LATIN PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Latin may be a dead language but it is very much alive when you read it and speak it. It lives in the echo of the words that were spoken long ago by the great men of Ancient Rome. Inscriptional evidence as well as texts from ancient grammarians tell us how the Romans pronounced Latin during the classical period. This simple guide will provide you with the basics.[1]

You may ask, "Why should I bother to learn the difference between long and short vowels? Why should I bother learning macrons (the long marks)?" Here is the best reply I know:

> " 'Learning macrons' is a piece of cake if you just learn proper ***pronunciation***—which is important. Macrons simply indicate vowel quantity, just like ***spelling*** in English, and that can mean a lot; after all, a cape is a cape, and not a cap (that silent -e); a sheep is a sheep, and not a ship; and a sheet is a sheet and not a . . . well, you get the idea: ***Easy*** to learn and ***important*** to know."[2]

A simplified pronunciation guide is as follows:

VOWELS

LONG VOWEL	SHORT VOWEL
ā as in *father:* **māter**, **grātiās**, **clāmat**, **vīllā**	**a** as in *Dinah:* **pater**, **quattuor**, **salvē**, **taberna**
ē as in *they:* **salvēte**, **trēs**, **cēna**, **hodiē**	**e** as in *pet:* **bene**, **septem**, **vehementer**
ī as in *machine:* **quīnque**, **fīlius**, **scrībit**	**i** as in *pin:* **tibi**, **mihi**, **nāvis**, **ita**, **videt**
ō as in *clover:* **nōn**, **octō**, **leō**, **mōns**, **nōmen**	**o** as in *orb, off:* **octō**, **novem**, **hortus**, **hodiē**
ū as in *rude:* **ūnus**, **ūndecim**, **tū**, **salūtat**	**u** as in *put:* **ut, unda**, **culīna**, **uxor**, **ululat**

DIPHTHONGS (combinations of two vowel sounds collapsed together into a single syllable)

ae as *ai* in *aisle*: **puellae, quaesō, saepe**
au as *ou* in *house:* **laudat, aut, paulīsper**
ei as *reign:* **deinde**
oe as *oi* in *oil:* **coepit**
ui as in Latin **u + i**, spoken as a single syllable like Spanish **muy** or English **gooey**, pronounced quickly as a single syllable, and occuring *only* in the following words: **cuius, huius, cui, hui, huic.** *Otherwise the two letters are spoken separately.*

CONSONANTS

Latin consonants had essentially the same sounds as the English consonants with the following *exceptions*:

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bs and **bt** were pronounced *ps* and *pt,* as in **urbs, obtulī, obstat, obstinātus**
c was always hard, as in **culīna, canis, tacē, circum, cīvis**
g was always hard, as in **vīgintī, agō, gustat, gerit**
i (as a consonant) usually had the sound of *y* as in English *yes*: **iānua, iūdex, iubet, iam, iacet**
qu is always followed by **u** as in English: **quoque, coquus, quis, quaerit**
r was trilled; the Roman **littera canīna** (sound of a snarling dog): **rīdet, perterritus, forum, rēs**
s was voiceless as in English *see:* **salvē, senex, subitō, servus, susurrāvit**
t was always hard as in **tacē, tablīnum, tibi, turba, tuba**
v had the sound of *w* as in **vīlla, via, valē, vīgintī, venit, videt, vibrat**
x had the sound of *ks* as in **senex, exit, mendāx, exspectat, vexat, dīxit**
ch had the sound of *ckh* as in English *block head:* **pulcher, charta, architectus**
ph had the sound of *ph* as in English *up hill:* **amphora, amphitheātrum**
th had the sound of *th* as in English *hot house:* **theātrum, thermae**
gn had the sound of *ngn* as in English *wing nut:* **magnus, benignus, ignāvus**

Nota bene: The Romans pronounced double consonants as separate consonants. For instance, the **tt** in **admittent** sounded like the two *t*'s in *admit ten*. Compare **redit** (he goes back) and **reddit** (he gives back), **calidus** (hot) and **callidus** (clever), **mīles** (soldier) and **mīlle** (thousand).

SYLLABIFICATION

1. Two vowels or a vowel and a diphthong are separated:
   puella, pu-el-la; fīliae, fī-li-ae; hodiē, ho-di-ē; theātrum, the-ā-trum
2. A single consonant between two vowels goes with the second vowel:
   amīcus, a-mī-cus; fīlius, fī-li-us; grātiās, grā-ti-ās; agricola, a-gri-co-la
3. When two or more consonants stand between two vowels, generally only the last consonant goes with the second vowel: **ancilla, an-cil-la; salvē, sal-vē; quattuor, quat-tu-or**. However, a stop (**p, b, t, d, c, g**) + a liquid (**l, r**) count as a *single* consonant: **patrem, pa-trem; agricola, a-gri-co-la**. Also, **qu, ch, ph, th** count as a *single* consonant: **amphitheātrum, am-phi-the-ā-trum.**

SYLLABLE QUANTITY

A syllable is **heavy** (long) *by nature* if it contains a long vowel or diphthong; a syllable is **heavy** *by position* if it contains a short vowel followed by two or more consonants or by **x**, which is a double consonant (=*ks*). Otherwise the syllable is considered **light** (short).
   Syllables heavy by nature (underlined): **ho-di-ē, grā-ti-ās, sal-vē, quae-sō**
   Syllables heavy by position (underlined): **ser-vat, por-tat, pu-el-la**

ACCENT

You place the accents on Latin words following these simple rules:
1. The accent is *never* on the last (ultimate) syllable.
2. In a word of two syllables, the accent always falls on the first syllable: **ser´vus, mi´hi, oc´tō.**
3. In a word of three or more syllables
   a. the accent falls on the next to last (penultimate) syllable, if that syllable is heavy:
      pu-el´la, sal-vē´te, ta-blī´num, vī-gin´tī
   b. otherwise the accent falls on the syllable before that (the antepenultimate syllable):
      grā´ti-ās, quat´tu-or, ūn´de-cim, trī-clī´ni-um

And remember, your most important goal is *consistency*, especially in vowel length. Sloppy pronunciation indicates that the words were never learned as they should be—voiced.