

Briefing 0 – How to translate!

This briefing gives a methodology for translating the kind of text that you will encounter.

General principles

The most important thing is to be meticulous in understanding the role that **each** Latin word plays in a sentence. Latin is a compact language, so **every word** has a vital role in translation. Do not ignore any word, and if you do not know it, look it up.

Do not ignore short words – they are usually very significant! Appendix 3 lists 1- or 2-letter words for reference.

If at all possible, you need to know:

- What each word means or can mean in a sentence
- Especially look out for the **verb** or **verbs** in a sentence – this should usually be the first thing to do in looking at a sentence for the first time. Look to see how many **clauses** there are – there will be a main clause with a verb, but there may also be subordinate clauses, introduced by **conjunctions or relative pronouns** (e.g. *who*).

So the leads to the most important step

Step 1 – look for the verbs and work out what the structure is of the sentence

A sentence can be a **simple sentence** with just one verb, or it can be a **compound sentence**, with a **main clause** and **subordinate clauses**, each with its own verb.

HINTS Subordinate clauses are introduced by one of:

- ❖ **et, atque** and other words meaning *and* or *but*, joining two simple sentences.
- ❖ **quod** or **quia** meaning *because*
- ❖ Relative pronouns **qui/qua/quod** in nominative or other cases, meaning *which* or *what*, possible with a preposition
- ❖ **ubi** – meaning *when* or *where* or **quando** meaning *when*
- ❖ **ut** – meaning *in order that* or **ne** meaning *in order that not*
- ❖ Other conjunctions – Appendix 2 has some possibilities

NOTE! When looking out for verbs, remember that **the commonest person is 3rd person singular *he/she/it* or plural *they***. So the **commonest ending is -t or -nt** as in **monet** (*he/she/it warns*) or **monent** (*they warn*). This is a good ending to look for first when finding the verbs in a sentence. Note whether it is a **singular** or **plural** ending.

Step 2 – analyse the verbs and identify their subjects and objects

- For each verb identify its **tense, person, voice** (active or passive) and – more advanced – mood **Indicative** (e.g. *I gave*) or **Subjunctive** (e.g. *I would give*).
- The verb may have a **Subject** and (possibly) an **Object**. Note that verbs may express the subject without having a separate word for it; e.g. **amat** can have a subject **she** if the sense indicates who she is. The word **est** can mean *there is* and what there is can be a noun in the **nominative** case.
- **So first** look for a **subject**, if there is a subject-word : **it must** be in the **nominative case**, singular or plural, and there may be more than one, perhaps linked by *and* – remember that the ending **-que** can mean *and*

HINTS: When looking out for the subject of a verb:

- ❖ It may just be **given by the verb ending**
 - ❖ If it is given by a **singular masc/fem noun or adjective**, it will have **nominative** ending **-a** (1st declension), **-r** or **-us** (2nd or 4th), **-ēs** (5th) or for 3rd declension **a letter that is one of: e, l, o, r, s, x**
 - ❖ If it is given by a **singular neuter noun or adjective**, it will have the ending **-um** (2nd) or **ū** (4th) or for 3rd declension **a letter that is one of: e, l, r, s**
 - ❖ If given by a **plural masc or fem noun or adjective**, it will have the ending **-ae** (1st declension), **-ī** (2nd), **-ēs** (3rd or 5th) or **-ūs** (4th).
 - ❖ If given by a **plural neuter noun or adjective**, it will always have the ending **-a** (all declensions).
 - ❖ Pronouns have their own slightly different rules
- **Secondly** look for an **object**, if there is one.

HINTS: When verbs have objects:

- ❖ A verb only has an object if it is **transitive** e.g. I (**subject**) saw the lion (**object**) and not in the Passive Voice: **I was seen** [by the lion – not an object].
- ❖ The **object** in Latin normally takes the **accusative** case.
- ❖ A few verbs like **do** – *I give* – have an **indirect object** that is put in the **dative case**. For example: *I gave a gift to the boy* → **dedī** [*I gave*] **dōnum** [*gift, object, acc*] **puerō** [*{to} the boy, indir. obj, dat*].

