

Latin: Don't Leave Home Without It

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Why we have Latin at Liberty:

1. **VOCABULARY:** 8th grade Latin supports the 8th Grade English Word Within the Word program (our Vocabulary curriculum). The cross-curricular connections between English and Latin help provide a coherent and unified curriculum for Liberty's 8th graders.
2. **GRAMMAR:** A solid understanding of Latin Grammar does wonders when it comes to understanding English Grammar. Once a student has established the crucial (and regularly neglected) habit of mind to examine the form and context of words in order to discern their meaning, the riddle of English Grammar actually becomes solvable. This is not a habit of mind that fluency-oriented languages tend to cultivate. Spoken languages lead the mind towards automatic comprehension; dead languages lead the mind towards deliberate comprehension.
3. **ANALYSIS:** Particularly because of the deliberate approach to language Latin tends to cultivate, deeper studies of it in 8th grade prepare LCHS students very effectively for a High School English education at Liberty, especially when it comes to writing. In 9th grade an essay on a text like the *Odyssey* or Dante's *Inferno* requires the close, analytic look at language that Latin cultivates. The ability to read critically goes hand in hand with the ability to carefully parse and interpret language. This Latin provides.

Even considering the language on its own terms, the practice of Latin translation works differently from the interpretation of Spanish or French. When fluency is the goal (as it is in modern languages), interpretation aims towards communicating a similar sentiment or idea. Latin translation, disregarding fluency, teaches almost nothing but such linguistic structure: the student's attention remains sharply focused upon using literary context to accurately discern both the structures of the language itself and the English word choices appropriate to it.

In short, Latin translation teaches one to appreciate the subtleties and nuances of one's own native tongue. Because our brains need not focus on speaking a rudimentary form of Latin, our minds instead use Latin to learn to read, write, and speak a more intelligent form of *English*.

4. **CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS:** All English teachers want their students to be able to appreciate the beauty and power of great writing. In order to do so, however, students must be able to think critically. At its heart, "critical thinking" is not a matter of skill so much as it is the natural effort of a well-structured mind, the cultivation of which is, if not *the* primary goal, at least *one* of the primary goals of education. The tradition goes back to the medieval Trivium: to structure concepts, one learns logic; to structure language, one learns Latin.

While some might object that the English-speaking world has its own Grammar, any reasonable student will complain (and any reasonable instructor will admit) that English Grammar is an absurdly messy affair. It mixes traditions from both Romance and Germanic languages with sloppy disregard. While instruction in English Grammar will aid the student in interpreting complicated English sentences, such skills rarely translate into the ability to *produce* sentences of comparable intelligence and complexity. This is to say that English Grammar does not train the minds of its students to become well-ordered. It keeps them from common mistakes and so elevates their language, but it does not train them in structured, clear, sophisticated expression.

From an English perspective, Latin offers our 8th graders an opportunity to appreciate their native English language much more profoundly.

A second year of Latin will build up what Liberty's 8th graders learned in 7th grade. The initial conjugations and declensions don't really provide them with all that the Latin language has to offer: they

need the deeper practice, the more nuanced translation skills that can only come from a more detailed study of the ablative absolute, the subjunctive mood, or the various workings of different clauses. Such an appreciation for structured language will help them greatly in their High School careers. Of course, I don't think that 8th graders without Latin are doomed to never think clearly. I simply and honestly believe that, wherever they choose to go to High School, 8th graders with two years of Latin training will have been prepared to think more clearly, to express themselves more deftly, and to read literature more deeply than their peers.