

TEACHING DIFFICULT CONSTRUCTIONS IN LATIN

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Abstract

Although Latin subordinate constructions (purpose clauses, ablatives absolute, indirect commands, *et al.*) are generally seen as hard to teach and hard to learn—and inspire terror in a few learners—nonetheless methods of teaching can be applied to clarify how they work, how they are formatted, and how as a result students can achieve improved fluency in reading and understanding Latin texts.

Key words

Translation, comprehension, clause-structure, ablatives absolute, event-order.

What counts as a difficult construction in Latin? *Quot discipuli tot difficultates*, arguably. Latin constructions are legion, or so at least benumbed learners may suspect. Ablatives absolute provoke choruses of groans, purpose clauses both get readily mistaken for result clauses and suffer from the stubborn conviction that subjunctives must mean “may” or “might”, gerunds and gerundives make no sense at all to many, and conditionals in indirect statement do not bear thinking about. Teaching these and their fellows calls for resourcefulness and persistence, as every teacher knows; needs and solutions vary from class to class, though some difficulties are of course widespread. The order in which constructions are taught will depend crucially on the teacher’s judgement of what best suits the class in terms of ability and time.

In the following paper, after some general remarks, teaching non-clause constructions is discussed; then subordinate clauses, first those taking the indicative mood and second the subjunctive. This arrangement is only for convenience here. Different practical ways of introducing topics in a course are suggested later (§23)¹.

GENERAL REMARKS

1. Before syntactical constructions can be learned, naturally the grammar basics must be: the parts of speech, declensions and conjugations. But once a reasonable range of these has been studied, and with them the nature of simple sentences in the subject-object-verb format, students can cut their teeth on simpler subordinate constructions, like prepositional phrases and clauses that take the indicative. Whether students should be told that they are learning ‘syntax’, or whether this should be a revelation for a more propitious time, like prose and M. Jourdain, is up to the teacher again. But it is important to develop, and then reinforce, early acquaintance with subordination and to stress some governing principles.

By convention, the Latin we learn is based on Cicero’s and Caesar’s formal writings, which were admired even by contemporaries for their purity and clarity of style. But using them as a basis for Latin study does have its price even in the prose realm, for students eventually meet many usages —some minor, some momentous— in other leading

¹ I am very grateful to fellow-teachers, including my wife Jann, who have generously shared with me their views on the topic of difficult Latin constructions.

authors like Livy, or even in the more unbuttoned Cicero of the *Letters*, usages blacklisted by their Ciceronian-Caesarian coursebooks or at best grumpily tolerated. The fact that Latin was a constantly developing and often varying language is important for students to appreciate, not just as a truth for its own sake but for their own benefit as learners, although it need not be stressed until their grasp of the language is well-established.

2. Teaching methods almost universally make use of translation from English into Latin as well as Latin to English, and English-to-Latin plays a productive rôle especially at beginners' level. Explaining simple subordinate constructions as well as simple sentences without English examples rendered into Latin, though possible, would be very laborious; class tests and assignments likewise. Relative clauses and simple participial uses are obvious models: "Cicero, who spoke yesterday, will soon be a senator", "by praising the people he will be elected consul" and, for a different construction, "he seems to be a brave leader" can all be turned straightforwardly into Latin.

The only modification to this practice is that English models *must* be accompanied by Latin ones too, with these in time becoming distinctly preponderant². This is partly because not all Latin constructions can be so neatly mirrored in English (thus "Caesar acted to prevent Cicero from speaking" and "he feared that they would cause trouble after being refused their pay" each involve two —very non-straightforward— subordinate constructions in Latin): learners who grow used to seeing their Latin through a windowpane of English soon start to flounder. Moreover a steadily growing proportion of Latin examples —even if they still have to be rendered into English— encourages other skills crucial to the learning of constructions: *reading-through* and *structure-recognition*.

3. It is important, in turn, to make clear from very early the difference between a phrase and a clause³ —something that even university

² English-to-Latin is of course widely used at all levels; but the more complex it gets, the more it bogs students down in variegated minutiae and dissipates the focus of an exercise. Cf. Hoyos 1997: 17.

³ That is, a phrase is a word-grouping lacking a finite verb (of course many phrases include non-finite verb-forms like a participle); a clause must contain, or imply, at least one finite verb.

students often find hard to pin down; yet knowing which is which is a valuable skill for both recognition and analysis. Moreover it is important to explain, and have students explain, grammatical points (including these) regularly *and in grammatical terms*. For the common habit of ‘explaining’ a case, tense or construction by merely translating it—even when the translation is right—is not just irritating but counterproductive to students’ own clear understanding.

