

## Follow the Latin Brick Road: Minimalizing and Redefining Memorization in Latin Learning

The presenter will trace his understanding and use of memorization in elementary Latin instruction over a 40 year career. He will present a brief look backward at previous textbooks and the role they expected memorization to play. The rapid decline in Latin enrollments during the 1970s convinced most people that the move from brute memorization was necessary if we wanted to save Latin from extinction.

Yet, the new textbooks that arose to save Latin still maintained a list of core vocabulary words, for example, that would not be glossed during further readings. And grammatical charts continued to appear, if not in the body of the text, then certainly in the appendices. Few are the classrooms, even today, where “chanting” is not employed. Be it “bo, bis, bit” or “eram, eras, erat,” memorization remains with us. What is its proper role in learning Latin?

The purpose of this talk will be multifold. First, it will try to show that a certain amount of memorization is mandatory for any sort of expedited learning. One becomes a competent mechanic more quickly if one simply memorizes that a  $\frac{1}{4}$ ” socket is half as large as a  $\frac{1}{2}$ ” ratchet. Second, it will introduce the concept of “brick” learning of Latin. Under this concept, the teacher is charged with keeping memorization to an absolute minimum by having students memorize only absolutely essential facts, the “bricks” of the language. These bricks have been identified over a four decade span by a continuous commitment to reduction, and are far fewer than many teachers imagine. Once these bricks are in place (and actually understood, rather than being consigned to rote memory) the amount of future memorization is drastically reduced for a student. Concrete examples covering morphology and vocabulary will be shared. Learning techniques, the necessity of learning in context, student centered learning, so-called “brain stem quizzes,” and constant review will be stressed. Hidden “bricks” (things not often set to memory)

will be discussed. It is not enough to memorize “a, ae, ae, am, ā, etc.” One must know that the ending –ae can be four separate things and that context will help determine which one is at work.

In sum, memorization is and has been part of learning since the inception of time. The chore for the Latin teacher is to focus on what truly needs to be memorized (“laser Latin”) and to remove the “brute” from memorization.