

From Caecilius to Caesar: Building Reading Skills in the Latin Classroom

I am often asked what textbook I prefer by people starting a new Latin program or those fresh out of teacher training. Let me state for the record that I believe a textbook is just a tool, not the end-all for good teaching. Good teaching has to start from within and embodies a philosophy that includes not just Latin but the students being taught Latin. Furthermore, it includes a vision of what the goal is: to enable others to read Latin—in fact, to read Latin *with pleasure* both silently and aloud.

Many people will extol the virtues of the *Cambridge Latin Course* for young students and students who struggle with a second language—the entertaining storyline, the gradual learning curve with regard to grammar in the first two books, and the emphasis on reading (as opposed to the more rigorous facility of being able to go from Latin to English and English to Latin) all make this book appealing to beginning students. Likewise, many devoted, respected teachers of Latin also consider these weaknesses for preparing a serious student of Latin. Having taught upper levels of high school Latin for several years now, I strongly disagree. In fact, I wish to discuss particular aspects that make the *Cambridge Latin Course* highly suitable for the student that not only enjoys the stories of Caecilius and his family but who wishes to read about Caesar's campaigns in Gaul in Caesar's own words as well as Aeneas's quest to establish the Roman race in Vergil's own words.

But before discussing what the *Cambridge Latin Course* has to offer for building a budding Latinist, I should describe the things that I believe are important for learning Latin in my classroom.

- good pronunciation

- vocabulary recognition in context
- morphology recognition in context
- lots of high interest, continuous reading material

To me, the *Cambridge Latin Course* offers:

- A. Natural opportunities for oral reading and questioning
- B. Strong vocabulary development
- C. Conscientious development of patterns and phrasing
- D. Copious amounts of reading material

A. (Let us begin with) Opportunities for oral reading and questioning

Because the material in the *Cambridge Latin Course* is clearly designed to be read out loud or indeed acted, one can develop from the beginning a keen awareness of vowel length, syllabification, and accentuation. Indeed these become critical issues by the time one is reading Caesar or Vergil and should be addressed and reinforced early on with practice and conscientious discussion. Admittedly, I begin each year with a few days of express instruction on pronunciation and syllabification for every level of Latin.

The things that I do throughout the year include:

- reading stories expressively out loud to students as part of a prereading activity
- having students read the text chorally with me as part of a postreading activity
- having students read individually in turn
- using simple questioning and answering to practice pronunciation and reinforce grammatical structures, as well as...

- having recitations per stage (or chapter) based on the stories at hand. (For more on these, please see your handout)

When we learn new endings and new vocabulary, I stress *not* memorizing macrons but learning how to *hear* long versus short vowels, discussing that Latin was a language meant to be heard, a language that was conversed in, and whose prose and poetry is dominated by sound because it was meant to be read out loud.

B. (Next) Strong vocabulary development

The *Cambridge Latin Course* will not put in its stage vocabulary lists any word that has not been seen already at least three times *in context*. Repetition *in context* is a key to true mastery, because we all know that students can learn vocabulary items for the day of the quiz and not remember those words two days later when seen in a story. More traditional vocabulary quizzes often reinforce this problem because they are treating vocabulary in isolation as dictionary entries and not how they will be appearing in context. In contrast, all of my vocabulary quizzes are in context, requiring students to provide a definition that includes changes in meaning determined by morphology. In the beginning of level 1 Latin it may be simply recognizing the difference between singular and plural nominatives and accusatives, or 1st, 2nd, or 3rd person with regard to verbs. In time the complexity increases.

Although level 1 quizzes usually only target a singular vocabulary item at a time, by the time students are in level 2 and 3 they frequently have to translate whole participial phrases or similar that includes the target vocabulary item plus other words which they should have mastered. My AP Caesar and Vergil vocabulary quizzes take this to extremes, forcing students to acknowledge phrasing and at the same time exposing them to the concept of “chunking,” which is used to grade translations on the AP exam. (Please see your handout.)