4. Possibly the hardest general point for the learner to assimilate about any construction, and one of the most essential, is that Latin ones do not always work exactly as English ones do. A past participle does not always translate into an English one (cf. *urbe condita, suos hortatus*) and other participles behave in ways that only practise will make readily recognisable (e.g., *mihi librum legenti nova res venit in mentem*). Again, purpose in Latin is rarely expressed with an infinitive, yet in English this is the most usual way to do it. On the other hand indirect statement in English is never (well, hardly ever) expressed via infinitives. It is natural for beginners to try such tracing-paper methods, but they have to be encouraged out of it.

A related fact needing regular emphasis is that English phrases and clauses do not automatically correspond to Latin ones. Such emphasis is a repetitive affair and may benefit from enlivening with color cards, class-quizzes and other stimuli, but all this is worthwhile if students thereby learn that—for instance—*urbe Romana condita* is not to be rendered with ruthless uniformity into an English phrase of the style “X having been ...d” or even a “with X having been ...d” phrase. Nor is a clause like *his uti conquirerent et reducerent imperavit* (§13 example 4, below) always to be translated rigidly into an English clause, for sometimes “commanded these to seek them out and take them back” may seem more natural.

Rather than just emphasizing what should not be done, it may well be effective in class to stress the potentialities—what *can* be done. For instance, part of the discussion of an ablative absolute phrase could canvass first a literal rendition (“the city having-been-founded”⁴), and then student-supplied versions that both make sense in context and read more naturally.

⁴ Putting the hyphens in is important: they help accustom the learner to seeing this is not the most natural rendition.

STRUCTURE AND MEANING

Two principles must be impressed on learners from the beginning.

5. First, a Latin sentence is a sensible statement about something (although learners do not always believe this!) and to understand it we must first read it through to its end—whether the end is a period, a colon or some other major punctuation-sign (not all learners believe this either). This must become an absolute and unbreakable rule. It has to become second nature for every learner. Only by reading through can we see what words are in the sentence, where they are placed (another myth is that ‘Latin word-order doesn’t matter’), and what constructions form it—even if these details take a few re-readings to absorb.

6. Second: the structural logic of a sentence needs recognition. The structure (or layout) is meant as a major aid to understanding, even if exasperated students sometimes feel sure of the reverse. The Roman instinct in a *narrative* sentence was to place events in the same order that they had occurred; in a *descriptive* or *analytical* sentence the points are made in logical order, logical at any rate to the writer. This principle can be called ‘the sentence as architecture’. By contrast, an English sentence prefers to announce the main grammatical action first (or as close to first as possible) and then hang subordinate grammatical components from this in a long tail—the sentence as children’s kite. Given the poverty of English inflexions, there is nothing wrong with this. But trouble arrives when a student tries, in every way possible, to handle a Latin sentence in the same way. Correct handling requires reading through and recognising the writer’s plentiful *array of signals*, which we shall soon look at.

7. Even a basic introduction to sentence-and clause-formats is a big step towards easier learning by students, so long as it is regularly reinforced from then on by practise and discussion. A sentence is, after all, just a main clause attended (almost always) by a respectful posse of subordinate phrases and clauses. Punctuation is one guide to how they are laid out, but only one. Subordinate clauses are not merely announced by conjunction or relative pronoun but always obey logical usages of format and sequence—the most elemental of which is that a clause is *never closed* until at least *one* finite verb has been given, or at least implied. Another, almost as elemental, is that if the clause itself em-

braces a further subordinate construction, then this latter in turn *must* be completed before the embracing one can itself be. A third major usage is that quite often a Latin sentence has its more important information in its subordinate constructions (phrases and clauses), not in the main clause which may be quite short.

All these usages may get overlooked by learners anxious about word-meanings and word-endings and where the verb is. But together with the rock-solid rule of always reading a sentence right through, they are important, and not for any aesthetic fancy or because of abstract moral rightness but because the Roman writer has taken it for granted that we know them. Ignore them, and every student will find in almost every sentence—especially those with subordinate constructions—a repetitiously tiring struggle in deconstruction and reassemblage⁵.

