance you get

When it comes to studying Latin or Greek, you may envision working diligently until you are able to translate state seals, fraternity mottos, and library inscriptions. Many 15-year old students sees themselves saying something off the cuff to his friends in witty sounding Latin or maybe using some excellent Greek in the middle of a debate tournament. Maybe you just enjoy languages and want to start properly your education properly.

I guarantee that a few months into your study, *unless you plan to study Latin or Greek every day*, you will find yourself regularly attempting a 3-hour marathon cram session once-a-week. You can't fool

me. I was in school a *reeeeeeeaalllly* long time. I know that you will only be productive during the first hour. By the third hour, you will be sleeping on your textbook. Plan to study every day, or else your dreams of language mastery will start to fade.

The following methods work with just about everyone:

Rewire your brain gradually

You are rewiring your brain to learn any new language. Daily study alternating with other activities and a full night's sleep is the stress-free way to soak up Latin or Greek. Sleep is a great study aid--as long as you are not sleeping through the only block of time scheduled for study. Want to know a great vocabulary trick? Spend about 12 minutes on vocabulary right before you go to sleep. Your brain will work on it all night for you while you get some quality snoozing done. First thing in the morning, take a look at a chart of words, endings or forms that you taped to your bathroom mirror, just think them through while you are brushing your teeth.

Long hours of study are actually a waste of time

INSTEAD, do some Latin every day and break up your study sessions into shorter periods. Even on your day off, do 15 minutes of Latin. Work a few flash cards or write out some forms--just do *something* in Latin or Greek every day.

Leaving your new language untouched for even two consecutive days will set you back considerably. You wouldn't stop pedaling your bike as you ride up a hill. Getting back up to speed is *possible* but it might hurt and it might make you sweat a lot. Trying to get all of your language study done in a couple hours each week will feel the same way. Ouch.

How much time should you spend studying each week?

If you attend a **brick-and-mortar school**, expect to spend more total time on Latin or Greek each week since the 5-day-a-week classroom time is not very productive for most students. Counting class time, your normal range will be **7-13 total hours per week**. You might split your time into something like this each week:

- Time physically sitting in class: 1-5 hours
- Understanding and learning new material: 2-3 hours
- Reviewing old material: 1 hours
- Translating: 2-3 hours
- Quizzing: 30 minutes-1 hour

Total: 8-13 hours total

If you attend **The Lukeion Project** program, your time t looks more like this:

- Sunday: spend 30 minutes looking at flash cards as you commute
- Monday: spend around 60 minutes preparing for your quiz, 60 minutes to take the quiz
- Tuesday: Attend class (60 minutes) and then spend around 30 minutes preparing your flash cards and recopying notes after class.
- Wednesday: spend 30 minutes reviewing concepts, spend around 45 minutes translating.

- Thursday: spend 30 minutes reviewing concepts, spend around 45 minutes translating.
- Friday: spend 30 minutes reviewing concepts, spend around 45 minutes translating, spend 30 minutes typing up answers turning in homework
- Saturday: spend 30 minutes looking at flash cards as you commute

Total: 8 hours-10 hours total

If the study time that I recommend here seems like a lot, you will require less time per week once you get up to speed and continue to study a little every day. You will also need quite a bit more time some weeks, a lot less on others. Be flexible and not too pouty. Remember you are learning a foreign language.

The ideal Latin study schedule (and you should make one to fit your own daily routine) will break study blocks up into little pieces. Keep study and translation sessions under an hour at a stretch (30 minutes is better). Go do another task and then return to language later. Take your flash cards in the car and use the otherwise wasted time during a commute or record vocabulary and forms so that you can listen to them at your convenience.

Be a spontaneous studier

Do NOT wait to do your language study until all the world is perfect. This will happen maybe once a semester. Some of you will wait to start until you are rested, fed, comfortable, and have a perfect hour of uninterrupted time. Sounds good doesn't it? It won't happen very often. Instead, study spontaneously when your brain is otherwise on down time or, as I like to say at my house: *on screen-saver*:

- while eating a bowl of cereal
- commuting to another event
- getting ready in the morning
- when there is a lull in the action
- when you are walking the dog, washing the dishes, or any mindless chore