One aspect of the *Cambridge Latin Course* that I have come to admire greatly is the inclusion of tricky vocabulary early on in the series. For instance, *invītus* meaning “unwilling,” though more often mistakenly taken to mean “invited,” appears as early as Unit 2 in level 1 Latin. Likewise *cōmis* and its adverbial counterpart *cōmiter* meaning “courteous or friendly” also appear in Unit 2. In the last stage of Unit 1, we have *āmittō, āmittere* meaning “to lose” which we see again in *dē bellō Gallicō*, such as when Caesar has lost 12 ships / *xii nāvibus āmissīs* (DBG 4.30.3) In Unit 3, *innītor, innītī, innīxus sum*, meaning “to lean on or rest,” appears and is easily related to *adnīxus*, “to lean against,” which beginning AP students will find in book 1, lines 144-145 of *The Aeneid: Cymothoē simul et Trītōn adnīxus acūtō / dētrūdunt nāvēs scopulō*... “And at the same time Cymothoe and Triton, having leaned against the ships dislodge them from the sharp rock.” Also in Unit 3 we begin to see participial phrases that we meet again in Caesar, such as *spē dēiectī* / “disappointed in their hope (of something)” These are just a few small examples. I am constantly thrilled to realize yet another perhaps tricky word found in Caesar or Vergil has appeared early on in this well-planned textbook series.

C. (Now let’s look at the) Conscientious development of patterns and phrasing

Critics of the *Cambridge Latin Course* bemoan its initial strict sentence patterns of NOMINATIVE + ACCUSATIVE + VERB and NOMINATIVE + DATIVE + ACCUSATIVE + VERB. But it’s this very focus on patterns from the beginning that helps to develop in students a sharp awareness of the significance of word order. Once students have had time to internalize endings, variations are introduced, word order changed, and thus new emphasis is presented for students to ponder. Students still need considerable help, which is where I find metaphrasing to be extremely useful in training students to focus on the endings. A simple metaphrasing sentence

would be “Someone verbed something to someone”—where there are words holding the place for a nominative, an accusative, and a dative (disregarding, momentarily, the possibilities of ablative and genitive). (Please your handout.) Thus, in warm-ups I give my students words like these: [*read Latin first, then say “which students would metaphrase as:”*]

- **multōs servōs** > Someone verbed **many slaves** to someone.
- **mercātor** > **The merchant** verbed something to someone.
- **latrōnibus** > Someone verbed something **to the robbers**.
- **ālae** > **The wings** verbed something to someone; someone verbed something **to the wing** (unlikely).

Particularly I will use words appearing in the day’s story, in this case from “mercātor Arabs” in Unit 2:

mercātor ōlim cum merce pretiōsā Arabiam trānsībat.... **multōs servōs** quoque habēbat, quī mercem custōdiēbant....mercātor servīque **latrōnibus** ācritter resistēbant, sed latrōnēs tandem servōs superāvērunt.... subitō mōnstrum terribile in caelō appāruit; **ālae** longiōrēs erant quam rēmī, unguēs maiōrēs quam hastae.

Metaphrasing is a useful warm-up or prereading activity and simple enough with level 1 Latin, but can be used with somewhat more sophistication in level 2 when working participial phrases:

- **militēs, gladiīs hastisque armātī**, > **The soldiers, armed with swords and spears**, verbed someone.
- **arcam, pecūniā complētam**, > Someone verbed **the chest, filled with money**, to someone.
- **Belimicus, spē praemiī adductus**, > Belimicus, led on by the hope of a reward, verbed something to someone.

- **statuam meam, ā fabrō Britannicō factam,** > Someone verbed **my statue, made by a British craftsman,** to someone.
- **senex, amulētum aureum tenēns,** > **The old man, holding the golden amulet,** verbed something to someone.
- **fūr, senem cōspicātus,** > **The thief, having caught sight of the old man,** verbed something to someone.

By having students paraphrase whole phrases I am emphasizing the importance of seeing word units and not words in isolation. In this instance, we would also discuss the difference between present active, perfect active, and perfect passive participles, not to mention ablative of means versus ablative of agent.