8. Studying syntax itself involves a major problem for many learners, not always identified. Each separate construction, whether phrase or clause, naturally is learned on its own. But as soon as they start on a passage of classical Latin they meet a riot of different phrases and clauses together, often interwoven (see examples **1-6** below). Roman authors tend, from the learner’s viewpoint, to complicate things alarmingly. Yet there are methods of mastering what they have to offer.

PHRASE-CONSTRUCTIONS: THE EXAMPLE OF PARTICIPIAL PHRASES

9. Important non-clause constructions include participial phrases, ablatives absolute and indirect statement, and they are not only important but often hard to grasp. Even participles may be confusing, quite apart from their use in ablatives absolute. The present participle may suffer confused identification with the English present continuous tense (“is...ing”, hence *puer in arbore sedens canem conspexit* can become “the boy **is sitting** in the tree **and** sees the dog”⁶); the past participle incurs any number of predictable perversions in translation or comprehension; and the future participle all too often simply has guesswork flung at it.

It is probably too sophisticated to explain to inexperienced learners that Latin does not treat events and situations as purely the business of

⁵ On these and other organizational principles see Hoyos 1997b.

⁶ My wife once encountered this rendition by a student.

finite verbs, any more than as purely the business of one-verb sentences. Luckily, the working of participles can be clearly set out and practised (cf. §4), even if not everyone will get entirely out of trouble with them. The example given earlier, *mihi librum legenti nova res venit in mentem*, illustrates how a single participle can correspond to an English clause (“while I was reading...”) and also how events are always narrated in the order they happened; likewise, for an example with a past participle, *urbem conditam multi visitabant Sabini*.

10. To some, the ablative absolute construction shows participles at their worst. This is a pity since it is hugely useful, exploited too by some writers—Tacitus notably—for vivid literary touches and by others for convenient and compendious narration (Suetonius perhaps to excess). This ‘absolute’ construction (a term coined by Roman grammarians) is a writing-device: it conveys important information with grammatical conciseness while focussing greater attention on the action of the nearest finite verb. To describe it as a construction grammatically separate from the rest of the sentence, and used for adding *incidental* (implying minor or superfluous) detail, is only half right—the first half. In reality it confuses the A. A.’s grammar with its communicative rôle.

The A.A. gives information that (I) usually is essential to the rest of the account, (II) often *though not always* is an action performed by the subject of the nearest finite verb—being of course always placed at the logically appropriate stage of the sentence. For a simple example,

• **1** at Xerxes Thermopylis expugnatis protinus accessit astu
(Nepos, *Themistocles* 4.1)⁷.

It can be convenient to present ablatives absolute as three (or three and a half) Types:

Type I	<i>me duce, Cicerone consule</i>	no participle
Type II	<i>matre loquente</i> <i>Cicerone epistulam scribente</i>	present participle, often with object or dependent phrase (or clause)

⁷ Examples 1 and 3-5 from *Target Structures* 2000.

Type IIIa	<i>urbe condita</i> <i>Nerone principe facto</i>	passive past participle
Type IIIb	<i>Cicerone locuto</i> <i>Caesare suos hortato</i>	active p.p., sometimes with object or dependent phrase (or clause)

This pattern has at least the virtue of clearly categorizing how the types look and how they can behave. As noted earlier, translating them along the one unvarying line of “X having been ...d” or “with X having been ...d” is not desirable. This need not rule such a habit out completely; but it reminds that using it permanently does less and less justice to writers’ meaning and allusions.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE: INDIRECT STATEMENT

11. Indirect statement (that is, the accusative and infinitive construction) is an equally severe hill to climb. English does have a usage like “I know him to be good” which can be used for introductory purposes, but the language does not extend much further in this direction: “they knew him to have been good” is scarcely heard today, and “Caesar had thought the Gauls to be about to attack on the next day” would merely proclaim itself a grotesque literalism from Latin⁸.

In writing Latin, a standard way to work out the relationship between governing verb of saying or thinking and its dependent infinitives is to think back to the tenses in direct speech (*‘Caesar’ inquit ‘venit/veniet’* etc.) and then base the indirect construction on these. But this is hardly practical when reading Latin. A tabular presentation may help a class wrestling with the construction⁹:

⁸ Not even truly literal: “to be about to attack” has an implication of immediacy which the future infinitive does not have.

⁹ Table slightly simplified. *Dixero* is omitted from the Primary group as we hardly ever find indirect statement introduced by a future perfect. *Dixi* can be Historic (“I said”) or Primary (“I have said”), with appropriate sequences. *Nego* etc. can be put in too, to show the negative versions.