HINTS: When looking out for the object of a verb in the accusative case:

- ❖ If it is given by a **masc** or **fem singular** noun or adjective, the **object** will always have the ending **-m**.
- ❖ In more detail, **masc/fem accusative singular** have endings **-am** (1st declension), **-um** (2nd or 4th decl.) or **-em** (3rd or 5th) (or very occasionally **-im**)
- ❖ If the **object** is represented by a **masc** or **fem plural** noun or adjective, it will have the ending **-s**.
- ❖ In more detail, **masc/fem accusative plural** have endings **-ās** (1st declension), **-ōs** (2nd), **-ēs** (3rd or 5th) or **-ūs** (4th)
- ❖ Neuter nouns have **accusative** cases identical to **nominative** cases – see above – plural always **-a**.
- ❖ Pronouns are similar, but some have **-ae** for neuter plural

HINTS: When looking out for the Indirect object of a verb, look for the dative case:

- ❖ The singular endings are **-ae** (1st decl.) **-ō** (2nd decl.) **-ī** (3rd, 4th and 5th)
- ❖ The plural endings are **-īs** (1st and 2nd decl.) **-bus** (3rd, 4th, 5th)

Step 3 – Work out the meaning of other words

- Adjectives usually have a noun to agree with, in case number and gender. Adjective endings are almost the same as noun forms, although the declension may not be the same. See also Participles
- Prepositions are particles like *to* and *from* and are used with nouns and adjectives. All prepositions take **EITHER** the **accusative** case **OR** the **ablative** case. Some prepositions, like **in** take the accusative when signifying motion e.g. *into the tunnel* and otherwise take the **ablative** *in the tunnel*.

HINTS: When looking out an ablative of a noun or adjective

- ❖ The singular endings are **-ā** (1st decl.) **-ō** (2nd decl.) **-e** (3rd but **-ī** for adjectives), **-ū** (4th) and **-ē** (5th)
- ❖ The plural endings are **-īs** (1st and 2nd decl.) **-bus** (3rd, 4th -5th)
- The **English preposition of** is translated in Latin by the **genitive** case. It often corresponds to the ending ‘s in English, and often represents possession or ownership

HINTS: When looking out the genitive of a noun or adjective

- ❖ The singular endings are **-ae** (1st decl.) **-ī** (2nd decl.) **-is** (3rd), **-ūs** (4th) and **-ēī** (5th)
- ❖ The plural endings are **-rum** (1st and 2nd decl.) **-um** (3rd, 4th -5th)

Note: 3rd declension Adjectives normally have ablative in **-ī**

- Verbs are often represented as verbal adjectives, and there are four common forms in Latin:
 - Present participle:** **capiēns (capiētis)** – **taking** (like *the man taking his sword*)
from **capiō, capere, cēpī, captum** – *I take*
 - Future participle:** **captūrus** – **about to take** (like *the man about to take his sword to battle*)
 - Past participle passive:** **captus** – **having been taken** (like *the sword having been taken to battle*)
 - Gerundive:** **captiendus** – **needing to be taken** (like *the sword needing to be taken to battle*)
- Verbs provide infinitives that represent the verb’s action by using the word **to**: **volō capere** – *I want to take*
- Pronouns often substitute for nouns of the same case/number/gender, often clarifying or pointing
tu bona es, iste malus est
you a good girl are, that [boy] bad is
- Adverbs (e.g. **celeriter** – quickly) qualify the action of verbs, and many are formed from adjectives (*celeriter* comes from **celer** – quick). Common endings are: **-ter, -ius, -e**
- Conjunctions and other particles (i.e. words that do not decline or conjugate) are very common,

Tenses

What is a ‘tense’ in grammar? My big Oxford dictionary says: “A set of forms taken by a verb to indicate the time (and sometimes the continuance or completeness) of the action in relation to the time of the utterance.”

Differences between English and Latin

English verbs have a number of forms that represent verbal actions (active or passive) and participles that are sometimes used with auxiliary verbs to represent tenses.

- speak/speaks spoke spoken speaking (irregular), feel/feels felt, feeling
- command/commands commanded commanding (regular)

In addition, English often uses a variety of auxiliary verbs which indicate the time, grammatical context, continuity and other nuances. Not counting nuances of ability, possibility, English has these forms:

- **I speak, I am speaking, I do speak** (present)
- **I will speak, I will be speaking, I am about to speak** (future), **I will have spoken**

- **I spoke, I have spoken, I was speaking, I used to speak, I have spoken, I will have spoken, I had spoken**

Latin has just six forms to cover these, but will often use adverbs to indicate the nuances.