Indeed, I have found paraphrasing particularly handy in quickly clarifying Vergilian phrasing. Take, for instance, this passage from Book 2 of the *Aeneid* (which you will find in your handout):

diffugimus vīsū exsanguēs. illī agmine certō

Lāocoonta petunt; et primum parva duōrum

corpora nātōrum serpēns amplexus uterque

implicat et miserōs morsū dēpascitur artūs;

post ipsum auxiliō subeuntem ac tēla ferentem

corripiunt spīrīsque ligant ingentibus;

Starting in line 212, *illī*, the serpents, are the subject of all the action. But students rarely hold such information in their heads for more than a line or two. By the time they hit line 216 they are suddenly struggling to make sense of what is going on. Yet consider if we paraphrase one word at a time as we meet them reading from left to right:

- **post** > afterward/behind (our textbook contains a note that it's adverbial)
- **post ipsum**> afterward someone verbed [Laocoon] himself
- **post ipsum auxiliō**> afterward someone verbed [Laocoon] himself with help (or to/for help)
- **post ipsum auxiliō subeuntem**> afterward someone verbed [Laocoon] himself coming with help [*if pressed for time say, "and so forth"*]
- **post ipsum auxiliō subeuntem ac**> afterward someone verbed [Laocoon] himself coming with help and (possibly connecting to another participle since this falls after one)
- **post ipsum auxiliō subeuntem ac tēla**> afterward someone verbed [Laocoon] himself coming with help and verbing weapons (or weapons verbed something, but a nominative makes no sense here)
- **post ipsum auxiliō subeuntem ac tēla ferentem**> afterward someone verbed [Laocoon] himself coming with help and bearing weapons
- **post ipsum auxiliō subeuntem ac tēla ferentem corripunt**> afterward they [the serpents] snatch [Laocoon] himself coming with help and bearing weapons....

And with luck, students already trained to see participial phrases as units merely saw this breakdown:

- **post**
- **ipsum auxiliō subeuntem**
- **ac**
- **[ipsum] tēla ferentem** ["with ipsum understood"]
- **corripunt.**

And this is nothing more really than an extended ACC + Verb pattern, with the nominative understood.

Of course, Caesar's sentences are significantly longer than those in Vergil, complicated (especially to a student) by the length of the sentence. I employ multiple strategies here, but underlying it all is still that critical need to see the underlying structure of the sentence, which is often somewhat simple. Even still, paraphrasing can often be helpful. Take for instance this passage from *dē Bellō Gallicō*, 4.25 (which you will find in your handout):

Quod ubi Caesar animadvertit, **naves longas**, quarum et species erat barbaris inusitator et motus ad usum expeditior, **paulum removeri ab onerariis navibus et remis incitari et ad latus apertum hostium constitui atque inde fundis, sagittis, tormentis hostes propelli ac submoveri iussit**; quae res magno usui nostris fuit. (DBG 4.25.1)

- *nāvēs longās* > Someone verbed the warships (long ships).
- *nāvēs longās ... paulum removērī* > Someone verbed the warships to be moved back a little
- *nāvēs longās... paulum removērī ab onerariis nāvibus* > Someone verbed the warships to be moved back a little from the cargo ships.
- *nāvēs longās... et rēmīs incitārī* > Someone verbed the warships to be spurred on with oars.
- *nāvēs longās... et ad latus apertum hostium constituī* > Someone verbed the warships to be deployed at the enemy's open flanked.
- *atque inde* > and from there

- *atque inde fundīs, sagittīs, tormentīs* > and from there with slingshots, arrows, and catapults...
- *atque inde fundīs, sagittīs, tormentīs hostēs propellī* > and from there the enemy to be driven back with slingshots, arrows, and catapults...
- *atque inde fundīs, sagittīs, tormentīs hostēs propellī ac submoveri iussit.* > and from there HE ORDERED the enemy to be driven back with slingshots, arrows, and catapults and (to be) moved away.

