

Research suggests that Latin is a  
viable choice for students with  
learning problems

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**Latin  
for  
Students  
with  
Learning  
Disabilities**

by

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## Introduction

A significant number of students studying Latin or any other foreign language encounter such severe difficulties that their pursuit of learning the language is jeopardized or even ended. Most of these “at risk” learners have diagnosed or diagnosable learning disabilities, but many others who struggle to learn a foreign language do not. The language deficit which links most of these students is poor auditory or phonological processing ability. They encounter difficulty distinguishing, repeating and remembering the sounds of language and struggle to pair a new sound to the concept it represents. Allied difficulties may include general memory problems and difficulty detecting and applying grammatical rules.

There is no single, secret strategy which unlocks the capability of students with these language learning problems. Learning, for them, is always challenging, but teachers find that a combination of strategies can work together to improve greatly LD students’ proficiency. The key is the leadership of a teacher willing to implement the practices that we acknowledge to be “best practices.”

The ideal teacher for students with learning disabilities is one who:

- Understands the general nature of learning disabilities;
- Is interested in their manifestations in individual students;
- Works consistently with her students in a mutual effort to understand individual learning problems and mitigate their effects;
- Sympathetically addresses the affective concerns that often plague students with learning problems;
- Gears class work and evaluation to strengths rather than weaknesses of students;
- Presents material by allowing students to see it, speak it and write it as well as hear it.
- Carries the segments of class time to keep students alert and interested and to involve as many students as possible;
- Is patient, flexible and creative
- Enjoys his/her calling and makes Latin learning enjoyable for students.

## Eight Reasons Why Latin is a Good Choice for LD Students

1. **The primary emphasis in Latin is customarily placed upon reading**, not speaking the language. Students with relatively poor phonological coding (auditory ability have a better opportunity to learn.
2. **Latin students typically see and hear Latin words** and sentences as they are read aloud so they can correlate the sound of the language with its written representation.
3. **The Latin alphabet** is already known to those who know English.
4. **Latin pronunciation is consistent**. Latin consonants and diphthongs produce one sound when spoken and Latin vowels produce only two. Latin pronunciation can thus be learned quite efficiently.
5. **Latin is inflected**. Learners must break words down into their component morphemes and analyze them in order to determine the role of the words play in sentences. This process improves the student’s understanding of the mechanics of language because they must use the rules of morphology and syntax. They cannot rely exclusively on word order to obtain meaning.
6. **Latin vocabulary** acquisition is facilitated by Latin’s relatively small lexicon and few idioms.
7. Over **50% of all English words**, most scientific and technical terms and most terms expressing abstract concepts are **derived from Latin**.
8. **Latin classes are typically “low incidence” classes** in which all students start at the same place in the learning curve. They are not like Spanish classes, for example, populated by students who have had some Spanish previously and have “dropped back” to relearn the language

## The Organizational Characteristics of an Ideal Latin Class are Appropriate for Students with Learning Disabilities

1. High degree of **structure and planning**.
2. Explicit **instruction in phonology** of foreign language
3. **Information** presented to students in **written form**
  - plan for the day
  - in class or take home assignments
4. Consistent **attention to Latin learning method** as well as content:
  - discussion of “how to learn”
  - assignments designed to teach students how to learn.
5. **Breaking words**, phrases, sentences and reading passages **into their component parts** and demonstrating how these parts constitute the whole.
6. **Consideration of students’ needs** when determining pace of introduction of new material.
7. Attention to **affective issues**, especially students’ anxiety.
8. Frequent **repetition and review**.
9. **Multisensory approach**:  
seeing/hearing/saying/writing or acting out the Latin
10. Careful consideration of **evaluation and testing** (pre-tests, separate setting, extended time).