PRIMARY <i>dico / dicam</i>	
<i>Caesarem venire</i>	that C. comes / is coming
<i>Caesarem venisse</i>	that C. has come
<i>Caesarem venturum esse</i>	that C. will come / will be coming
HISTORIC <i>dixi / dicebam / dixeram</i>	
<i>Caesarem venire</i>	that C. came / was coming
<i>Caesarem venisse</i>	that C. had come
<i>Caesarem venturum esse</i>	that C. would come / would be coming

And—an aspect worth pointing out—in either sequence the tense of the infinitive is automatically keyed to the tense of the verb of saying or thinking. If Caesar’s coming precedes or preceded this verb in tense, the infinitive must be perfect; if it was or is happening at the same time as the saying-or-thinking verb, its tense must be present; and if it is going to happen afterwards or was going to happen, then a future infinitive it will be. The rule applies too where the governing verb is, say, a participle or even another infinitive, though the reader may have to decide the tense-relationships in such cases.

The danger remains of a class persuading itself that the future infinitive unchangeably means “*will come*”, the present “*comes*” and so on, no matter what the sequence (or “*would come*”, “*was coming*” etc.). But this is a danger whatever the method or mnemonic used: it arises out of a mechanical approach to language-study which only patience and practice can alleviate.

12. The rules of indirect statement are one thing; recognising indirect statement when it occurs in a text is another task. Roman writers often use the mere hint of a statement, thought, or emotion as a launching device for *Oratio Obliqua*—which, from a Latin point of view, is a clear and flexible medium of communication capable of great stylistic color. For instance,

• **2** *nec praesens tantummodo effusa est laetitia, sed per multos dies renovata: esse aliquam in terris gentem quae sua impensa bella gerat* (etc.) (Livy 33.33.4-5, abbreviated).

The mention of *laetitia* is all Livy needs so as to relate, at great length, the thoughts of those feeling the joy—the Greeks liberated by Rome in 196 BC.

Or, again because the construction's format is so obvious, a writer may open a sentence with it—readers being expected to take this in stride—and only at the sentence's end then clarify it with *ferunt, rebantur*, or something less obvious like *veri simile erat*. Such common practises illustrate once again the unbreakable rule of *reading through* and recognising the sentence's *structure*.

Only after a fairly good grounding in indirect statement (i.e. accusative-and-infinitive statements) should students go on to the business of subordinate clauses in *Oratio Obliqua*. This brings us to subordinate clauses in general.

CLAUSE-STRUCTURES: GENERAL

13. Subordinate clauses in their vigorous variety can baffle learners, especially if they have not been taught English syntax, or have been taught it only cursorily. And as noted earlier, any 'real' Latin passage presents a profusion of interwoven constructions. This is why the need to grasp the *shape* and *structure*, and thereby the *logic*, of a sentence is essential.

The difficulty of recognising subordinate constructions is obviously smallest when there is just one and it is short:

imperavit civibus ut templum aedificarent

Cicero dixit Catilinam heri ex urbe discessisse

—but much of Latin prose is not so laconic. Readers often run up against more complex sentences like these:

• **3** *quis enim toto mari locus per hos annos aut tam firmum habuit praesidium ut tutus esset, aut tam fuit abditus ut lateret?* (Cicero, *Pro Lege Manilia* 31).

• **4** *quod ubi Caesar rescit, quorum per fines ierant his uti conquirerent et reducerent, si sibi purgati esse vellent, imperavit* (Caesar, *B. Gall.* 1.28.1).

• **5** *dicere omnes et palam disputare minime esse mirandum si remigibus militibusque dimissis, reliquis egestate et fame perditis, praetore tot dies cum mulierculis perpotante, tanta ignominia et calamitas esset accepta* (Cicero, *II in Verrem* 5.100).

Sentence **3** is the simplest, but reaches its result clauses only after a series of subordinate phrases. **4** involves first two subordinate clauses with the indicative mood and then two with the subjunctive—all different grammatically. In **5** the reader first must recognise two historic infinitives, then an accusative and infinitive statement embracing a conditional clause, and this itself embraces no fewer than three ablative absolute phrases. How does one teach this?

SIGNALS FOR CONSTRUCTIONS

14. Because a writer, like a good road-maker, signals what is up ahead, the nature of every subordinate construction is meant to be recognised from the word(s) introducing it or—with phrases especially—the words surrounding it. Sometimes this is obvious: in **3**, *tam* modifying *firmum* and then *abditum* signals a result clause each time and *ut* tells us where it begins; in **5** *dicere* and *disputare* (the historic infinitives) signal indirect statement, and within this *mirandum* does the same for the *si*-clause.