More effective, often, with Caesar are some of Dexter Hoyos's Rules for Reading from *Latin: How to Read it Fluently*, published by the Classical Association of New England.

- **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.*

When we are teaching our students to read, especially early on in a reading text such as the *Cambridge Latin Course*, it is vitally important to stress learning the endings. Criticism of these texts often consists of the storyline being so easy to follow that learning the endings often seems unnecessary to students. But lexical meaning is only half of a Latin word—the easy half to register. Thus extra time and practise will be needed to train the brain to register endings. This is one reason why I use metaphrasing so extensively in my course. Reading a sentence all the way through completely truly requires practice and diligence, especially with a long periodic sentence for which several readings may well be an absolute necessity.

- **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.*

It is critical to recognise the structure IN SEQUENCE. So often the main clause has little meat to it and the true action is held in the series of clauses and phrases. And here is something that may be difficult for a lot of students (I know it was for me): reading without translating.

- **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. SUB-RULE Do not translate in order to find out what the sentence means. Understand first, then translate.*

Understand first, then translate. We are not stuck thinking like decoders. By following the rules that we have so far, it is much easier to see that Latin is not a word for word code. Once we truly understand the sentence or paragraph, then we can more easily write an intelligent translation, or better yet, our students can write an intelligent translation free from awkward phrasing from time-consuming decoding.

- **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. A word-group can be shown by linking its first and last words by an “arch” line.
- **Rule 8** The words within two or more word-groups are never mixed up together: “arches” do not cut across one another. But an “arch” structure can contain one or more interior “arches”; that is, embraced word-groups.
- **Rule 9** All the actions in a 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.

While I may not discuss each and every one of these rules with my students, I do employ and model the strategies embodied here when reading Caesar. We read sentences all the way through, several times, looking for the overall shape, the parallel structures (which often help to disambiguate forms), phrases and clauses. We are mindful of the bigger picture while at the same time looking for the details. This is extremely important when dealing with prose.

Another feature of the *Cambridge Latin Course* that I’ve come to admire over the last several years is how they build up from simple to more complex phrasing, thus gradually preparing the student for the transition to authentic Latin. For instance, let us consider the phrase “after he said (or heard) these words.” One of the earliest phrasings for this occurs in Stage 21 of

Unit 2: *postquam haec verba dīxit*. Simple enough. But if we follow how this phrase and similar are used subsequently, we see the following progression (*please see your handout; if you are following along you will also see where I have inserted similar or somewhat related phrases from Caesar or Vergil*):

1. Memor, **postquam haec verba dīxit**, statim obdormīvit. (“Lūcius Marcius Memor” Unit 3 8)
2. Latrō, **haec verba locūtus**, exiit (“Vilbia” Unit 3 20).
3. Vilbia, simulatque haec audīvit, īrāta fontī appropinquat (“amor omnia vincit: scaena tertia” Unit 3 37).
4. **haec verba locūtus**, rēgī poculum obtulit (“in thermīs II” Unit 3 48).
5. senex, **haec locūtus**, lentē per iānuam exit (“Britannnia Perdomita” Unit 3 54).
6. **cum** Dumnorix **haec dīxisset**, Quīntus rem sēcum anxius cōgitābat (“Quīntus cōnsilium capit” Unit 3 68).
7. Belimicus, **cum haec audīvisset**, gladium dēstrictum ad iugulum servī tenuit (“Salvius cōnsilium cognōscit” Unit 3 72).
8. sollicitus erat quod in epistulā, quam ad Agricolam mīserat, **multa falsa scrīpserat** (“in p̄ncipiīs” Unit 3 107).
9. deinde renovāvit **ea quae in epistulā scrīpserat** (“in p̄ncipiīs” Unit 3 107).
 - o his rebus adducti et auctoritate Orgetorigis permoti constituerunt **ea quae** ad proficiscendum pertinerent comparare, iumentorum et carrorum quam maximum numerum coemere, sementes quam maximas facere, ut in itinere copia frumenti suppeteret, cum proximis civitatibus pacem et amicitiam confirmare. (DBG 1.3.1)

