

Latin Expressions used in English

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This is a list of Latin words and phrases that you will often encounter in English speech or writing. They are sometimes pronounced in different ways nowadays: some people still use the old-fashioned English pronunciation, which makes the words sound just like English, others employ the 'restored' pronunciation which has been used for teaching Latin in English-language countries for more than a century, and often they are pronounced in a mixture of the two pronunciations. If you can familiarise yourself with them, you will not only be able to understand them when you meet them, but you will also, if you introduce them occasionally into your own writing, make a considerable impression of one kind or another on your readers. Well known quotations are not included, because they are so numerous that they would make this short list much too long. You will have to google these if you need a translation.

a posteriori: 'from the subsequent', an expression used by philosophers to describe inductive reasoning (reasoning from effects to causes), or the creation of arguments from actual experimentation or observation.

a priori: 'from the previous', an expression used by philosophers to describe deductive reasoning (reasoning from causes to effects), or the application of generally accepted laws to specific instances without further discussion.

ad eundem gradum: 'to the same level', most commonly used when someone joins the staff of a university, and is granted a degree of that university at the same level as the degree that had previously been conferred by another university.

ad hoc: 'for this (thing)', used to describe something that is arranged quickly (and perhaps not very carefully) to meet a particular situation. If an arrangement is described as being '*ad hoc*' this implies that something that could have been planned in advance would have been better. A noun, 'adhocery', has also been invented.

ad hominem: 'to the man' (in the sense of 'to the person'). Used (particularly in Australian political debate) of arguments that attack a person, rather than the question that should be discussed. The equivalent in football would be 'going for the man, not the ball'.

ad infinitum: 'to infinity', a phrase that is used to indicate an endless process. The best known use is in the poem (of which there are several variants):

Big fleas have lesser fleas
upon their backs to bite them
and lesser fleas have smaller fleas
and so *ad infinitum*.

ad libitum: 'at pleasure', used when someone is not following instructions or a score or a script.

ad nauseam (NOT *nauseum*): 'to nausea', a phrase which describes actions or arguments that have been repeated so many times that most people are sick of them.

ad valorem: 'according to value', used of a tax that is levied on the value of an item, not on its weight or on any other basis.

addenda: ‘things to be added’, used of additions to a list. This is a neuter plural word, and if there is only one addition, it should be described as an *addendum*.

advocatus diaboli: ‘advocate of the Devil’. In the past, when the Roman Catholic church was considering whether to beatify a dead person or declare that person a saint, someone would be appointed to search for anything in that person’s life that might make such a declaration inadvisable, and bring it forward as a reason for not proceeding with the process. This practice ceased in 1983. The phrase is also sometimes used of someone who advances an argument (without necessarily believing it) so that every possible point of view can be considered.

affidavit: ‘he has sworn’, used as a noun in English to describe a written statement which may be used in judicial proceedings.

aegrotat: ‘he/she is sick’, used as a noun in old-fashioned English to describe a certificate which states that someone can be excused from something because of sickness.

agenda: ‘things to be done’. This is a neuter plural word in Latin, but like *data* it is usually treated as a singular noun in modern English (*cf. data*). However, if there is only one item to be discussed at a meeting, it could be called an *agendum* by someone who wishes to demonstrate a knowledge of the Latin language.

alias: ‘otherwise’, regularly used to refer to an alternative name used by a person (in English, *aka* (‘also known as ...’) is often used in the same way.). The Latin word is also often nounced, so that someone might refer to ‘an alias’ in the same sense. Scientists may even verb it, saying that something is ‘aliased’.

alibi: ‘elsewhere’ (*ibi* means ‘there’), usually nounced in English (a language in which almost any noun may be verbed), most often used in a legal or quasi-legal context to describe a claim or proof that someone was not at a certain time in a place where an offence has been committed.

alma mater: ‘nourishing mother’, a phrase which has been used for a long time to describe an educational establishment where the student was mentally ‘nourished’.

alter ego: ‘other/second I’, used to describe someone who is either so like the speaker that they think or act in the same way, or an alternative hidden aspect of the speaker’s personality.

ante bellum: ‘before the war’, most often used to describe the period (and the architecture) that preceded the American Civil War.

anno Domini (usually abbreviated A.D.), ‘in the year of the Lord’, used to calculate dates in the Christian calendar. Pedants prefer to place the abbreviation A.D. before the number of year, and B.C. after it.

annus mirabilis: ‘wonderful year’, a phrase originally meaning a year in which some remarkable things such as a solar eclipse followed by the birth of a two-headed calf took place (these things, perhaps, suggesting the approach of some cosmic event), now generally used of a year in which everything has gone extremely well. Some years ago Queen Elizabeth, at the end of a year in which the antics of her children has received much bad publicity, accepted the suggestion that in her Christmas Day broadcast she should call it an *annus horribilis* (NOT *HORRIBILUS*, PLEASE, since *horribilis* is an adjective of the 3rd declension). This phrase has now passed into general use for her loyal subjects.

ante Christum, ‘before Christ’ (abbreviated *a.C.*), rarely used now for dates, since B.C. (‘before Christ’) is preferred.

ante meridiem: ‘before midday’, normally abbreviated to *a.m.*

Ars gratia artis: ‘Art for the sake of art’, meaning that the value of a work of art should be considered without any reference to its political or didactic or moral message (if it has one). This is not a quotation, but a Latin translation of a phrase that began to be used in other languages in the

19th century. It has become the motto of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film company. In Latin *gratia* (actually the ablative singular of *gratia*, meaning ‘grace, favour’) was sometimes used as a quasi-preposition, accompanied by the genitive case and normally (although not in this case) following the noun with which it was associated.

bona fide: ‘in good faith’ (ablative case). This phrase is used, even by lawyers, to describe an action or statement that is (or was at least intended to be) free from deception. The nominative form, *bona fides*, ‘good faith’, is also used in sentences such as this: ‘They demonstrated their *bona fides* by producing their passports’.

