

CarPe Latinam – V

One of the struggles in second language learning is vocabulary acquisition. Many teachers bemoan that their students just don't know how to study vocabulary. Perhaps it is true that in this day and age of immediate gratification the art of sitting down to memorize may be lost.

There are several things you can do as a teacher to help vocabulary acquisition among your students. Traditionally at the top of the list is making flashcards. Teachers of level 1 Latin, especially at the secondary level, should consider making a large set for classroom use in order to model how to use cards most efficiently. In addition, such websites as quia.com provide a means for creating electronic flashcards which our game-playing students find appealing. Drilling words in context can be even more effective, something which can be done either in class orally or created electronically.

Many teachers also have students keep running vocabulary spirals, sorting vocabulary by parts of speech, declension, or conjugation. The other old standby is copying new vocabulary words 5 times each. This is also useful, but, let's face it, very dry and some students will interpret such work as busy work.

And still, how much vocabulary actually gets into a student's active vocabulary as opposed to passive vocabulary? Perhaps the problem is that we haven't helped our students remember their SANDALS—and perhaps we haven't remembered them ourselves.

SANDALS is a nifty acronym for *Spectate Audite Nunc Dicite Agite Legite Scribite*, and we should keep these six imperatives in mind when trying to improve vocabulary acquisition. Consider the following:

The TEACHER should use new words orally as much as possible so that the student can watch and listen (SPECTATE et AUDITE). For example, if *contendit* is a new vocabulary item, the teacher can demonstrate *contendit* in comparison to *ambulat* while saying those words. Likewise, if a student mistranslates *currit*, the teacher can reply “*non contendit, non festinat, non ambulat, sed currit*” (and feel free to actually run). It is important that students hear Latin spoken correctly and consistently in the early years of learning. Even the simple process of using large flashcards with students should be accompanied with the teacher saying each word clearly while students see the word.

The STUDENT needs to use the words in any way possible, beginning with saying the word accurately outloud. (Proper, consistent pronunciation will help to fix the word in the mind.) Students should repeat vocabulary (DICITE) as well read passages out loud (LEGITE), several times if possible in order to fix meanings in context. Students should also be able to follow simple instructions in Latin (AGITE) as well as tying some appropriate gestures to vocabulary. Students can go beyond making traditional flashcards or vocabulary spirals by having a more interactive vocabulary log in which students might take a few minutes each night to use new vocabulary in the context of a simple

sentence (SCRIBITE), even something as basic as *villa est nomen. villa est locus*. It would be even better if the student could create a simple definition in Latin. *villa est aedificium in quo sunt culina et tablinum et atrium et triclinium. familia in villa habitat*.

Often when studying authentic texts students learn vocabulary in the order presented, especially if vocabulary is provided on a facing page. Why not have students put vocabulary in natural word groups—animals, places, people, emotions, military terms, and the like? Perhaps students could also keep a running list of antonyms and synonyms, as well as words easily confused. This would be no different than elementary students studying the difference between where, wear and were.

Consider this as well: how many missed opportunities have slipped by you this year for sneaking in some vocabulary that would otherwise not be discussed in class? Just this last week, when trying to think of a simple yet fun way to reinforce singular and plural nominatives, I decided to greet my 7th graders at the door with a question of *quot sunt unus canis et duo canes*? And then it occurred to me—*canis* appears in their textbook, but there are so many other interesting animals that I would otherwise not find time to teach that I could use.

I have one last thought on vocabulary acquisition. I personally feel that perhaps the most critical mistake made in learning Latin vocabulary is not saying vocabulary out loud—not learning the true sound and feel of the word. From day one the exact pronunciation of the word should be learned (which means that students would need to know the macrons) so that, when presented a text later on without macrons, the student would have no urgent need to look all of the words up to check for long vowels. Ask yourself this simple question: can you confidently write in Latin complete with macrons? Why not? Can't you hear how the words sound in your head and thus represent them accurately in writing? No? Then perhaps you need to refine how you acquire (or reacquire) vocabulary as well. Join the club.

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