10. **haec cum audīvisset**, Agricola respondit, “sī tālia fēcit, eī moriendum est” (“tribūnus” Unit 3 111).
- **haec cum** dixisset, procedit extra munitiones quaque pars hostium confertissima est visa irrumpit. (DBG 5.44.4)
11. **haec ubi dīxit Agricola**, Salvius respondit īrātus, “quam caecus es! quam longē errās!” (“contentiō” Unit 3 112).
- **haec ubi dicta**, cavum conversa cuspede montem impulit in latus; ac venti velut agmine facto, qua data porta, ruunt et terras turbine perflant. (*Aeneid* I.81-83)
 - **haec ubi dicta dedit**, lacrimantem et multa uolentem dicere deseruit, tenuisque recessit in auras. (*Aeneid* II.790-791)
12. **quod cum audīvisset**, Salvius, “ego” inquit, “nōn Cogidubnus, aureōs tibi dedī (“cēna Salvī” Unit 3 150).
- **quod cum** animadvertisset Caesar, scaphas longarum navium, item speculatoria navigia militibus compleri iussit, et quos laborantes conspexerat, his subsidia submittebat. (DBG 4.26.4)
13. **Belimicus hīs verbīs perturbātus**, “nimium bibistī, mī amīce,” inquit (“Belimicus rēx” Unit 3 152).
- **illi repentina re perturbati**, etsi ab hoste ea dicebantur, tamen non neglegenda existimabant maximeque hac re permovebantur, quod civitatem ignobilem atque humilem Eburonum sua sponte populo Romano bellum facere ausam vix erat credendum. (DBG 5.28.2)

14. **quae cum audivisset**, Haterius adeo gaudēbat ut de tigno paene dēcideret (“polyspaston” Unit 3 198).
- o **quae cum** adpropinquarent Britanniae et ex castris viderentur, tanta tempestas subito coorta est ut nulla earum cursum tenere posset, sed aliae eodem unde erant profectae referrentur, aliae ad inferiorem partem insulae, quae est propius solis occasum, magno suo cum periculo deicerentur;... (DBG 4.28.2)
15. **his verbis auditis**, praeco, qui Eryllum haudquam amabat, magna voce, “Eryllus!” inquit (“salutatio II” Unit 3 220).
- o **his dictis** impensō animum flammavit amore / spemque dedit dubiae menti solvitque pudorem (*Aeneid* IV.54-55).
 - o **His** animum arrecti **dictis** et fortis Achatēs / et pater Aeneas iam dudum erumpere nubem / ardebant. (*Aeneid* I.579-581)
 - o quam simul ac tali persensit peste teneri / cara Iovis coniunx nec famam obstare furori / **talibus** adgreditur Venerem Saturnia **dictis**: (*Aeneid* IV.90-93).
16. tum Messalinus, **simulatque haec Epaphroditum verba audit**, occasione usus, “satis constat,” inquit, “nullus hostes ferociores Germanis esse, nullum ducem Domitianō Augustō esse meliorem (“consilium Domitiani II” Unit 4 57).
17. **quibus verbis sollemnibus dictis**, Polla postes ianuae oleo unguis fascinatiois avertendae causā (“confarreatio III” Unit 4 71).
18. **quibus auditis**, Salvius sperare coepit se e manibus accusatorum elapsurum esse (“cognitio” Unit 4 105).

- **quibus auditis** liberaliter pollicitus hortatusque, ut in ea sententia permanerent, eos domum remittit et cum iis una Commium, quem ipse Atrebatibus superatis regem ibi constituerat, cuius et virtutem et consilium probabat, et quem sibi fidelem esse arbitrabatur, cuiusque auctoritas in his regionibus magni habebatur, mittit. (DBG 4.20.6)

The transition from a simple *postquam* clause through various subjunctive clauses to ablative absolutes (and those using a *qui*-correlatives, no less) was gradual but meaningful, supporting a pattern already in place and thus developing into an expectation within the student’s mind.

