

The Transitional Phase of Learning Latin

With the recent upheaval in the Latin AP Exam situation, the time is right to reconsider the unique characteristics of students in the transitional phase of learning Latin—that time when students have finished their introduction to basic Latin grammar but are not yet ready to read Latin at an advanced level. While this stage is defined primarily by its characteristics, not by year or level, most commonly the transitional stage is encountered during level 3 high school and its rough equivalent at the college level, intermediate Latin. The characteristics of transitional learners will be discussed along with teaching methods that have alleviated the difficulties that students encounter at this level.

Various authors, sometimes adapted and sometimes in their original form, are read in Latin 3 high school classes and in college intermediate classes. Each textbook features its own selection of author passages but some authors are seen more often at this level than others. In recent years, some high schools converted their Latin 3 classes into AP classes so that students might take two different AP examinations and thus had to deal with transitional learners during a year that proceeded at the fast pace that preparing for an AP Examination requires. Other high schools did not follow this method but instead used the level 3 book from their textbook series or devised their own curriculum for Latin 3 classes. Intermediate college classes continued to prepare students for upper level Latin by introducing them to a wider variety of authors than usually seen at the high school level. Reading these authors, whether at the high school or college level, depending on the books and methods used, have not always helped students make the transition to upper level Latin. A review of what authors are most commonly taught at this level will be presented.

At the same time, in some cases not all the necessary grammatical and syntactical were taught during the introductory stage, leaving these holes in a students' foundational Latin to be filled in during the transitional phase. These topics and how to weave them into a transitional course will be presented during this panel.

Two books recently written to meet the needs at the transitional level will be presented by their respective authors. How these two books, *The Ovid Transitional Legamus Reader* and *The Horace Transitional Legamus Reader*, specifically meet the characteristics of transitional learners will be discussed and the authors' own teaching methods for this stage of learning will be included. In addition, methods to follow when designing one's own transitional materials for use in the classroom will be described.

Finally, a way to design a transitional level course and what books and materials are most effective in doing this will be presented in depth. At the conclusion of this panel, participants will be able to write an outline and choose books and materials for a transitional course that meets the needs of their own students.

Panel Title: The Transitional Phase of Learning Latin
Paper One: Designing a Latin 3/Intermediate Level Transitional Course

Latin 3 high school students and intermediate level college students are often in the transitional phase of learning Latin. The characteristics of students at this level will be described and include such topics as student difficulties with understanding footnotes and remembering to consult footnotes, problems with finding words in a dictionary or glossary, and the agreement of nouns and adjectives that are widely separated in the text among other characteristics. Teaching methods and tips that will aid the students will be presented.

The most frequent authors read during the transitional phase in high school classrooms include Cicero (the *Catilinarians*, *Verrines*, *Pro Archia*, *Pro Milone*, etc.), Pliny, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*. Depending on which textbook is used, the student may also read passages from Eutropius, Horace, Asconius, Petronius, Aulus Gellius, Caesar, Augustus' *Res Gestae* or excerpts from later Latin. The frequency with which these authors are read will be discussed according to the most common textbooks in use in American schools today.

Grammatical and syntactical topics which are often postponed to the transitional phase will also be considered according to textbooks in use. Other topics such as ablative absolutes, the passive periphrastic, and subjunctive clauses among others, even though they may have been taught during the introduction to Latin seem to need review at the transitional level. The participants will also learn how to include these topics while teaching an author text and how to construct exercises that weave the content and vocabulary of the text with the grammatical or syntactical topic to be taught.

Finally, taking into consideration which authors to teach, which grammatical and syntactical topics need to be introduced, and the characteristics of transitional learners a system will be delineated on how to combine various books written for the transitional stage. These books include all five readers in the Legamus Transitional series: Vergil, Ovid, Horace, Catullus, and Cicero as well as *The Little Book of Latin Love Poetry* by Brueker and Weinfeld. Different schools, different courses, and different teachers have different goals for the transitional stage. Some want to balance prose and poetry, others want to approach either prose or poetry in order to balance the transitional phase with the course that will follow, some are concerned with either the mix of high ability students with others or with the separation of the two, and some want the transitional phase to prepare their students for a following AP course. All of these concerns will be discussed among the participants and the panelists.

Panel Title: The Transitional Phase of Learning Latin
Paper Two: Transitioning to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Every teacher will agree with me that no matter what the degree or level of preliminary instruction, the transition from learning Latin grammar to reading Latin texts is discouraging for students. Even after using textbooks that stress a reading approach, like the JACT, which I used for twenty years and which ends the study of grammar with 'real Latin,' students are defeated by an actual Latin text no matter how well annotated it may be. The problems are at least two-fold. Students want to prepare for their reading classes in a manner akin to grammar preparation, which in many cases means doing written homework in the hallway an hour before class. Teachers, on the other hand, are intent on getting students up to speed. They might begin a translation class with twenty lines per session with the goal of reaching fifty by the end of the semester. Faced with twenty lines, vocabulary and notes, students feel they need to launch right in and they do so by looking the first word, slapping it into a sentence, continuing on to the next until they have coherent English that has very little to do with the Latin right in front of them.