Benedictus benedicat (the verb is in the subjunctive mood, expressing a wish): ‘May the Blessed One bless (it), a traditional form of grace said at the beginning of a meal in a number of institutions. The matching grace at the end of the meal was *Benedicto (dative) benedicatur* (impersonal passive subjunctive), ‘May there be a blessing on the Blessed One’.

caput mortuum: ‘dead head’ (in Latin, *caput*, can mean the starting point or essential part of something). In English the expression is sometimes used to describe the residue that is left after distillation or sublimation from a liquid has taken place. It is also less frequently used to describe worthless remains of a procedure that should be thrown away.

caret: ‘it is lacking’, used in editing to indicate that something is missing, or as a noun, as the name of the inverted ‘v’ that shows this.

carpe diem: This is a quotation (Horace, *Odes*, I, xi, 8. Quotations are not meant to be included in this list, but it has become a common English expression. In its original context it means ‘take/seize’ the day, *i.e.*, ‘enjoy the day when you can’, but it is more often used now in the sense of ‘seize the opportunity’.

casus belli: ‘the event of (leading to) a war’, often used to explain and even to justify a war.

caveat: ‘let him beware’, used as a noun in legal language to describe a warning issued or placed on a legal document that prevents any action being taken without advice being given to the person who might be affected by that action.

caveat emptor: ‘let the buyer beware’, a maxim that indicates that it is the responsibility of a purchaser to make sure that what is being purchased is of good quality (in modern commerce, there are increasing protections for the purchaser, so one might almost turn the maxim around and say *caveat venditor*, ‘let the seller/vendor beware’.

ceteris paribus: ‘other things being equal’, an ‘Ablative Absolute’ construction. The phrase is used when assumptions are made by scientists or economists when they wish to focus on the effect of one variable on a dependent variable, and for the purpose of this exercise they wish to assume that all other variables remain the same.

circa: ‘about’, usually abbreviated to *c.*, and used to indicate approximate dates or numbers.

cf. (confer): ‘compare’.

Civis Romanus sum: ‘I am a Roman citizen’. When Saul (later Paul) of Tarsus was about to be scourged by the governor of his province, he claimed that he was a Roman citizen (Acts 22-25). The New Testament does not actually use these exact words, but the claim is often quoted in this Latin form. It became particularly well known in 1850 when the British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston used these words to defend the right of a *civis Britannicus* to be protected, in whatever land he might find himself.

cogito ergo sum: ‘I think, therefore I am (or exist)’, a *dictum* (saying) of the philosopher Descartes.

compos mentis: ‘in control/command of the mind’ (the opposite being *non compos mentis*). This expression is used in legal transactions to classify a person as being of sound or unsound mind, but it is often also used in non-legal situations.

corpus delicti: ‘the body of a crime’, used in legal language to indicate the totality of the things that constitute a breach of the law.

corrigena: ‘things to be corrected’, used as the title of a list of corrections printed on a separate when a book has been printed, and it would be too expensive to reset the text. If there is only one mistake, it should be described as a *corrigenum* by an author or editor who wishes to demonstrate a knowledge of the Latin language (*cf. erratum*).

cui bono: ‘to whom is this beneficial?’, used when attempting to discover who might have been responsible for, or might have profited from, some event.

cuius region, eius religio: ‘whose realm, his religion’, a phrase that implies that the religion of the ruler dictates the religion of the state that he rules. It was developed in the middle sixteenth century after some years of armed conflict between groups that supported the church of Rome, and Protestants. If this were applied in Australia, we would have been devout Roman Catholics since September 2013, boomeranged between being Anglicans and atheists for a few years before that. Or, if we accept that the *regio* of Australia is ruled by Elizabeth II, we would have been staunch Anglicans for at least sixty-two years.

cum grano salis: ‘with a grain of salt’, used when something is not believed automatically or taken literally (the same image is also used in English).

curriculum vitae: ‘course of life’, usually abbreviated to *c.v.*, a statement of the principal events in the career of a person, used for formal applications and biographies.

data: ‘things given’. This word is now used to describe the information on which a decision is based, and a majority of persons would now treat it as a singular noun (*cf. agenda*). However, surveyors still use the singular form, speaking of a ‘datum point’.

de facto: ‘from the fact’, a phrase used to describe a situation that exists, even if it is not legal. For instance, when two people cohabit, they may be said to have a *de facto* relationship even if they are not legally married, *cf. ipso facto* and *de iure*.

de iure or *de jure*: ‘by right’, as opposed to *de facto*.

de novo: ‘anew’, of something that begins, or begins again.

Deo gratias: ‘thanks to God’ (*gratias* is in the accusative case, so should be supposed to be the object of a verb such as *ago, agimus* etc.).

