

Learning Latin is foundational to giving your child a classical education. Studying Latin improves mental discipline, indirectly improves English vocabulary and usage, and opens the doors to reading classical and technical literature.

One benefit of studying Latin is that it develops mental discipline. Studying any foreign language involves memorization and application. In Latin, students develop mental discipline by memorizing verb endings (conjugations), noun endings (declensions), and vocabulary words. Although our postmodern minds may balk at memorization, it is no different from preparing for algebra by memorizing the multiplication tables. We expect our children to drill in fine arts or sports, but we balk at drilling academic subjects.

After children have developed the discipline of memorizing the fundamentals of Latin, they begin to apply what they have learned by conjugating verbs in different tenses, declining nouns, and translating. Translation is the final skill learned as students assimilate their knowledge of Latin vocabulary and grammar. The process of memorizing and translating Latin develops excellent study habits as students learn to memorize, to apply, to thoroughly observe details, to work carefully, and to persevere. Latin provides a daily exercise regimen for the brain ‘muscle.’

In addition to developing mental discipline, students who study Latin improve their understanding of their mother tongue—English. It has been estimated that 50% of English words have Latin roots. The number increases to roughly 80% of words that are two or more syllables. This means that Latin students have much higher scores on standardized vocabulary tests such as the SAT. More importantly, Latin students have a larger vocabulary at their command when they are reading and writing.

Vocabulary is not the only English language skill that is enhanced by Latin studies. When students translate sentences and larger passages from Latin to English, they also get a comprehensive course in English grammar as they learn to consider how the eight parts of speech function in both languages. Latin students also receive an excellent education in style. Latin is a more precise and concise language than English. This is why Latin forms the basis for so many inscriptions such as *e pluribus unum* (out of many, one) on American coins and the mottoes for states, universities, and other institutions. After deliberate studies of Latin, students become better writers in English. Writers throughout history—including notables such as Shakespeare—have credited their Latin studies for their English language facility.

If these were not enough intellectual riches, students of Latin have an advantage when they proceed to study other languages. In his book, *The Latin-Centered Curriculum*, Andrew Campbell notes that, “the major Romance languages—Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese—derive 90% or more of their vocabulary from Latin” (p. 44). Students of Latin apprehend other languages much more quickly not just because of their training in grammar and translation, but because they have a head start in remembering the meanings of new words which have Latin roots.

One final consideration is the way in which Latin opens doors to classic and technical literature. When we teach our children Latin, we open doors for them—doors to reading history, literature, science, medicine, and Scripture. Imagine your children automatically translating the scientific names of animals and insects, gaining a fresh perspective on democracy, and reading John 1 in Latin. Latin students reconnect not just with the roots of our language, but with the roots of our culture and our Christian faith. To connect with our Christian culture, we must go back to the beginning which includes a look at Latin—the written and spoken language during the early church.

Unfortunately, most of us were educated in a system which had neglected or even ridiculed the study of Latin by modern students. Fortunately, we have an abundance of resources within our grasp for helping us to learn Latin and teach it to our students.

Although Latin can be challenging, the benefits are worth the time and the occasional struggle. Our students will be rewarded with superb study skills for tackling all difficult subjects, a rich vocabulary, and a deep connection to our classical, Christian culture.