

**Lesson
One****Inflection and Word Order****Aims**

The aims of this lesson are to enable you to

- understand what is meant by ‘inflection’
- understand the flexible word order of a Latin sentence

Context

It’s not easy starting to study a new language, especially one that is no longer spoken. A lot depends on your knowledge of the English language (grammar, etc) and whether you have studied another modern language. But in this lesson, we go right back to first principles.



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Parts of Speech

It is very important for us to understand parts of speech in our study of Latin. This course will refer to nouns, adjectives, adverbs, etc, as the terms occur in your exam and you will be expected to know them. So, if you're not confident with naming the parts of speech, please memorise the definitions according to the table below.

Part of Speech	function	English examples	Latin examples (translations of the English examples)
Verb	action or state of being	to be, to have, to do, to love, to sing, to play	esse, habere, facere, amare, cantare, ludere
Noun	thing or person	dog, slave, poem, house, London, man, woman	canis, servus, carmen, domus, Londinium, vir, femina
Adjective	describing word for a noun	good, big, red	bonus, magnus, rufus;
Article	tells you whether we are talking about a specific thing or a general thing	the (definite article); a/an (indefinite article)	<i>Latin doesn't use articles. So 'a sailor' is just the word 'sailor'</i>
Adverb	describes a verb, adjective or adverb	silently, well, badly, very, really	tacite, bene, male, valde, vere
Pronoun	replaces a noun	I, you	ego, tu
Preposition	links a noun to another word	to, at, after, on, but	ut, ad, post, in, sed
Conjunction	joins clauses or sentences or words	and, but, when	et, sed, cum

Latin Word Order

Latin word order is very flexible.

This is because it is an **inflected** language. An inflected language is one in which nouns change depending on the function they play in the sentence. We will learn more about this in Lesson 4.

Because the form of the noun decides the meaning, rather than its place in the sentence, the order of the words in a sentence is fluid.

For example:

Puer libros legit.
Libros puer legit.
Legit puer libros.
Legit libros puer.
Libros legit puer.
Puer legit libros.

All of these sentences say 'The boy reads books.' This is different to English, where moving the words of the sentence renders something completely different or means it doesn't make sense ('The books reads boy', 'Reads the boy books').

That said, the most common Latin word order is **Subject, Object, Verb (SOV)**. That is the first of the sentences in our example and literally reads "the boy books reads." So a Latin sentence will generally start with the person doing the action, then have the thing affected by the action, then the action itself.

Where Latin sentences vary from the SOV order, it is to provide emphasis. In writing, it is the first and the last words which are important. This is why Latin generally has the subject as the first and the verb as the last word. In our example sentence, it is the fact that the boy is reading that is important, not that he is reading books. However, if we take the second example sentence (libros puer legit) we are literally saying 'books the boy reads.' So here, we are making it clear the books (rather than scrolls, or magazines in a modern context) are being read. The fact that it's the boy reading them is less important here.

An adjective describing a noun generally comes after it (as in modern French).

pars parva = a small **part**

Sometimes, the Romans separated adjectives from their nouns, to try to make their sentences more interesting or to create parallels.

So let's assume we have a small girl and a brave dog, we could have:

fortis canis et parva puella

canis fortis et parva puella

And if we assume the small girl meets (*convenit*) the brave dog, we could have:

fortem canem parva puella convenit
 canem fortem parva puella convenit
 parva puella fortem canem convenit
 fortem canem parva puella convenit
 parva fortem puella canem convenit

Notice in the last one, we have our two adjectives together and then our two nouns together. The **inflection** tells us that *parva* and *puella* go together and that *fortem* and *canem* go together, because they are in the same **case**. The inflection comes at the end of the word.

Adverbs will usually come at the beginning of the sentence. So if I want to say 'the small girl met the brave dog today (*hodie*)' I'm going to put *hodie* at the start of my sentence.

Activity 1

The words 'exercitus fortis militem perterritum pugnāt' make the sentence 'The brave army fights the terrified soldier'.

exercitus = army fortis = brave militem = soldier
 perterritum = terrified pugnāt = fights



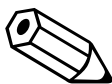
What other ways can we write this same sentence, using the same words, in Latin?


Please write your answer in the space below and then check with the Suggested Answers at the end of the lesson.


Activity 2

The words 'liberi laeti canem magnum liberant' make the sentence 'The happy children set free the big dog'

liberi = children (nominative plural)
 laeti = happy (nominative plural)
 canem = the dog (accusative)
 magnum = big (accusative)
 liberant = set free

	<p>What other ways can we write this same sentence, using the same words, in Latin?</p> <p>(Do not worry about the terms 'nominative' and 'accusative' - we will come back to those.)</p>
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Activity 3	<p>The words 'nauta pulcher navem romanum reddit' make the sentence 'The handsome sailor restores the Roman ship'</p> <p>nauta = sailor (nominative singular) pulcher = handsome (nominative singular) navem = the ship (accusative) romanum = Roman (accusative) reddit = restores</p>
	<p>What other ways can we write this same sentence, using the same words, in Latin?</p>

Activity 4	<p>The words 'nuntius scelestus poenam saevam nuntiat' make the sentence 'The wicked messenger announces the cruel punishment'.</p> <p>nuntius = the messenger (nominative singular) scelestus = wicked (nominative singular) poenam = the punishment (accusative) saevam = cruel (accusative) nuntiat = announces</p>
	<p>What other ways can we write this same sentence, using the same words, in Latin?</p>

Suggested Answers to Activities

Activity One

We will give three possible answers for each of these activities but there are other possibilities!

exercitus fortis pugnāt militem perterritum
militem perterritum exercitus fortis pugnāt
militem perterritum pugnāt exercitus fortis

Activity Two

canem magnum liberi laeti liberant
liberi laeti liberant canem magnum
canem magnum liberant liberi laeti

Activity Three

navem romanum nauta pulcher reddit
nauta pulcher reddit navem romanum
navem romanum reddit nauta pulcher

Activity Four

poenam saevam nuntiāt nuntius scelestus
nuntius scelestus poenam saevam nuntiāt
nuntius scelestus nuntiāt poenam saevam