Deo volente: ‘God willing’ (*i.e.*, if nothing happens to prevent what is desired).

deus ex machina: ‘A god from a machine’. In ancient Greek tragic plays the problems of humans were sometimes solved when a divine character appeared at the top of the stage building, raised by some sort of mechanical contrivance, and announced what would happen. The Greek phrase that described this, *theos ek mechanes*, survives in this Latin version. The Latin phrase is sometimes used to describe a solution to a human problem that is imposed by the intervention of a higher power, rather than being a natural development of the action.

dictum: ‘a thing said’ (neuter singular), used of a formal saying or pronouncement, usually with reference to someone in the past whose words might be considered authoritative.

disiecta membra: ‘limbs thrown away’ or ‘scattered fragments’, a phrase first used (in a slightly different form) by the Roman poet Horace, who may have been referring either to fragments of a poet’s work which could still be recognised as having been composed by this person, or perhaps words that could still be recognised as this poet’s work even if they were rearranged.

do ut des: ‘I give so that thou mayest give’, a phrase that implies that the donor expects a *quid pro quo* (*q.v.*), and is sometimes used to refer to the sacrifices or offerings given to the gods, in the hope of receiving benefits from them.

Dominus vobiscum: see *Pax vobiscum*.

dramatis personae: ‘the persons of a drama’, regularly used as the title of a list of the characters in a play.

‘Ecce homo’: ‘behold the man’. In the Latin version of the New Testament (*John XIX, 5*), these are the words that Pontius Pilate used when he presented Jesus to the people, after he had been scourged, and had had a crown of thorns placed upon his head. This has provided a popular subject for artists.

ego: ‘I’, used in various ways by psychologists and others to describe the thinking impulses of a person, as opposed to the *id*, the unthinking instinctive ones. The word is also used in various compounds to describe self-interest or selfishness.

emeritus: ‘honourably discharged’, a word that was once predominantly used to describe soldiers who had completed a period of service, but is now employed only as a title of university professors who (it is to be hoped) continue to engage in scholarly activity after formal retirement.

ergo: ‘therefore’, occasionally used in philosophical discourse (*cf. cogito*).

errata: ‘errors’, used, like *corrigenda*, as the heading of a list of errors in a piece of writing (*cf. corrigenda*). The singular form is *erratum*.

et alii (masculine) or *et alia* (neuter): ‘and others’ (normally abbreviated to *et al.*). This is used when referring to a number of people when it is sufficient to name only one or a few, not all of them (for instance, when in an academic article you think that you need only mention the most important authority, and omit the rest), or to a number of things additional to the thing or things that have already been mentioned.

et cetera: ‘and other things’, usually abbreviated in English to *etc.*

et in Arcadia ego: ‘Even in Arcadia, there am I’, words shown on a tomb in a painting by the 17th century artist Nicolas Pussin entitled ‘Les Bergers d’Arcadie’. In a pastoral background, three men and a woman are shown looking at the tombstone. The words have been interpreted in two ways, depending on whether ‘ego’ means the person buried there (who is saying that he once enjoyed Arcadian pleasures), or Death. The latter interpretation is more forceful, and probably correct.

et sequentes, see *sequentes*.

ex aequo et bono: ‘from (what is) equitable and good’, a term used by lawyers to describe a decision that may not be exactly in accordance with the law, but is reasonable in the circumstances, and may be accepted if both parties agree to it.

ex cathedra: ‘from the chair’ (a ‘cathedral’ is a building where a bishop or archbishop occupies a ‘chair’, a relatively rare item of furniture in early times, and therefore a sign of high status).

ex gratia: ‘from grace’, a phrase used to describe some payment or concession that is being made purely as a favour or a concession in a particular case, and is not intended to set a precedent.

exempli gratia: ‘for the sake of an example’ (*gratia* is a sort of pseudo-preposition which follows the word (in the genitive case) that it governs. The phrase is usually abbreviated in English to *e.g.*, or to *eg* by people who do not know what they are doing.

ex libris: ‘from the books (of) ...’. This phrase, originally followed by the Latin name of the owner of a book in the genitive case, is still sometimes used in bookplates, followed by the name of the owner.

ex nihilo ‘from nothing’, a phrase sometimes used in a general way to express the idea that something has come into being where there was nothing before, but also used in philosophical or theological discourse, particularly when the difficulty of conceiving absolute nothingness is concerned. The classical quotation *ex nihilo nihil fit*, ‘out of nothing, nothing comes into existence’ is often used in this context

ex officio: 'from the office', used to indicate that someone has a place on a committee or in some other group because of the position that that person holds, not because of being elected, or appointed for some other reason.

ex post facto: 'from the thing done before', meaning that something is being ordered or done retrospectively.

exeat: 'let him go out', used as a noun in English to indicate a permission that has been granted to someone to leave a building or place.

extra vires: 'outside the powers', used in legal language to describe an action that someone has committed without having sufficient authority.

fiat: 'let it be done', used in English as a noun to describe something that has been authorised by a person in a position of authority, without the need to follow any other administrative processes; a ruler or government may 'legislate by fiat', without spending time on other procedures.

fiat lux: 'Let there be light!' In the Jewish account of the creation of the world (*Genesis I, 14*), God ordered that on the fourth day there should be light.

floruit: 'he/she flourished', used with a date to indicate the time when a writer or artist was most productive, often abbreviated to *fl.*

habeas corpus: '(that) you may have the body': the opening words of an order that a person who has been detained should be brought before a court to investigate the legality of detainment - a very important early feature of English law.