At other times the signalling is not so obvious and the writer expects us to recognise a construction from how it stands in the sentence, as we saw in **2** above. In **3**, *toto mari* relates strictly to the surrounding phrase *quis locus*, and Cicero signals this by having the latter phrase embrace *toto mari*. This is normal in word-group structures.

15. Sentence **4** offers a different but equally ordinary example of how to recognise a construction by reading it in context. *Quorum* and its relative clause anticipate the antecedent *his*: the *quorum*-clause is not an

indirect question dependent on *resciit*, for then *ierant* should have been *iissent*; and in any case *resciit* has *quod* as its object—whose position at the beginning shows that it links this sentence to the preceding one. *His* in turn plainly cannot play any part in the *quorum*-clause; Caesar expects us to recognise *his* as signalling the start of the main clause of the sentence, a function revealed by a complete read-through (it is the indirect object of *imperavit*).

In other words Latin authors do not always announce the coming, or the function, of a subordinate construction by using explicit signals; the context is meant to be the signal.

16. Yet the only way to teach such constructions syntactically is by using explicit signals: putting *tam ... ut* and similar terms (including, sooner or later, more recondite ones like *feri potest ut*) for result clauses, *imperavit* (et al.) *ut* for indirect commands, grouping words in English-type sequences for purpose clauses (*hoc fecit ut Catilina discederet*), using *dicere* and *putare* and the like for accusative and infinitive statements, and so on. This divide between ‘taught’ Latin and ‘real’ Latin is a major difficulty in both teaching and learning; it can be bridged only by emphatic practice of the recognition-principles sketched earlier.

INDICATIVE CLAUSE-CONSTRUCTIONS

Subordinate clauses have at least the benign quality of (normally) introducing themselves with a signal: a conjunction or a relative pronoun. The reading-through principle is meant to ensure that the signal gets noticed.

17. As mentioned above, indicative subordinate clauses can be started on relatively early. Some Latin textbooks may in fact introduce subordination this way. Doing so introduces learners not just to particular constructions—relative, temporal, casual with *quia/quod*, some concessives, open conditions, *dum*—but also to the concept of subordination and the demands which this makes on sentence-structure, while sparing them from having to grapple simultaneously with the mysteries of the subjunctive and its tense-sequences. Many of those

constructions do take subjunctives in appropriate contexts, and not only in indirect statement; but those usages can be studied later.

Indicative subordinate clauses are likely to strike a chord with learners because at times they do behave somewhat like English clauses. The differences in detail can then be easier to impress on the learner: for instance tense-sequences (*si noluerō, non respondebo*) and the frequent anticipative separation of *ante* and *prius* from *quam* (*non prius fugere destiterunt quam ad flumen pervenerunt*)—the latter being a simple example, too, of signalling an approaching subordinate construction. Likewise *ita* in a comparative construction, signalling an *ut*-clause (or phrase) to come.

18. It is important to bring out the crucial rôle of *word-group-order* in these contexts. It is far more natural for a Roman to write, and even think, thus:

Cicero oratione quam in senatu habuit Catilinam ex urbe eiecit,

because it corresponds to the order of events, than

Cicero Catilinam ex urbe eiecit oratione quam in senatu habuit,

which corresponds to an English layout—even though this consists of the same words and still puts each verb at the end of its construction.

Nor is *Cicero Catilinam ex urbe oratione quam in senatu habuit eiecit* preferable, with its subordinate-clause and main-clause verbs excruciatingly side by side (though this is not to claim such word-ordering never occurs).

So too *Romulus postquam urbem condidit multos cives congregavit* is normal sentence-structure, even if to English-accustomed eyes *Romulus multos cives congregavit postquam urbem condidit* may look just as acceptable if not more so. And *Cato quia iam senex erat lente ambulabat* is more logical in Latin than placing the word-groups in a sequence more customary to English (*Cato lente ambulabat quia iam senex erat*), even if the English sequence is sometimes found in Latin too.

With this guidance established early, harder constructions will be that much easier for students to get a grip on.

SUBJUNCTIVE CLAUSE-CONSTRUCTIONS

19. Subordinate clauses with the subjunctive vary, as readers wearily know, from the easy-to-identify (*hoc facio ut patriam conservem*) to the recondite like:

- **6** *ad captivos meos visam ne quippiam turbaverint* (Plautus, *Captivi* 127).

