

SELF-STUDY GUIDE FOR THE SBTS PHD LATIN REQUIREMENT

Preparation and Materials

Any student hoping to pass the PhD Latin Proficiency Exam (2 hours) must master the Latin syntax, grammar, and vocabulary contained in the entirety of a typical introductory textbook. Students are advised to complete the readings and exercises in either *Lingua Latina Per Se Illustrata: Vol. I, Familia Romana*, or *Wheelock's Latin* (7th ed. or later). The former book is the one used in the Latin courses taught on campus, but both are superbly useful. *Familia Romana* uses the 'natural' method and features much more vocabulary, cultural background, and reading practice (while covering the same grammatical topics); it contains no English at all, and the quality of its Latin readings is superior. On the other hand, Wheelock's approach may be more familiar for students who have learned Greek or Hebrew according to the traditional grammar-translation method.

Students who purchase *Familia Romana* should also purchase and use the accompanying book of exercises (*Lingua Latina: Exercitia Latina I*) as well as the answer key (*Lingua Latina: Teacher's Materials*) and very useful English *Companion to Familia Romana*. There is a second volume (*Lingua Latina Per Se Illustrata: Roma Aeterna*) which supplies further reading practice and grammar review; students who have time should do both *Familia Romana* and *Roma Aeterna*. If a student finds the final chapters of *Familia Romana* too easy at first glance, he should move on to *Roma Aeterna* directly and complete that book. A student who completes both *Familia Romana* and *Roma Aeterna* will be far better prepared for the exam than one who completes Wheelock only.

For those purchasing *Wheelock's Latin*, the corresponding workbook is essential, and the various readers/anthologies associated with it are all very helpful (check Amazon); the reading practice they provide is an essential supplement for your preparation. For specifically later Latin morphology and vocabulary, Collins' *Primer of Ecclesiastical Latin* (plus answer key companion) and Smith's *Ecclesiastical, Medieval, and Neo-Latin Sentences* are useful supplements, but cannot replace *Wheelock's Latin* or *Familia Romana* as basic textbooks.¹

Students should expect to spend at least a year of self-study preparing for the exam, unless they already possess a strong grasp of the whole system of syntax and grammar. The textbooks above and their exercises can of course be completed in much less time, but most learners require a long period of continuous practice, review, and reading to achieve basic competence.²

¹ The distinction between "classical" and "ecclesiastical" Latin is an artificial and ultimately meaningless one; there was and is just one Latin language. Generally speaking, students who learn classical Latin thoroughly will have no trouble with later medieval or Renaissance texts (most later authors themselves learned the language via study of classical texts), but students who learn through the exclusive use of books which focus on the Vulgate or Christian authors will encounter major difficulties when trying to read texts from outside these narrow parameters.

² Students should also try watching the videos produced for *Latin Per Diem* by Dr. David Noe at Calvin College (available on YouTube), in which short texts from both classical and Christian sources are presented and analyzed grammatically. *The Daily Dose of Latin* (produced by Dr. Tyler Flatt of Boyce/SBTS and available on YouTube) will also be a helpful supplement, although students are cautioned that the Vulgate texts examined in that series are generally much easier than what will appear on the proficiency exam.

No dictionaries or other aids will be permitted during the exam; unusual vocabulary will be supplied with the passages. If you wish to purchase a dictionary for your study and preparation, you should buy Lewis & Short, which covers both classical and late antique/Christian usage and is still a scholarly standard. The Oxford Latin Dictionary is newer and better in most respects, but is far more expensive and covers only the classical period. Bennett's *New Latin Grammar* (available online [here](#)) is a useful quick reference grammar, although more serious students should purchase Gildersleeve's *Latin Grammar*, which treats all topics much more fully.

The Exam Itself

The exam will require you to translate six passages from Latin into idiomatic modern English. The passages come from a mix of classical, medieval, and Reformation-era authors, and from a mix of styles and genres. Most will be prose but there may be some poetry as well.

Students should aim to produce translations which are as natural, fluent, and comprehensible in English as possible. If your translations do not make sense in English, you have not understood the Latin. Avoid excessively literal renderings and colloquialisms, as well as unnecessarily stilted, awkward, or archaic language.

Your translations will be evaluated on the basis of the deficiencies they reveal; graders will judge whether or not your knowledge of Latin grammar and vocabulary is sufficient for you to deal competently with the kinds of texts generally studied in the course of PhD studies and dissertation work at SBTS.