honoris causa: 'for the sake of honour', used when someone is given appointment, or a university degree or some other award, as a mark of esteem, without having to fulfil any requirements.

ibidem: 'in the same place', usually abbreviated to *ibid.*, used in footnotes to indicate a subsequent reference to the same page in a work that has already been cited.

id est: 'that is', abbreviated in English to *i.e.*

imprimatur: 'let it be printed'. This word was once used for the most part to describe the official permission granted by the Roman Catholic Church for the printing of a book that was deemed not to contain any heretical or scandalous matter, but is now often used simply as a noun to indicate a general permission for printing, or even the sanctioning of some other activity.

in absentia: 'in absence'. Students who do not attend a graduation ceremony may be awarded their degrees *in absentia*.

in articulo mortis: 'in the moment of death', used to describe the last moments of a dying person.

in camera: 'in a room' (a *camera* in the modern sense gets its name from the *camera obscura*, a predecessor of the modern camera, a room in which views of the outside world could be projected through a lens onto a horizontal screen on a table). If something is done *in camera*, it is done privately, not in an open court of law or some other place open to the public.

in esse: 'in being', or 'in actual existence' (*esse* is the infinitive of *sum*, used as a verbal noun), by contrast with *in posse*.

in extenso: 'extensively', *i.e.* when a statement or some other activity is presented at full length.

in extremis: 'at the last things', used to describe the words or actions of someone who is at the point of death.

in flagrante delicto: 'in the blazing crime', used to describe the circumstances in which someone who is committing a crime is caught in the act of committing it, 'red-handed', so to speak, or, more crudely, 'with his pants down'.

in genere: 'in the (same) genus', a phrase used in legal documents and elsewhere, meaning that two or more things are of the same general class, without being exactly the same.

in loco parentis: ‘in the place of a parent’, used of a person or organisation (such as a school) which is in charge of a minor, and has control of that minor person (provided that no civil rights are infringed).

in medias res: ‘into the middle of things’, used, for example, when a literary account of something begins in the middle of the action, rather than recounting the preliminaries.

in memoriam: ‘in memory (of)’, used to describe an action or offering made in memory of someone.

in partibus infidelium: ‘in the places of the infidels’, an expression used particularly by the Church of Rome to describe places that are not under the control of that church.

in posse: ‘in being able’, or ‘potentially’ (*posse* is the infinitive of *possum*, used as a verbal noun), by contrast with *in esse*.

in propria persona: ‘in one’s own person’, as opposed to delegating the matter to another.

in puris naturalibus: ‘in a pure natural (state)’, a modern phrase which is used in a jocular way to describe a naked person.

in situ: ‘in the place/site’, describing something found in its original location, or in the final location that it is to occupy (there is an extensive Wikipedia article on the different ways in which this phrase may be used).

in statu pupillari: ‘in the state of a ward’ (*pupillus* means an orphan or a minor who is under the guardianship of someone else), *i.e.*, under guardianship.

in statu quo (ante): ‘in the state in which (previously)’, used to indicate that something is in its original state; see also *status quo*.

in toto: ‘entirely, totally’.

in vino veritas: ‘in wine, truth’, a phrase which means that when people consume alcohol, their normal prudence or defensiveness is weakened, and they are likely to say what they really think instead of hiding it.

in vitro: ‘in glass’, used of a biological process that occurs in test tubes in a laboratory rather than in the way that it would normally occur in nature.

in vivo: ‘in the living’, a term used to describe experiments that are carried out on living subjects.

index librorum prohibitorum: ‘index of prohibited books’, a list that was developed in the late Middle Ages by the church of Rome, banning the reading of certain books by Roman Catholics.

infra: ‘below’, used in English to refer to a later page in a book (*cf. supra*).

infra dignitatem: ‘beneath one’s dignity, unbecoming’ (often abbreviated to *infra dig.*), sometimes used to describe an action that is rejected (or should be rejected) because it is not appropriate to the dignity of the person concerned.

instante: ‘taking a stand’ (ablative), used in dates to indicate the present or standing month, as opposed to the one before or after it, and regularly abbreviated to *inst.* (*cf. proximo, ultimo*).

inter alia: ‘among other things’ (the masculine form *inter alios* and the feminine form *inter alias* might sometimes be more appropriate, but are rarely used).

inter vivos: ‘between/among’ the living’, used in legal language to describe the transfer of property between persons who are alive, as opposed to a bequest made when someone has died.

ipso facto: ‘by the fact itself’, a phrase used to describe a situation in which, whatever the legalities might be, this is the reality, *cf. de facto*.

librae, solidi, denarii: ‘pounds, *solidi* and *denarii*’, normally abbreviated to *£sd* (the first letter being an ornate form of the letter L), and often pronounced as ELL-ESS-DEE, which should not be confused with d-Lysergic Acid Diethylamide or Low-Sulphur Diesel). This was a way of describing money in Britain, Australia and some other countries before the introduction of decimal

currencies. In terms of British coinage, it would be translated as ‘pounds, shillings and pence’. The Roman *libra* was a pound (originally a pound of anything, but in monetary terms later a pound of gold). The *solidus* was a gold coin that was first issued by Constantine the Great but in the middle ages the name was also applied to a silver coin. The *denarius* was originally a Roman silver coin, but became debased, and ended up as a bronze coin.