“I shall visit my prisoners (as I fear) that they have caused some trouble”: the *ne*-clause with its perfect subjunctive must depend on an *implied* verb of fearing: context as signal¹⁰.

20. A prime difficulty with subjunctive subordinate constructions is understanding the correct sequence and thus interpreting the sense correctly—particularly important in English-to-Latin assignments but important, too, in Latin-to-English and Latin-to-Latin ones¹¹.

There is no simple device for easing this difficulty. Even in English, many people handle sequences faultlessly in speech and yet fall into dire confusions when doing so as an exercise. Some benefit may come through using tabular lists on different-colored cards or sheets, but reading-practice and manipulating actual examples are very desirable training activities.

It may be useful, too, to start students on subjunctive clauses using Historic-sequence examples. Most of the texts they will read tend to Historic rather than Primary use, and once the former is learned it should make the latter easier to grasp—more so than the other way round.

¹⁰ Woodcock 1959: 146, §189: “a general idea of anxiety inherent in the context”.

¹¹ Latin-to-Latin assignments: for instance, sentences in Primary sequence having to be rewritten in Historic, or vice versa; and text in *Oratio Recta* recast in *O. Obliqua* (or vice versa again).

21. Teaching such constructions could best begin with the easier-to-identify ones like purpose and result clauses, which both begin with *ut* (when positive) and have similar though not identical tense-sequences. The differences between them are naturally taught too, but some of the ways of which each—like *quo* introducing purpose clauses containing a comparative, and result clauses signalled by *is/ea/id* or *eius modi/huius modi* instead of *talis/tantus/etc.*—could be set aside for a later level of study.

22. *Cum* clauses might well come next, since they comprise temporal, causal and concessive usages, concepts already learned in indicative format if the approach suggested above is followed. Other subjunctive temporals, causals and concessives can then be studied (though not yet their occurrence in indirect statements, which at this stage would very likely cause confusion). Then, after them, the sequence might be:

- indirect commands, since students now know *ut/ne* clauses
- indirect questions with *quis/quantus/quot* (et al.) —for direct questions have been taught earlier in the course— and then those with *num* and *utrum*
- subjunctive conditionals
- constructions of fearing

—with less common or more hard-to-grasp formations to come later, perhaps in a following year’s course: for instance

- subordinate clauses in indirect statement
- gerunds and gerundives
- other ways of expressing purpose besides *ut/ne*-clauses.
- constructions with *quominus/quin*, *dummodo*, *dignus ut/qui*, and so on.

CONCLUSION

23. Difficult constructions can be taught successfully. In class, it may well be most effective to start with various simple non-clause constructions (e.g. prepositional and easy participial phrases) and then simple

clause-constructions (e.g. indicative-mood relative and temporal clauses), next to move on to another set of non-clause constructions, and so on. But this is not the only approach possible and it might in fact strike some as too fragmented. Many Latin coursebooks bring on subordinate clauses, for instance, in complete groupings—presenting both the indicative usages and the subjunctive ones—and make little concession to degrees of difficulty. This more traditional approach will work, given an enthusiastic teacher and committed students.

24. The principles of structural logic set out earlier are relevant and helpful to studying such constructions (§§5-8). Latin authors wrote, and expected to be read, with each word relating to those around it and telling the reader something about how the whole sentence is developing. Moreover they, like us, thought and wrote in *word-groupings*: *quis toto mari locus* and *per hos annos*, for instance, form a single idea each.

To hope to piece together a sentence's meaning without recognising these structures is a process glacial even when not futile. The logical *formatting* that Latin authors gave to their word-groups at every level—phrases, clauses, whole sentences—means by contrast that it is consistently rewarding to apply the recognition-principle not only to reading texts but also to learning constructions.

25. The other greatest difficulty for a learner is the sheer variety of constructions and of their details. Memorisation is a vital technique (as learners may as well be told from day one) but no less so is practise—in effect, another sort of memorisation—and practise in more senior or mature classes can profitably be seconded from time to time by discussion.

To reinforce and motivate learning, in turn, written assignments are necessary; but they do not have always to take the form of translating sentences from or into Latin. In fact, after the first year or so, the fewer such exercises the better learning is for the student. Other exercises (like the Latin-to-Latin manipulation mentioned earlier) can be devised which deal more searchingly with the syntax under study. In any case, with these or with traditional techniques the teacher's own sympathetic imagination will be crucial to any course's success.

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