

# AN INTRODUCTION TO LATIN PRONUNCIATION: CLASSICAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL

## CLASSICAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL

- ‘Classical Pronunciation’ refers to the pronunciation of Latin as it was spoken in Ancient Rome in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.
- Ecclesiastical Pronunciation refers to the evolved pronunciation of Latin as the language of the liturgy in the Church, spoken all over the world in the present day.
- There are a few differences between classical and ecclesiastical pronunciation, which this guide will explain.

## VOWELS

- There are no silent letters in Latin. While in English ‘trade’ is one syllable, in Latin it is two: ‘TRA-deh.’ Pronounce every vowel.
- Latin distinguishes between short and long vowels. Vowels marked with a macron above them (̄) are long while unmarked vowels are short.
- Some texts omit macrons, and they must be remembered by memory. However, this curriculum includes macrons for all long vowels.
- Vowels are pronounced the same way in Classical and Ecclesiastical Latin.

## A and Ā

- |                                     |                                       |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| • a is pronounced as in <i>aba!</i> | • ā is pronounced as in <i>father</i> |
| • examples from the curriculum:     | • examples from the curriculum:       |
| • agit                              | • pācem                               |
| • canis                             | • aquā                                |
| • mea                               | • sāncto                              |
| • arānea                            | • arānea                              |

## E and Ē

- e is pronounced as in *met*
- examples from the curriculum:
  - edit
  - pācem
  - ecce
  - est
- ē is pronounced as in *they*
- examples from the curriculum:
  - fēlēs
  - hilarē
  - minimē
  - rēmōs

## I and Ī

- i is pronounced as in *bit*
- examples from the curriculum:
  - patris
  - in
  - hilarē
  - canis
- i can also be used as a consonant, as in 'Iulius.'
- ī is pronounced as in *machine*
- examples from the curriculum:
  - vīta
  - nōbīs
  - vīdistī
  - filiī

## O and Ō

- o is pronounced as in *off*
- examples from the curriculum:
  - dormit
  - somnium
  - duo
  - vocō
- ō is pronounced as in *oob!*
- examples from the curriculum:
  - nōbīs
  - rēmōs
  - nōn
  - vocō

## U and Ū

- u is pronounced as in *full*
- examples from the curriculum:
  - currit
  - filius
  - sum
  - meum
- ‘qu’ is only a consonant sound, without any vowel length, as in *equus*
- ū is pronounced as in *rude*
- examples from the curriculum:
  - dūc
  - mūs
  - ūnus
  - spīritūs

## CONSONANTS

- Most consonants are pronounced as they are in English, but we will review the exceptions.
- Unlike the vowels, there are more defined differences between Classical and Ecclesiastical pronunciations of the consonants.

## C

### Classical

- c is always hard, as in *cat*
- examples from the curriculum
  - canis
  - dulciter
  - ecce

### Ecclesiastical

- as a hard c when followed by a, o, or u, but as ch as in *chair* when followed by e, i, ae, or oe.
- examples from the curriculum
  - canis
  - dulciter
  - ecce

# G

## Classical

- g is always hard, as in *gate* or *gift*
- examples from the curriculum
  - rogat
  - agit
  - gemma

## Ecclesiastical

- as a hard g when followed by a, o, or u, but as g as in *giant* when followed by e, i, ae, or oe.
- examples from the curriculum
  - rogat
  - agit
  - gemma

# V

## Classical

- v is pronounced like the English w, as in *way*
- examples from the curriculum
  - vīta
  - nāviter
  - vocō

## Ecclesiastical

- v is pronounced like the English v, as in *virtue*
- examples from the curriculum
  - vīta
  - nāviter
  - vocō

## DIPHTHONGS AND CONSONANT COMBINATIONS

- Some letters combine in Latin to produce special sounds. When two vowels combine in such a way, they are known as *diphthongs* (from Greek, meaning ‘two sounds’).
- E.g., ch is pronounced in both Classical and Ecclesiastical as the ch in *choir*. An example from the curriculum is *Christus*.
- oe is pronounced in Classical as the o in *boy* and in Ecclesiastical as the a in *way*.

## ae

### Classical

- ae is pronounced like the long English i, as in *fine*
- examples from the curriculum
  - laetus
  - saecula
  - duae

- ae is pronounced like the long English a, as in *way*
- examples from the curriculum
  - laetus
  - saecula
  - duae

### Ecclesiastical

## gn

### Classical

- gn is pronounced as in *Agnes*
- examples from the curriculum
  - sīgnum
  - agnus
  - regnat

### Ecclesiastical

- gn is pronounced like ny as in *canyon*
- examples from the curriculum
  - sīgnum
  - agnus
  - regnat

## Sc

### Classical

- sc is always pronounced as a hard sc, as in *septic*
- example from the curriculum
  - piscis

### Ecclesiastical

- as a hard sc when followed by a, o, or u, but as 'sh' as in *shirt* when followed by e, i, ae, or oe.
- example from the curriculum
  - piscis

# ph

## Classical

- the ‘p’ and ‘h’ are pronounced separately, as a lightly aspirated ‘p’
- example from the curriculum
  - elephantus

## Ecclesiastical

- combine to make an ‘f’ sound, as in *philosophy*.
- example from the curriculum
  - elephantus

## Two Helpful Websites

- Phonetica Latina: <http://la.raycui.com/>
- Preces Latinae: <http://www.preces-latinae.org/thesaurus/Introductio/Pronunciatio.html>