In old-fashioned English the weight of an imperial pound was abbreviated with *lb* (from the Latin word), and an ounce to *oz* (the ‘z’ at the end was not really a letter, but a squiggle written to show that the word was abbreviated). So a baby that weighed six pounds eight ounces at birth would have its weight recorded as being 6lb 8oz.

loco citato: ‘in the place cited’, a phrase used in footnotes to indicate a repeated reference to the same page of a work that has already been cited (*cf. opere citato*).

locum tenens: ‘holding the place’, a phrase usually employed to describe a person (most often a medical doctor) who is temporarily replacing someone else. The phrase has also passed through the French language to become ‘lieutenant’.

locus standi: ‘place of standing’ an expression used to indicate that someone has a right to be involved in an argument, usually one that takes place in a court of law.

lusus naturae: ‘a game/jest of nature’, used in most instances to indicate a freak, an animal or a human being born with unnatural characteristics, but occasionally also used in recent times to indicate a person who has exceptionally well developed skills.

Magna Carta: ‘the Great Charter’, a document issued in 1215 by the only King John to reign over England, which granted various liberties to the people of England, liberties that have been upheld since that time, except for the one that promises that no one shall be subjected to delays in the carrying out of legal processes.

magnum opus: ‘great work’, used to describe a major, or even the greatest work that someone who practises one of the arts of literature, painting, sculpture etc. has produced [*Note: opus* is a neuter noun of the 3rd declension, so *magnum* has to have the neuter ending too].

me iudice (or *judice*): ‘with me being the judge’ (an Ablative Absolute construction), meaning ‘in my considered opinion’.

mea culpa: ‘my blame’ (or, as they say in the USA, ‘my bad’), an expression that admits responsibility for something that has gone wrong.

membrum virile: ‘the manly member’, a way of describing a human penis in learned language.

memento mori: ‘remember dying’, *i.e.*, ‘remember that you will have to die’.

memorandum (plural *memoranda*): ‘a thing to be remembered’, most properly used to describe a note written to oneself or someone else as a reminder, but now frequently used in the sense of a short informatory document.

mens rea: ‘guilty mind’, used by lawyers to describe a criminal act such as murder that is done quite deliberately rather than accidentally.

mens sana in corpore sano: ‘a healthy mind in a healthy body’, words originally appearing in a poem by the Roman poet Juvenal, but now used enthusiastically, usually by school principals. *Mens* is feminine and *corpus* (3rd declension) is neuter, hence the different endings for the adjective.

minutiae: the plural of *minutia*, ‘small/trivial matter’, used to indicate small details in a longer list.

mirabile dictu: ‘wonderful in the saying’, ‘wonderful to relate’, used when describing some unusual and remarkable event.

modus operandi: ‘the manner of working’, used to describe the method that someone is following in the work that is undertaken.

multum in parvo: ‘much in little’, a phrase used to describe something of small size or extent that nevertheless contains a great deal that is significant. The words might be turned around to make a negative comment, ‘*parvum in multo*’.

mumpsimus: in the Latin mass, when the priest has consumed bread and wine, he says *quod in ore sumpsimus, pura mente capiamus*, meaning ‘that which we have taken into our mouth, let us take with a pure mind’. It is said that a mediaeval monk used to say *mumpsimus* (which is meaningless) instead of *sumpsimus* (because he was misreading the text, or because his copy was defective), but when his mistake was pointed out to him, his only response was that he had been saying this for forty years and wasn’t about to change it. The word has now been nouned, and if we say that someone is ‘holding on to his mumpsimus’, it means that he is obstinately hanging on to something, even though he might have been told that it is wrong. Less commonly, *sumpsimus* has also been nouned, and is used to describe an insistence on using a correct expression, even when in common speech an incorrect form has become normal (for example, the insistence that an outdoor theatre is not an ‘amphitheatre’ unless it is completely circular or oval, or that ‘try and do ...’ is bad English).

mutatis mutandis: ‘things that ought to be changed having been changed’ (an Ablative Absolute construction). It implies that something is being done or presented for a second time after certain necessary changes have been made.

ne plus ultra (occasionally beginning with *non* or *nec*): ‘no more beyond’, an expression which suggests that what is being mentioned is the most extreme or most developed or most superior form of something. The phrase is treated like a noun in English: it might be said of a man who dressed extremely well that ‘he was the *ne plus ultra* of sartorial fashion’.

nemine contradicente (usually abbreviated to *nem. con.*): ‘with no one saying otherwise’ (an Ablative Absolute construction). This phrase is often used when it is desired to say that a vote for something was unanimous, but in fact it means something slightly different, because some voters might have abstained from voting. The same applies to an alternative version, rarely used, *nemine dissentiente* ‘No one dissenting’.

nihil obstat: ‘nothing stands in the way’. Used when a decision can be made without further discussion.

nil desperandum: ‘nothing must be despaired’, a quotation from a poem by the poet Horace, meaning ‘never despair’. *cf.* the following.

nil illegitimis carborundum: modern pseudo-Latin (surviving in some ungrammatical variants), meaning ‘don’t let the bastards grind you down’. One version is said to have been the personal motto of an American general, Joseph Stillwell (1883-1946).

nisi: ‘unless’, most often used in the legal term *nisi prius* (‘unless previously’), when a decision is made which does not take effect until a later date, allowing the opportunity for a change of mind or the presentation of further evidence.

nolens volens: ‘unwilling/willing’ (participles); used to describe a situation when something is going to happen, whether it is desired or not desired.

nolo contendere: ‘I am unwilling to contend’ (*nolo* is a run-together form of *non volo*, ‘I am unwilling’). In some countries, instead of pleading guilty or not guilty to a charge (which is what must happen in Australia), a defendant may choose this option. It is equivalent to pleading guilty, but may shorten the proceedings, and by not being found guilty, the defendant is in a better position if a civil action follows.

