

A Secondary School Model for Learning Management Systems in Enhancing Successful Latin Translation

The goal of this method is to help students towards successful translation. This is nothing new, but too many secondary schools today are faced with “dumbing-down” texts in the face of “I can’t” by students and outmoded textbooks. This is one suggested method that has been successful, moving students from “I can’t” through “I am improving” to “I can” by using cooperative group-based online sessions monitored and graded by the instructor.

This method uses the online system Schoology, but other online systems such as Blackboard provide similar frameworks in which to create this group environment with students who have grown up well-familiarized with online communications. Latin students from the beginning levels well into intermediate levels of Latin instruction face mental roadblocks with the specific individual skills needed for translation and most especially with putting all those elements together into good English translations.

Online discussion boards are nothing new in education and have been used now for many years primarily at the collegiate level for distance and asynchronous learning moderated by instructors. Many secondary schools now, however, have purchased access to such systems as Schoology and Blackboard, but these are underutilized, especially for Latin instruction. Instead of seeing such discussion boards solely as a framework for a repository of class documents and communication, they can enhance the secondary school homework assignments, by providing the medium for group work completed outside of the classroom. This allows students to work cooperatively on translation, in a monitored environment, while doing so in

their own homes at a time of their own choosing. This also helps set students up for online college classes of any type.

The instructor's first step is to jigsaw or chunk the passages up into shorter, appropriately sized pieces of one, two, or three sentences depending upon level and student abilities. The selection of the groups must be done with a careful eye to the right mixture of high, medium, and struggling performers, rather than allowing self-selection by the students. While systems such as Schoology monitor for inappropriate language, the instructor needs to "check-in" on the groups, adding varying degrees of scaffolding assistance as the year progresses for the different levels.

The students' online work needs to be graded, as especially at the secondary level, the work will not otherwise be completed. Systems such as Schoology automatically count and list for instructors the number of each student's postings within a chat group, but the instructor must also give credit for constructive comments, and as a check to see that all students are contributing to the level of their ability within each group. Students need to be encouraged to ask each other questions and to share their ideas with confidence.

All groups are assigned the entirety of the homework, and cooperate on these, but are also to be the "experts" on a single chunk and present this piece to the class while the other students/groups, with the instructor as guide and moderator, question and as needed assist and gently critique the presenting group. Jig-sawed portions are assigned to groups in a rotating order, and each person in each group must take their turn in presenting. One method for a three-student group can be to have one student declaim the Latin, a second read through the group's translation and explain the syntax, and a third handle the questions from the other groups after the presentation. Credit should be given not only to the presenters, but also to valuable questions and suggestions given by other groups. This method forges a firm connection of their group

homework with the classroom work, reinforces older concepts and helps them to practice new ones.

The goal should be to create a whole class “conversation” about the passage that has been assigned, while allowing individuals to take pride and ownership of their individualized “expert” sections. The various groups form a community within the classroom, to be there for each other when a group flounders rather than to attack and can be used to enhance a positive classroom environment. By teaching, they shall learn, and they do.