

Libellus: Writing an OER Introductory Latin Textbook

All Latin teachers have their own preferences in terms of textbooks, which can often be summed up as “this is the textbook I have the fewest problems with.” This presentation offers yet another option in the field of introductory Latin textbooks: one which will soon be available online as an Open Educational Resource and hence available freely for anyone’s use and adaptation. The book was originally proposed as a means of encouraging enrollments in introductory Latin: although our institution retains a three- or four-semester language requirement for most majors, our program is competing with many modern and a number of ancient languages, many of which are teaching introductory levels with either homegrown free textbooks or no textbooks at all.

In the first section I will briefly discuss the makeup and structure of the textbook on both the macro and the micro level. The book itself is ultimately yet another grammar-translation method textbook, albeit one with some aspects of reading method; it also has review sections that offer some cultural/historical background information, as well as sections introducing practice in ‘active’ Latin for those teachers who wish to include practice in spoken Latin. The connected narrative for the readings (roughly one every other chapter) is set in the early 1st century BCE: the two main characters, both sub-elite, are the daughter of a Sullan veteran who has been granted some farmland and her friend, a native Etruscan living in the same area. There is a time jump set roughly at the end of the first semester of instruction: the first half of the book deals with the characters’ childhood in the countryside, while the second half picks up several years later in Rome. Each reading ends with a choice for the student, expressed in Latin: although a true branching narrative in the sense of a “choose-your-own-adventure” was not practical, given

the requirements of morphology, vocabulary, and syntax in an introductory textbook, the choices not only supply the students with some comprehensible-input style readings, but offer them more agency in their readings than is usually found in introductory textbooks.

In the second section, since the textbook was first piloted in two sections of introductory Latin taught by experienced graduate student TAs in fall of 2025, I will be able to present some preliminary results on student and instructor feedback, as well as some informal data on retention. Ultimately, I see the utility of the textbook as up to the teachers: while it can certainly be adopted as a proper textbook, it can also be used to supply extra grammatical explanation or readings for a different book.