Non liquet: ‘it is not clear’ (*liqueo* means literally ‘flow, be liquid’, like water, but since water is usually supposed to be clear, the image of clarity has been transferred to it). The expression is used in legal language to describe a situation in which a clear decision is not possible.

One might compare the option in Scottish law of using the expression ‘not proven’ instead of ‘guilty’. This implies guilt, but also shows that the judge or the jury felt that the evidence was insufficient to warrant a guilty vote. It is a useful option, because juries in particular might be unwilling to offer a ‘guilty’ verdict in some circumstances, and might let someone off even though there was a high probability that the defendant was in fact guilty. This verdict has been described jokingly as meaning ‘not guilty, but don’t do it again.’

non sequitur: ‘it does not follow’ (*sequor* is a deponent verb, with passive forms having an active meaning). This phrase is often used in philosophical discussion, to show that what is being said does not logically follow what has been previously said.

nota bene: ‘note well’, usually abbreviated to *n.b.*

obiter dictum: ‘said on the way’, referring to something that is said in passing, not part of the main argument of what is being said.

omnium-gatherum: mock Latin (the *omnium* is the Latin genitive plural of *omnis*, meaning ‘of all’, but the *gatherum* is only a jocular attempt to put a Latin ending on an English word). It is used to describe a miscellaneous collection of things or people.

opere citato: ‘in the work cited’ (normally abbreviated to *op. cit.*), a phrase used in the footnotes to a piece of writing to indicate that different pages of a work to which a previous reference should be made is being quoted again (*cf. loco citato*).

pari passu: ‘with an equal step’, used when indicating that two things or persons are being treated equally with no distinctions or preferences being made or shown.

passim: ‘in every direction, everywhere’, used in indexes or other pieces of writing to indicate that something appears so frequently that it is not felt necessary to give a reference to every occasion on which it appears. An elegant example of its use may be found in a book on ancient Greek history by an Oxford scholar, who amused himself by playing an entry in the index to his work as follows: ‘probably: *passim*’.

pax vobiscum: ‘peace (be) with you’ (plural; the singular form would be *tecum*; in Latin the preposition *cum* can sometimes be tacked on to the end of a word, rather than preceding it). This formula is regularly used as a form of benediction by priests of the Roman Catholic church, and sometimes by other Christian priests, in translation. The shorter version *Pax vobis* ‘Peace unto you’ is also used. The correct response is *Et cum spiritu tuo*, ‘And with thy spirit’. The phrase *Dominus vobiscum* ‘The Lord (be) with you’ is also used.

peplum: the Latin form of the Greek word *peplos*, used by art historians to describe a full length woollen garment worn by women, which was belted at the waist with surplus material hanging over the belt, so that the overfold could be interpreted as a separate upper garment. The word is now used in two senses: to refer to a type of Italian film with a story of ancient times (sometimes called a ‘sword and sandal’ film) or to an upper garment worn by women, the lower part of which is flared out in a way slightly reminiscent of the ancient Greek overfold.

per capita: ‘by the heads’, used when a count is made, or when distributions are taking place, measured by the number of individual persons who are involved.

per centum: ‘by the hundred’, usually abbreviated to *per cent*, or indicated by the symbol %.

per annum, per mensem, vide infra.

per diem: ‘by the day’, used to describe a payment or allowance that is calculated on a daily basis. Alternative phrases (much less commonly used) are *per mensem*, ‘by the month’, and *per annum*, ‘by the year’.

per procuracionem: ‘through the agency (of)’, always abbreviated to *p.p.*, and used when a subordinate person is signing a letter on behalf of a superior. The correct way of doing this is for

the superior person's name to appear first, followed by *p.p.* and the name of the subordinate person (in Latin, the second name would appear in the genitive case).

per se: 'by itself', used to show that something is being considered on its own, not in association with other things.

persona non grata: 'a person not welcome', used of someone who is not acceptable in a social setting or in another group or country (if the plural is required, it would be *personae non gratae*, but this is not normally used).

placebo: 'I will please', a Latin verb which has been turned into a noun, and is used in a medical context to describe a pseudo-medication which the patient may believe will be helpful, and indeed often is, simply because of this belief. In clinical trials of new medications, patients are often divided into groups, with some of them receiving doses of the drug that is being tested, and others receiving medication which seems similar, but does not contain the drug. Not surprisingly, human nature being what it is, patients who are receiving the placebo often claim that they are benefiting from it. On the other hand, when patients who are receiving a drug that is being tested, and know that a placebo is also being used, seem to be less likely to report a benefit than patients who do not know this. A new pseudo-Latin word, *lessebo* has been coined to describe this effect.

post hoc ergo propter hoc: 'after this, therefore on account of this', an expression used by philosophers to describe a fallacious argument which assumes that if something happens after something else has happened, the second event is caused by the first. The last three words are sometimes omitted, and someone may refer to a '*post hoc* argument'.

post meridiem: 'after midday', normally abbreviated to *p.m.* Persons who do not understand the meaning of these words in Latin now regularly (and inaccurately) write '12 p.m.' when they mean '12 noon'.