Repetition with slight variations reinforces both structure and meaning so that by the time you get to Caesar or Vergil, such phrases are second nature.

Other Matters Specific to Caesar’s Style:

While there are many interesting structures which Caesar makes full use of that are developed in a sophisticated manner in the Cambridge Latin Course, I would like to briefly mention two which have caught my eye. Although CLC does not expressly address these structures in the “About the Language” section in the stage, they are nonetheless present for the observant teacher to note and emphasize with his or her students.

1. id quod

The following (which you will find on your handout) are examples of the use of *id quod* type phrases.

- Memor: Cogidubne, *id quod dīcis*, absurdum est. mortuus est Cephalus.

(“Britannia perdomita” Unit 3 53)

- deinde renovāvit ea quae in epistolā scrīpserat. (“in p̄ncipiīs” Unit 3 107)
- “quanta īnsānia! id quod mihi patefēcistī, vix intellegere posum.” (“in p̄ncipiīs” Unit 3 107)
- “id quod Salvius dīxit v̄rum est,” inquit Belimicus. (“in p̄ncipiīs” Unit 3 108)
- “tē ipsum oportet Imperātōrī id quod in Britānniā fēcistī explicāre.” (“contentiō” Unit 3 112)

2. quī correlatives

What I understand are called qui-correlatives were something I was never expressly taught, and frankly only understood clearly from teaching CLC, and even that was from presentation alone, not an expressed description anywhere. These are very common in Caesar, and thus I think something critical for students to learn in advance of AP.

- quī cum dominum appropinquantem cōspexisset, celeriter surrēxit fabrōsque dīligentius labōrāre iussit. (“polyspaston” Unit 3 197)
- cui respondit Haterius, “summō gaudiō afficior quod opus meum ab Imperātrōre laudātum est.” (“polyspaston” Unit 3 197)
- quae cum audīvisset, Haterius adeō gaudēbat ut dē tignō paene dēcideret. (“polyspaston” Unit 3 198)
- quae tamen, clāmōribus fabrōrum neglētīs, vultū serēnō celeriter praeteriit. (“adventus” Unit 3 214)
- quī igitur, audītīs nōminibus suīs, alacriter prōgressī domum intrāvērunt. (“salūtātiō I” Unit 3 216)

These two structures, id quod and qui correlatives, are just a small sampling of sophisticated things buried in this textbook. I said at the beginning that I believe a

textbook is only a tool, but in this one—in the hands of an instructor who is truly paying attention to the details—we have an accessible tool that is full of complex, sophisticated structures that we can find ways to show to our students.

D. (And finally, let's discuss the) Copious amounts of reading material

The observations I made above about the progression could not have been done if I only assigned one story per stage out of the 4 to 6 provided. The trick is to remember the material in the *Cambridge Latin Course* is meant to be read and treated as literature, not constantly written out in English translations as if deciphering a secret message. Consider that in Latin 1 students are reading up to 800 words of Latin per stage by the end of Unit 1; in Latin 2 and 3 it is closer 1000-1100 words. Admittedly I spread most those 1000 plus words over 2 weeks in my level 2 and 3 classes, while pushing my AP students to read about 700-900 words a week of Caesar or Vergil.

The glory of the approach I take to teaching Latin, I feel, is that I can develop true reading skills from the beginning with step by step supports (via paraphrasing and the like), which enable a larger number of students to succeed in Latin as compared to classes that are front loaded with grammar. And by the time they are reading Caesar and Vergil, these students have practiced repeatedly on the large quantities of reading many skills which make them solid readers of Latin.

In the 8 years I have been teaching at Dripping Springs High School, my enrollment has gone from 40 students to enough for two full time Latin teachers this year, including for the last several years now a small but steadily growing AP Latin program. This increase is due in part to the quality and design of the *Cambridge Latin Course*, in part to my teaching style, and in part to my determination to insure that all can take pleasure in reading Latin. *Thank you.*