



# The Pronunciation of Latin

Today, there are two main ways of pronouncing Latin. The first of these is the Classical Pronunciation, which is the way we think Latin was spoken prior to around the third century or so. The second, and the one this web site is really concerned with, is Ecclesiastical Pronunciation, which is the way Latin has been spoken from somewhere in the 3rd/4th centuries down to present day and is the way Latin is spoken in the Church. The two methods are very, very close to one another. Indeed if one is familiar with one method, only a little effort is needed to be able to use the other.

## Guide to the Pronunciation of Ecclesiastical Latin

Since English borrowed its alphabet from Latin, the pronunciation of individual Latin letters is close to that of English. In fact Latin is generally easier than English to pronounce since Latin does not have silent letters nor has the peculiar diphthong shifts of English (i.e. rough and through are pronounced very differently!). About the only difficulty is the need to distinguish between long and short vowels. There are no simple clues for the novice as to whether a vowel is long or short. It simply has to be memorized. However, with practice, this too becomes easy over time and a certain intuitive pattern will emerge as one's vocabulary expands. A good Latin dictionary that marks long and short vowels will make life much easier. It is recommended that the novice look up unfamiliar words to ensure correct pronunciation.

### Syllables

Every Latin word has as many syllables as it does vowels or diphthongs. (Diphthongs are double vowels which form one sound. The most common Latin diphthongs are ae, oe, and au.) Unlike English, which has silent letters, in Latin each consonant, vowel and diphthong is pronounced separately. *Peccata* is thus pronounced *pec-ca-ta* and not *pec-a-ta*. *Tuum* is pronounced *tu-um* (*too-um*), and not as *toom*.

### Accents

The rule for where the accent or stress in a Latin word goes is also straight forward. If the word has only two syllables, the accent always falls on the first syllable. For example, *amo* is pronounced as *AH-moe*, not *ah-MOE*. If the word has three or more syllables, then where the stress is applied depends upon whether the syllable second to the last has a long vowel or not. If the second to last syllable has a long vowel in it, then the accent is placed on that syllable. If the second to the last syllable has a short vowel, then the previous syllable (the third syllable from the end). For example, *peccata* is pronounced *pe-CAH-ta*, since the *a* in the second syllable is long, but *nomine* is pronounced *NOH-mi-neh*, since the *i* of the second syllable is short. As I said, a good dictionary is most helpful here.

## Pronunciation of the Letters

Since English borrowed its alphabet from Latin, the pronunciation of individual Latin letters is close to that of English. The differences are mainly the vowels and a few consonants.

### Vowels

Long	Short
A as in father	A as in Dinah
E as in they	E as in met or pet
I as in machine	I as in pit or hit
O as in note	O as in off
U as in rude	U as in put

The distinction between a short or a long A is how long the vowel is actually pronounced. The long A is simply held longer than a short A, Ahhhhhhh versus ah.

## Consonants+

Consonants are "hard", but some consonants take a hard form in front of some vowels and a soft form in front of other vowels:

These consonants are hard before a, o, u, au	And these are soft consonants before ae, e, oe, i:
C = k as in cot	C = ch as in chain
CC = kk as in accord	CC = tch as in catchy
SC = sk as in tabasco	SC = sh as in sheep
G = g as in go	G = soft g as in gentle
	GN = "ni" as in onion (ny like sound)
	TI - when followed by a third vowel becomes a tsee sound, as in tsetse fly

Sometimes one will see a "j" in Latin. Technically Latin has no letter J. It was introduced in the 13th century or thereabouts to differentiate between the vowel i and the consonant i. The consonantal i is like our y. "Major" in Latin is pronounced as MAH-yor. Until this last century, most printed Latin texts used the j to indicate the different sounds. Today the j's are usually replaced with the more classical i's.

## Diphthongs

ae - as "ay" in say
au - as "ou" in house
oe - as "oy" in boy

So now that we have all these good rules, let's take some examples. Before we do, however, note one other difference between Latin and English. In English, word order is crucial. Dog bites man means something very different than man bites dog. In English, the word order distinguished who did what to whom. In Latin, it is the ending of the word that indicates who did what to whom. Vir (man) mordet (bites) canem (dog), vir canem mordet, canem vir mordet, canem mordet vir, mordet vir canem, and mordet canem vir all mean the same thing, man bites dog. So when we get to the examples, you will see a very different word order than what is demanded in English. Now for the examples:

## The Sign of the Cross

Signum	Crucis
SIN-yum	CREW-chis

<b>Latin</b>	In	nomine	Patris,	et	Filii,	et	Spiritus	Sancti.	Amen.
<b>Pronunciation</b>	In	NOH-mi-neh	PAH-tris	et	FEE-li-ee	et	SPEE-ri-toos	SANC-tee	AH-men
<b>Translation</b>	In	the name	of the Father	and	of the Son	and	of the Spirit	Holy.	Amen.

## The Minor Doxology (Glory Be):

<b>Doxologia</b>	<b>Minor</b>
Docks-oh-loh-GEE-ah	MEE-nor

<b>Latin</b>	Gloria	Patri,	et	Filio,	et	Spiritui	Sancto.	Sicut	erat	
<b>Pronunciation</b>	GLOH-ri-ah	PAH-tree	et	FEE-li-oh	et	Spee-RI-too-ee	SANC-toh	SEE-cut	EH-rat	
<b>Translation</b>	Glory be	to the Father	and	to the Son	and	to the Spirit	Holy.	As	it was	
<b>Latin</b>	in	principio	et	nunc	et	semper	et	in	saecula	saeculorum
<b>Pronunciation</b>	in	prin-CHI-pi-oh	et	noonk	et	SEM-pair	et	in	SAY-coo-la	say-coo-LO-rum
<b>Translation</b>	in	the beginning	and	now	and	always	and	unto	the ages	of ages*

\* ages of ages is the Latin way of saying forever and ever. We can thank King Henry VIII for the peculiar "world without end" ending we have in English today.