post mortem: 'after death', a phrase used in English (often as a noun) as a noun to describe an examination conducted after death to document the condition of the body, or establish the cause of death (it is frequently written as 'postmortem' in English. The Greek word 'autopsy' ('self-seeing' or 'seeing for oneself') is used in the same sense.

post scriptum: 'written afterwards', a phrase used to indicate an addition to a letter or another kind of document. It is usually abbreviated to P.S. or PS. If there is more than one addition, this may be pluralised by doubling the first letter to P.P.S.

prima facie: 'at the first appearance', implying that something may be viewed in this way at first, but that this interpretation may or not be acceptable after further investigation.

primus inter pares: 'first among equals', an expression which is intended to suggest (whether it is true or not) that a leader or ruler is only equal to those who are associated with him, not above them. If the expression is used with reference to a woman, it should be *prima inter pares*.

pro and *con* (for *contra*): 'for and against', used to describe arguments for and against something.

pro bono (publico): 'for the (public) good'. When lawyers or other professionals take on work without demanding their usual fees, they are said to be doing this *pro bono*.

pro forma: 'for form's sake', used when some procedure which might seem unnecessary is carried out because of an administrative requirement. In modern English a new word 'proforma' has come into occasional use in the sense of 'form' (*i.e.*, a form which must be filled out), but it is better not to use this, even though it may seem very grand.

pro hac vice: 'for this turn/occasion', implying that an action is taking place, or an appointment made, on one occasion only, without necessarily setting a precedent for the future.

pro rata: ‘according to the rate’, meaning ‘proportionally’. The phrase is used when something is being divided according to the shares that each person has in an enterprise, or when part time appointments are paid according to the fraction of a full time appointment that an appointee has.

pro tempore: ‘for the time being’, implying that a continuation need not be expected.

proximo: ‘on the next’ (ablative singular), used in dates to indicate the next month, and regularly abbreviated *prox.*, *cf. instante, ultimo*.

qua: a feminine ablative singular from *qui* (perhaps agreeing with *via* understood), meaning ‘in what way’, used in English to explain someone’s position as taking an action in a certain capacity, rather than for any other reason.

quasi: ‘as if’, equivalent to ‘ostensibly, apparently, resembling’. It is used before other words to suggest that something more or less (but not entirely) resembles something else, or falls short of it in some way. So we may have a ‘quasi religion’ or a ‘quasi contract’. The word was once always pronounced with the old English pronunciation, ‘kway-sigh’ but is now more often pronounced in an Italianate way.

quantum in me fuit: ‘as much as was in me’, used to suggest that the speaker has done as much as possible, even if this was not successful.

quasi: ‘as if’, used to imply that the person or thing concerned is not the genuine holder of a position, or the genuine article.

quid pro quo: ‘something for something’, a compensation that is given, or demanded, for something that has been done to benefit someone (*cf. do ut des*).

quo vadis, Domine?: ‘Where art thou going, Lord?’ A story is told of Peter, the disciple of Jesus that he was fleeing from Rome to avoid being put to death, met Jesus coming in the other direction, and asked him this question. Jesus is supposed to have replied that he was going to go to Rome to be crucified again, because if Peter was fleeing, this meant that the first time hadn’t been enough. Peter, as it is said, was chastened by this, and returned to Rome to be executed.

quod erat demonstrandum: ‘which was to be demonstrated’ (regularly abbreviated to *q.e.d.*). This is a Latin translation of the endings of mathematical theorems in the Greek text of Euclid’s *Elements*, in which the problems to be solved are described in the opening line, and these triumphant words appear at the end when the solution has been demonstrated.

quod vide: ‘which thing, see’, usually abbreviated to *q.v.*, used to indicate that reference should be made to something that has been mentioned if further information is required.

quorum: ‘of whom’, the genitive plural of a relative pronoun which has been nouned in English (a language in which any noun may be verbed). It was once the first word of a mediaeval formula *quorum vos* (2,3,4 etc.) *esse volumus*, specifying the number of people who had to be present at a meeting to make its decisions valid. If an insufficient number of people attend a meeting, it is said to be ‘inquorate’.

ratio decidendi: ‘the reason of deciding’, *i.e.*, the reason for making a decision.

re: ‘in the matter (of)’ (the ablative of *res*, a matter thing, etc.). Used in English to mean ‘as regards’ with regard to’.

reductio ad absurdum: ‘a reduction to the absurd’ (occasionally expressed as *argumentum ad absurdum*), an argument which attempts to disprove something by showing that an untenable result will follow if the proposition is accepted (the reverse procedure may also be adopted: that if it is desired to show that something is true, then it must be demonstrated that an untenable result will follow if it is denied).

requiescat/ant in pace: ‘may he/she/they rest in peace’, normally abbreviated to R.I.P. and used on tombstones.

regina: ‘queen’; VR and ER on letter boxes in the UK stand for ‘Victoria Regina’ and ‘Elizabetha Regina’.

requiescat in pace: ‘may he/she rest in peace’, a formula sometimes used on gravestones, and usually abbreviated to R.I.P.

res ipsa loquitur: ‘the thing itself speaks’, *i.e.*, the facts speak for themselves, and no further proof is needed.

rex: ‘king’; GR on letter boxes in the UK stands for ‘Georgius Rex’.

rigor mortis: ‘the stiffness of death’, describing the stiffening of the limbs that takes place for a while after death.

semper fidelis: ‘always faithful’, the motto of the United States Marine Corps, usually abbreviated to ‘semper fi’ by the Marines.

