

BOOK REVIEW

Latin to GCSE Part I. By HENRY CULLEN and JOHN TAYLOR. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. Pp. xviii + 254. Paperback, \$23.77. ISBN: 978-1-78093-440-2

Latin to GCSE Part II. By HENRY CULLEN and JOHN TAYLOR. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. Pp. xvi + 312. Paperback, \$25.95. ISBN: 978-1-78093-441-9

Latin to GCSE is a labor of love written by Henry Cullen and John Taylor, two educators with several years of experience training pupils and administering the GCSE (General Certificate in Secondary Education) examination. The GCSE exam is the culmination of Latin studies at the high school level in the United Kingdom, as administered by Oxford, Cambridge, and the Royal Society of Arts. Hence, the direct audience for this series is those preparing for GCSE, but it is also suitable for students readying themselves for the WJEC (Welsh Joint Education Committee) examination and more broadly, those generally interested in Latin studies. *Latin to GCSE* is comparable to *Wheelock's Latin*, *Jenney's Latin*, or other basic grammar textbooks.

The text is designed to take students from the beginning all the way to examination readiness and allow them to read as quickly as possible without overlooking language fundamentals. To this end, the text uses a twofold approach, which Cullen and Taylor deem traditional and up-to-date. In keeping with tradition the authors treat grammar seriously, but—and this is where their testing experience shows its hand—the text also focuses on areas that have proven more problematic for students over the years.

The vocabulary in *Latin to GCSE* covers that defined for the test, and grammar exercises excel at incorporating terms as they arise. Upon first appearance GCSE-specific vocabulary is underlined and glossed in blue. Non-GCSE words are underlined, but glossed in black, and again underlined upon reoccurrence. This color-coding alerts students to items that need to be memorized while highlighting them in context. The final segment of each chapter is a vocabulary list of 40–50 GCSE terms, and there are English-Latin and Latin-English vocabulary lists in the appendices.

Latin to GCSE is broken into six chapters per book, each offering a cache of grammatical concepts with a plethora of practice exercises. The grammar is divulged piecemeal, accompanied by ample exercises (on average 40 exercises per chapter containing five to ten practice sentences) that focus on one particular concept. This is a real strength of the book, although over time the exercises tend to become redundant.

Nouns are first introduced in their nominative and accusative cases, expediting the reading of complete sentences, and nouns are presented in European paradigms (an adjustment would better suit an American audience). The explanation of grammar is verbally simplified, sometimes to great benefit, sometimes less successfully. For instance, for the imperfect tense the authors eschew the confusing term “progressive” by stating that the verb “took place in the past and over a period of time” (1.60). Again, they forego the term “subordinating conjunction,” referring to them as words that “link sentences” (1.142).

This terminology reflects the books’ young target audience; yet, at times some words are too colloquially put or fail to foresee possible stumbling blocks. For instance, while discussing comparative adjectives with *quam*, they awkwardly state that “items either side of *quam*” must agree in case; later, they state that one can equally express a comparison by “missing out *quam*” and using the ablative (2.8). Technical jargon such as “declines” and “conjugates” is avoided in favor of “goes like,” which overlooks essential terminology that may breed eventual confusion. Again, this oversimplification is apparent in their explanation of verb formation where they simply offer the vowel + ending instead of explaining how the present stem derives from the infinitive. This is presumably to preempt confusion with third conjugation verb formation, but the same occurs with perfect verbs. Likewise, I found their explanation of *i*-stem nouns and interrogative pronouns somewhat incomplete, and they do not explain the use of *ut* + indicative (2.151), which is easily misunderstood as a subjunctive clause. To round out grammatical studies, the final chapter contains 400 revision sentences, providing students with extra translation practice, and five GCSE practice papers, so that students can anticipate the actual exam.

Each chapter also contains several English-Latin sentences as a final exercise to every lesson. These diligently incorporate new vocabulary, focus on newly learned grammar, and oftentimes go beyond GCSE expectations. Those that exceed exam requirements are colored in blue and labeled Stretch & Challenge (S&C)—as the book proceeds, almost all of these sentences become superfluous to the test. Finally, the appendix of each book contains about 30 additional practice

sentences and a list of Restricted Vocabulary and Grammar for possible English-Latin sentences on the exam.

The Latin stories at the end of each section are chosen for their “intrinsic interest” and their “importance to Roman history (1.x).” This is one of the more enjoyable aspects of the book, and a close reading shows that the authors have at times attempted to adhere to their ancient sources—particular reminiscences of language in Vergil’s *Aeneid* and Tacitus’ *Annals* are noticeable. Nonetheless, as the readings progress, one notes that pedagogically they would benefit from more regular incorporation of new grammar.

Part one tells the story of Aeneas and the Trojan War, leading to the Roman monarchy until its end. Part two resumes its march through history, highlighting famous Republican heroes, events of the Punic Wars, and Caesar’s life. Chapter 11 is devoted solely to the reign of Augustus and the Julio-Claudian emperors, culminating in the fire of 64 CE and Nero’s indictment of the Christians. The content of the stories will engage any reader, while epitomizing the more salient events of Roman history. Embedded amongst these tales are 26 depictions. Unfortunately, they are executed in a bluish hue and printed in low quality, resulting in a blurry image, but this is a forgivable offense considering the books’ friendly price tags.

Built into each chapter are Revision Checkpoints. These occur after a few lessons, reiterating critical grammatical points that students have recently learned. Since each book contains so much information collected into just six chapters, checkpoints seem practical and necessary. Each chapter also concludes with a Chapter Grammar Summary, another handy summation of new material. These lists can serve as useful guideposts for review purposes. Students can refer to the grammar summaries and further pinpoint grammar lessons through the revision checkpoints. Equally useful are the Reference Grammar, the Glossary of Grammar Terms, and the Indexes in the books’ appendices. Book two offers six additionally helpful appendices (Use of Cases, Constructions, Negatives, Uses of the Subjunctive, Words Easily Confused, and Words with More Than One Meaning). All of these help make *Latin to GCSE* more accessible for students.

Grammar excluded from these volumes will likely be a caveat for those considering *Latin to GCSE* at the college level (although *Latin Beyond GCSE* likely contains these). Basic grammar not occurring in these texts include: ablative of separation; future perfect indicative; future passive participle and infinitive; supine; gerundive; passive periphrastic; present and perfect subjunctives; hortatory and de-

liberative subjunctives; proviso and generic clauses; and all contrary-to-fact conditions. Students do not encounter these concepts on the GCSE, and while they are grammar critical for reading genuine Latin texts, some of these can be covered in early semester review or discussed in context.

Overall, this textbook is an excellent option for a variety of venues. Its pace is best suited for secondary education, but if supplemented, it would certainly suit a college course well. Students will find the pace and its sustained focus on minor details advantageous, and Bloomsbury now offers a companion website for further guidance alongside the text. The stories will engage readers and provide a decent historical overview. And while it is not free from textual errors, those encountered are relatively minor.

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