

Pronunciation guide

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Latin sounds

Classic Latin	Church Latin (Italian tradition)
Most sounds are the same to those in English (standard southern British), except:	
<p>A – ‘cup’ (short vowel) or ‘father’ (long vowel) AE – ‘eye’ AU – ‘house’ C – ‘cat’ (always hard)</p> <p>CH – ‘k’ with a sharper expulsion of breath (as in ‘curses!’) E – ‘pet’ (short vowel) or ‘pay’ (long vowel) EI – ‘reign’ EU – two sounds run together: ‘e-oo’ G – ‘gag’ (always hard) GN – at the beginning of a word ‘n’, and in the middle of a word ‘ngn’ (as in ‘hangnail’) I – ‘lip’ (short vowel) or ‘leap’ (long vowel) J – ‘y’ (as in ‘yodel’) NG – as in ‘anger’ (not ‘hangar’) OE – ‘oil’ O – ‘not’ (short vowel) or (long vowel) ‘note’ (as the Scots would say it) PH – ‘p’ with a sharper expulsion of breath (as in ‘peasant!’) QU – ‘kw’, as in ‘quack’ R trilled with the tip of the tongue S – as in hiss (not his) TH – as ‘t’ with a sharper expulsion of breath U – ‘pull’ (short vowel) or (long vowel) ‘pool’ V – as English ‘w’ Y – French ‘tu’ (short vowel), French ‘sur’ (long vowel)</p>	<p>C before ae/oe/e/i/y is pronounced ch (as in ‘church’)</p> <p>G before ae/oe/e/i/y is pronounced ‘j’ (as in ‘gem’) GN is pronounced ‘ny’ (a soft ‘n’)</p>

NB: There are several traditions of Church Latin pronunciation. The one suggested in the table leans towards a so called ‘*Italian standard*’ as it is mostly accepted in romance-speaking countries and resembles vernacular Italian pronunciation. There is also a ‘*German standard*’ which is preferred in some countries and education systems. It mostly repeats the Italian model, apart from some differences:

C before **ae/oe/e/i/y** is pronounced ‘ts’ (as in let’s)
OE is pronounced ‘ö’ (as in ‘her’)
G – always hard ‘g’ (as in ‘good’)
S between two vowels is pronounced ‘z’
T before **i** is pronounced ‘ts’
PH is pronounced ‘f’ (as in ‘pheasant’)

Short and Long Vowels

Vowel and consonant length were more significant and more clearly defined in Latin than in modern English (where it can still be observed occasionally, compare *hill* – *heel*). In the modern spelling of Latin, especially in dictionaries and academic work, macrons are frequently used to mark long vowels (ā ē ī ō ū ŷ).

Distinguish between:

grātia (gratitude, long vowel)	and gladius (sword, short vowel)
dēbēo (I must, long vowel)	and Deus (God, short vowel)
amīcus (friend, long vowel)	and animus (mind, short vowel)
cōnsul (consul, long vowel)	and collis (hill, short vowel)
iūstus (just, long vowel)	and iuxtā (close to, short vowel)

NB: The fact that the vowel is **long** doesn't necessarily mean that it will be **stressed**. On stress in Latin words see 'Number of syllables and stress in Latin'.

Diphthongs

A **diphthong** is a vowel (a, e, or o) followed by a glide (i, e or u).

AE as in English **high**.

AU as in English **how**.

EI as in English **eight**.

EU e-u (two separate sounds, not as in English **yew**).

OE as in English **boy** (only **shorter**)

UI u-i (as in French **oui**)

Double consonants

Where double consonants occur, as in *sitting*, both consonants are pronounced; so *ille* is pronounced *il-le* (**l** is sounded long as in English *halllight*).

Distinguish between:

éras (you were)	and érras (you wander)
ádhuc (still)	and addúc (lead to)
cátulus (puppy)	arid Catúllus (the name of a poet)

Number of syllables and stress in Latin

The following rules should always be observed:

- 1) Except in obvious diphthongs (**ae**, **au**, **oe**, often **eu**), every single vowel signals a **separate syllable**, as in the English word *recipe* (three syllables). Thus, in Latin 'de|si|ne' is three syllables and 'di|em' is two.
- 2) The stress in Latin words of more than two syllables falls on the **penultimate** (second from last) syllable if this is metrically 'heavy' (i.e. contains a 'long' vowel or a vowel before two consonants), e.g. 'fes**T**ina', 'a**G**enda'. It falls on the **antepenultimate** (third from last) syllable when the penultimate syllable is metrically 'light' (i.e. contains a 'short' vowel before a single consonant), e.g. '**D**Ominus'.
- 3) The stress **almost always** falls on the first syllable of two-syllable words.
- 4) What is recommended in 2 is natural for English speakers.

Bibliography

- 1) James Morwood, 'Pronunciation', in *A Latin grammar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1–5.
- 2) George Sharpley, 'Introduction', in *Get Started in Latin* (London: Hachette UK, 2010 [1999]), pp. xvi–xvii.