- Present tense: **dīcō = I speak, I am speaking** (+ *nunc?*), **I do speak** (+ *certe*)
- Future simple tense: **dīcam = I will speak, I am about to speak**
- Imperfect tense – always implies continuous or long-term action that possibly may still be happening: **I was speaking, I used to speak**, but for verbs that imply continuous action, the past form can be used without the auxiliary verb, e.g. **I felt that everything was working well**
- Past Perfect – always implies completed action : **I spoke, I have spoken; I felt (the wasp stinging me)** – as a completed non-continuous action)
- Future Perfect (in the future looking back on a completed action): **I will have spoken**
- Pluperfect (looking back at an action made some time ago): **I had spoken**

Difference between I spoke, I have spoken

In English, there is a nuance between these two:

- **I spoke** reports on a past action, without implying continuing significance of the action
- **I have spoken** implies that the action continues to be currently significant.

Latin would use **dixī** for both of these situations – as translator you need to make a choice. The **I have ...** form is inappropriate when the sense is a simple report on a past action, perhaps occurring some time ago.

- *I fell over and broke my arm, so I am in plaster and mending slowly.* (The significance is in the *so ...* clause)
- *I have fallen over and broken my arm, and I am in a lot of pain, and cannot come to tea.* (The accident and its consequence is still significant.)

Auxiliary verbs in Latin

For all the translations listed above, Latin implies the presence of the word within the verb and its endings. Note, however, that the past passive forms explicitly use the present, future and imperfect forms of **sum es est** with the past participle passive e.g.

- **mus necatus est** – *the mouse was killed* (past perfect passive)
- **mus necatus erit** – *the mouse will have been killed* (past perfect passive)
- **mus necatus eram** – *the mouse had been killed* (pluperfect passive)

Latin *does* use explicit auxiliary verbs, e.g

- **mus currere potest** – *the mouse can run* (literally *the mouse is able to run*)

and also for translating **I must ...** , or **I ought to ...** etc.

Appendix 1 – Common Prepositions

Prepositions taking the accusative case

ad	<i>to, at</i>
ante	<i>before</i>
apud	<i>at, near, among</i>
circum	<i>around</i>
circa	<i>about</i>
contrā	<i>against</i>
extrā	<i>outside of, without</i>
infrā	<i>below</i>

inter	<i>between, amidst</i>
intrā	<i>Within</i>
iuxtā	<i>next to, beside</i>
ob	<i>over against, on account of</i>
per	<i>Through</i>
post	<i>after, behind</i>
praeter	<i>beside, past</i>

prope	<i>near</i>
propter	<i>near, on account of</i>
suprā	<i>above</i>
trans	<i>across</i>
ultrā	<i>beyond</i>
versus	<i>towards</i>

Prepositions taking the ablative case

ā, ab, abs	<i>by, from</i>
cum	<i>with</i>
dē	<i>from, concerning</i>

ex, ē	<i>out of, from</i>
prae	<i>before, in front of</i>
prō	<i>before, for</i>

sine	<i>without</i>
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Prepositions taking the accusative case for motion and the ablative case otherwise

in	<i>into, against, in, on</i>
sub	<i>up to, under</i>

super	<i>over, upon</i>
subter	<i>under</i>

Appendix 2 – Other particles

babae	interjection	<i>hey!</i>
cur?	adverb	<i>why?</i>
ecce	interjection	<i>look! see here</i>
ēheu!	interjection	<i>oh dear!</i>
et	conjunction	<i>and</i>
hercle!	interjection	<i>by hercules!</i>
heri	adverb	<i>yesterday</i>
hodiē	adverb	<i>today</i>
hūc	adverb	<i>to here</i>
iam	adverb	<i>now</i>
ibi	adverb	<i>there</i>
igitur	adverb	<i>therefore</i>
ita	adverb	<i>in this way, thus</i>
ita vērō	interjection	<i>yes</i>
mane	adverb	<i>in the morning</i>
minimē	interjection	<i>no</i>
mox	adverb	<i>soon</i>
ne	adverb or conjunction	<i>not or in order that not</i>
nimum	adverb	<i>too much</i>
nisi	conjunction	<i>unless</i>

