

# How to Read a Latin Poem

## LATIN 226: Roman Lyric

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1. Read the complete poem in Latin, preferably while working out its scansion. Annoy and mystify those around you by reading it as the Romans did: **outloud**, and with a flamboyant, passionate accent. You will have to do this in class and practice makes perfect.
2. Silently identify vocabulary you recognize.
3. Begin to break complete sentences --and lines-- into smaller sense units.
  - Identify main verbs; subordinate verbs; important verbal constructions
  - Identify nouns and adjectives that appear to go together
  - Keep in mind that you may have to make adjustments when you later translate
4. NOW turn to your dictionary and commentaries and begin the work of translating.
  - Keep vocabulary on a separate sheet of paper or in a notebook.
  - Keep notations and questions on grammar and syntax also on that separate paper.
5. Once you've spent far too much time with the dictionary and done the laborious first translation, go over the poem a second time, and a third time.
  - Each time you translate the poem, try to rely less and less on your notes, paying more attention to the language of the poem itself.
  - Begin to pay attention to the *sounds* of the words, in addition to their meanings, and try to really read and appreciate the Latin. Look for puns, for clever or meaningful word order, for words that sound alike; for words that stand in stark contrast to the other surrounding words.
  - Think about what the poet is feeling, and what he is conveying in the poem. Note your own first impression of the poem's theme, style, structure, etc.
6. Now you are read to **interpret** and **enjoy** the poem by asking "Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About a Poem but Where Afraid to Ask..."

### Helpful hints

1. Feel free to refer to translations. I will place several on reserve for you in Classics seminar room. Remember that each translator interprets a poem when he or she translates it. In class, I want to hear *your* translation. You will be responsible for articulating why you interpreted and translated the poem as you did.