

# The Ablative Absolute

LATIN 101B • Spring 2003 • Wheaton College



## ABSOLUTE Subordinate Clauses:

A Subordinate clause is ABSOLUTE when it stands entire outside of the grammar of the main clause and contains no FINITE verb.

English Examples:

*The door being open, all the bugs got in the house.*  
*The key having been lost, I could not open the door.*  
*That said, we now turn to the next section of the program.*  
*All things being equal, the procedures are the same.*

Compare:

*Having been lost my key, I could not open the door.* What is different about this sentence? It still contains no finite verb BUT the participial phrase is no longer absolute because it now depends on the subject of the main clause.

## ABLATIVE

In Latin, the participle and the noun it agrees with will be in the ABLATIVE case.

## ERGO...

When you see ablative nouns/adjectives/participles isolated grammatically from the main clause of a sentence (and usually set off by commas), you probably have an **ABLATIVE ABSOLUTE**.

## TRANSLATING THE ABLATIVE ABSOLUTE I

Simplest and most accurate translation uses the preposition *with* followed by the noun and then the participle in the correct tense and voice. Witness:

<i>Viro necato, puella terretur.</i>	<u>With the man having been killed</u> , the girl is scared.
<i>Rege veniente, gens iucunda erat.</i>	<u>With the king arriving</u> , the people were happy.
<i>Equo venturo, miles hastam iecit</i>	<u>With the horse about to come</u> , the soldier threw the spear.

Ablative Absolutes can contain prepositions, relative clauses, etc. as well.

*Rege veniente ad urbem, gens iucunda erat.* With the king arriving at the city, the people were pleased.

If ablative absolutes have ACTIVE participles, the participle can take a DIRECT OBJECT just like most active verbal forms.

*Rege dicente haec, gens non iucunda erat.* With the king saying these things, the people were not pleased.

Pay special attention (as always) to active and passive forms.

*His verbis ab rege dictis, gens non iucunda erat.* With these words having been spoken by the king, the people were not pleased.

## TRANSLATING THE ABLATIVE ABSOLUTE II

- 1) Since the Ablative Absolute uses participles, the tense of the clause is RELATIVE to that of the main clause.
- 2) The exact logical relationship between the main clause and the ablative absolute has to be constructed from the CONTEXT. It is usually translated with one of English's standard subordinating conjunctions: *because, since, after, although, if, inasmuch as, etc.*