non	interjection	<i>not</i>
nōne	particle	<i>surely not ... ?</i>
num	particle	<i>surely ... ?</i>
nunc	adverb	<i>now</i>
nunquam, numquam	adverb	<i>never</i>
ōlim	adverb	<i>once upon a time</i>
paene	adverb	<i>nearly, almost</i>
postea	adverb	<i>afterwards</i>
quam	particle	<i>than</i>
quō	particle	<i>where to?</i>
quoque	adverb	<i>also, too</i>
saepe	adverb	<i>often</i>
salvē	interjection	<i>hallo!</i>
satis	adverb	<i>enough</i>
sed	conjunction	<i>but, however</i>
statim	adverb	<i>at once</i>
ubi	conjunction	<i>where or when</i>
ubique	adverb	<i>everywhere</i>
vix	adverb	<i>hardl</i>

Appendix 3 – Latin words with two letter words or less

This list is provided for reference, and as a reminder that short words matter!

ā or ab	Preposition taking the ablative: <i>from</i>
ac	Conjunction <i>and</i> or <i>and also</i>
ad	Preposition taking the accusative – <i>to</i> or <i>towards</i>
an	Conjunction: <i>whether</i> or <i>can it be that?</i>
at	Conjunction: <i>but, on the contrary</i>
au	Interjection: <i>ow!</i>
dā	Verb: imperative singular of dō (q.v.) <i>I give</i>
dē	Preposition taking the ablative: <i>down/away from, from, off; about, of, concerning; according to; with regard to;</i>
dō	Verb: 1st conj irregular: dō dāre dedī dātum ; imperatives dā, date <i>give</i>
ea	Pronoun: nom sing fem or nom/acc plur neut of is (q.v.) <i>he/she/it</i>
eā	Pronoun: abl sing fem of is (q.v.) <i>he/she/it</i>
eī	Pronoun: dat sing (all genders) of is (q.v.) <i>he/she/it</i>
eō	Pronoun: abl sing masc or neut of is (q.v.) <i>he/she/it</i>
eō	Verb (irregular): present tense 1st pers sing eō is it imus itis eunt, ire, iī, itum , imperative ī, ite – <i>I go</i>
et	Conjunction <i>and</i>
eu	Interjection <i>bravo, well done</i>
ex	Preposition taking the ablative: <i>out of</i>
ī	Verb: sing imperative of verb eō – <i>I go</i>
id	Nom/acc sing neut of is (q.v.) <i>he/she/it</i>

ī	Verb past perfect 1st person sing eō (q.v.) – <i>I go</i>
in	Preposition taking the accusative: <i>into or onto</i> , or ablative <i>in</i> or <i>on</i>
iō	Interjection <i>hurray</i>
is	Pronoun is ea id, eum eam id, eius, eī, eō eā eō//eī eae ea, eōs ea, eōrum eārum, eīs – <i>he she it/they</i>
is	Verb 2nd pers sing present eō (q.v.) <i>I go</i>
it	Verb 3rd pers sing present eō (q.v.) <i>I go</i>
mē	Pronoun acc or abl ego, mē, meī, mihi, mē – <i>I/me</i>
nē	Particle <i>not, lest</i>
ō	Interjection <i>O oh</i>
ob	Preposition taking the ablative: <i>on account of</i>
os	Noun 3rd decl neut nom sing os ossis <i>bone</i>
ōs	Noun 3rd decl neut nom sing ōs ōris <i>mouth</i>
rē	Noun 5th decl fem abl sing rēs rēī – <i>thing</i>
sē	Pronoun 3rd person sing/plur acc or abl sing -,sē, suī, sibi, sē <i>himself/herself/itself/themselves</i>
si	Conjunction – <i>if</i> – used in conditional sentences
tē	Pronoun acc or abl sing of tu (q.v.)
tu	Pronoun nom sing tu, tē, tuī, tibi, tē – <i>you</i> (sing)
ut	Conjunction – <i>in order that</i> – with subjunctive or <i>as</i> with indicative

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