When I teach students new to translation, or even experienced students looking at an author for the first time, I slow it down. I focus on teaching the basics of translation because once these are learned, students will pick up speed. These are my 'techniques' which, by using visual aids in this presentation, I will be applying to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but which work for any author. First, I allow no English translations in class. Instead students have notes that include vocabulary in dictionary form, and grammatical notes from the text. Most translation mistakes occur because of wrong vocabulary choices and students need to go back to their dictionary to correct themselves. Students, however, can use the type of notation described by Patrick Mcfadden in the latest *CPL* 4.1. They need to know where to begin and what to do next, so they are allowed to designate the subject with 's', to underline the verb, to bracket prepositional phrases, to link adjectives with nouns etc. Again, if they make mistakes, they correct their notations. Finally, I ask students to contextualize the Latin, again using techniques similar to those described by Jennifer Rea in *CPL* 3.1. This type of preparation initially occurs in class before the next assignment is due. I give background and notes to the passage where necessary, then I give the students a series of questions designed to aid translation, which they can answer, individually or in groups with the aid of vocabulary and notes in the text, then I have them 'break out the Latin' by which they pretty much diagram each sentence phrase by phrase and clause by clause. I model this 'unpacking' (not my term but I love it!) of the Latin for a couple weeks, then I have them work in groups, and then they are on their own. During the group segment, they are given the text on disc, which they then modify and return to me. I put it together and either email it to the class or post it on WEBCT before the next class. This modern technology works very well and the students get very elaborate with fonts and colors. When they come to class, we go over these lines very quickly, and begin to prep the next set of lines. Their confidence skyrockets and we have grammar-based discussions instead of the inevitable "Can you go over this line again?" This preliminary work enables them to the literary aspects of Ovid's work and there are times when they actually enjoy what they are doing.

Panel Title: The Transitional Phase of Learning Latin
Paper Three: “Let’s Read” Horace Using Bolchazy-Carducci’s Transitional Reader

Horace may seem too difficult for students who have finished a textbook series and are tackling their first “real” Latin author. Any intermediate student of Latin can appreciate Horace’s wit, his intricate style, his depiction of Roman society and relationships, and his timeless reflections on human life. This presentation will show how Ancona’s and Murphy’s *Legamus* Horace transitional reader helps train the student to read authentic Latin and this rewarding writer in particular.

Our textbook begins with selections about Horace’s relationship with his father, taken from *Satires* I.4 and I.6 and totaling 47 hexameter lines. We go on to eight of the most-beloved of Horace’s *Odes*: the ones known by the tags “Pyrrha,” “Chloe,” “*carpe diem*,” “Golden Mean,” “Cleopatra,” “Soracte,” and “*non omnis moriar*,” and the amoebaeon love competition that is *Odes* 3.9.

We also begin with the *Satires* selections because they are autobiographical and their imitation of conversational speech creates ways to review recently studied syntax: e.g. conditional sentences, indirect command, indirect question, etc. We review a construction before the student encounters it. Handouts will show how the grammatical review helps the student prior to reading a poem.

We also put the *Satires* first because they demand skill with complex sentences. The series’ use of different fonts for different adjective-noun pairs in a passage helps the student get used to the author’s word order. Various handouts show how the selections are printed first in simplified Latin, how we put much emphasis on showing students how Horace leaves out words, how we supply background material about Roman society, and how the student is finally ready to work through the authentic form of the selection as Horace wrote it. Participants will see how the notes on the “authentic” text deal with finer points (e.g. meter, figures of speech) than those on the modified version.

As we proceed through the *Odes*, our explanatory material thins. One handout will show how by that point in the volume, the notes need to provide less help, and another will show how we have dispensed with the modified version of the Latin.

Our discussions, “Thinking about how the Author Writes,” help the student synthesize awareness of certain features of elevated writing. Our discussions, “After Reading What Horace Wrote,” prompt the student to reflect on the passage. Handouts will accompany both of these discussions.

A useful feature of the volume is the Grammatical Appendix. A handout shows how it explains grammatical topics using phrases from Horace. To close, we will look at how the volume helps the student practice reading in meter.

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Paper Four: Bringing Authentic Latin to the Lower Levels

Students in lower level Latin classes often get little or no exposure to authentic, unadapted Latin. Teachers are often afraid that the reading will be too hard, or that the students will become frustrated. In fact students feel a sense of accomplishment and even pride when they realize they have read a passage of 'real' Latin. When you tell a second year student that they have just read something that the AP students are reading, they feel successful. There are plenty of poems of Martial or Catullus, short passages from Vergil or Livy that can be used to help students feel that sense of success.

Teachers are often hesitant to present such material to students because they feel that they don't know everything they need to know to understand the reading. Students don't need to have mastered everything on their own in order to be able to derive meaning from the passage. Sufficient vocabulary glosses can help students weave their way through an unfamiliar text. Most students will be able to figure out essential meanings of verb forms once they have learned the personal endings. The teacher may need to help with passive verbs, for example, if students have not yet encountered them. Teachers need not underestimate their students' ability to decode meaning.

The materials must be adapted based on the students' readiness. Supplying too little for beginning students leads to frustration, but supplying too much encourages students to determine meaning by looking at the notes, not reading the Latin. Some allusions and references must be explained.

Latin classes are enriched when teacher include the Romans' own words in their class. Teachers can develop their own materials or make use of Bolchazy-Carducci's Transitional Readers. This presentation will examine how to use these materials even though they are designed for students with a little more exposure to Latin.