Senatus Populusque Romanus (usually abbreviated to SPQR): ‘the Senate and Roman People’ (the *-que* at the end of the second word is one of the ways of saying ‘and’ in Latin). A formula that occurs regularly in contexts where laws or other pronouncements are being made in Latin, and now survives in its abbreviated form in the city of Rome, where it appears on manhole covers and other public structures.

seniores priores: ‘seniors first’, an adage which is said to be based on the Roman principle that older men should be given a front seat at councils of state (although if this is true, it may only have been because they were deaf), and allowed to speak first. It has also been said that it is connected with the principle that old men like to believe that they can give good advice, because they can no longer set bad examples.

sensu stricto: ‘in a strict sense’ (as opposed to *sensu lato* or *amplo*, meaning ‘in a general sense’). These phrases (which may also be found in the comparative or superlative forms) are not ancient, but were invented by modern scientists at some time before the beginning of the 20th century.

sequens (singular) or *sequentes* (plural): ‘following’, normally abbreviated to *sq.* (singular) or *sqq.* (plural) after a page number when referring to a text; so ‘pp. 256 *sqq.*’ means ‘page 256 plus an unspecified number of following pages. It is more common nowadays to use *f.* and *ff.*, abbreviated forms of the English words. The convention of doubling a letter (or the last letter) when an abbreviation is being used is of Roman origin; for example, the abbreviated form of ‘consul’ is COS, but when the plural, ‘consuls’ is required, it becomes COSS, and when in the later Roman Empire more than one ruler had the title of Augustus, we find the abbreviations AVGG and AVGGG (when there were three *Augusti*).

seriatim: ‘in series, one after another’.

sic: ‘thus’. This word is regularly placed in brackets (often in italics to show that it is a foreign word) when the writer wishes to indicate that the statement or the spelling of a word may not be correct, but that what is now being written is an exact reproduction of what was written or said previously.

sine die: ‘without a day’, used in legal proceeding when an adjournment is made without a date being fixed for resumption of a case. A similar phrase, *sine anno*, ‘without a year’, is used in a different way, to indicate that the year in which an event took place is not known.

sine qua non: ‘without which not ...’, indication that something is indispensable.

statim: ‘at once’, used by doctors to indicate that some procedure must be followed as soon as possible, regularly abbreviated to ‘stat.’ and pronounced briskly by actors when appearing as doctors in films.

status quo (ante): ‘the state in which (previously)’. This phrase is now used like a noun: the ‘status quo’ must be preserved; it is necessary to preserve the ‘status quo’.

stet: 'let it stand', used by correctors of documents who have made an alteration, and then realised that the original text was in fact correct.

sub iudice or *sub iudice*: 'under a judge', meaning that some matter is being considered, or about to be considered, by a court, and therefore nothing should be said about it in public until the court has resolved the matter.

sub poena: 'under a penalty', used in legal language when someone is ordered to do something, and will be punished for failing to do it.

sub rosa: 'under the rose', of communications or discussions that are to be kept secret (the rose being a symbol of secrecy). From ancient times onwards, the depiction of a rose on the ceiling of an enclosed room may be taken as a suggestion that discussions held there are to remain private.

sub verbo or *sub voce*: 'under the word' (usually abbreviated to *s.v.*), used to indicate that information will be found (as in dictionaries) under that heading.

sui generis: 'of its own kind', indicating that something (or perhaps a person) is unique, and not classifiable with other things or persons.

sum quod eris: 'I am what thou wilt be'; this (and variations on it) can be used as a cheerful message on a tombstone.

supra: 'above', used to indicate an earlier page in a book (*cf. infra*).

sursum corda: 'upwards (the) hearts' (*corda* is the plural of the neuter noun *cor*). This is an invocation which translates in a more compact form the original Greek expression, 'Let us lift up our hearts', and is said by a priest as part of an exchange of words with a congregation. The usual way in which it is rendered in English, 'Lift up your hearts', is slightly inaccurate.

tabula rasa: 'a scraped tablet', meaning something that might or might not have received writing, but is now blank, waiting for something to be entered upon it (and thus, of a mind that can be led to receive impressions that it did not have before). The imagery is derived from the Roman practice of keeping notes scratched with a stylus on wooden tablets covered with a layer of wax, which could be re-used each time by smoothing the wax to obliterate what was already on it.

tempus fugit: 'time flees', implying that life is short.

terra firma: 'firm land', contrasted with the sea or the air.

terra incognita: 'unknown land' (some early maps suggested that a 'great southern land', a *terra australis incognita* might exist to the east of Africa and the south of India and Ceylon).

terra nullius: 'land of no one', implying that this land was not formally inhabited by anyone, and so might be taken by anyone who arrived there. This claim has been rejected in Australia in cases where the pre-European inhabitants of the country have been able to show continuous occupation.

Testamur: 'we testify', traditionally the first word of the Latin text of a formal statement certifying something, and particularly of a certificate issued by a university certifying that a student has passed the subjects that have been studied. It is used as a noun in English

ultimo: 'on the last' (ablative singular), used in dates to indicate the preceding month, regularly abbreviated to *ult.*, *cf. instante, proximo*.

ultra vires: 'beyond the powers', used to indicate that someone has acted in a way that exceeds the authority that has been granted to that person.

vade mecum or *vademecum*: 'go with me', used in English as a noun to describe a handbook or guidebook which is regularly carried by someone.

vae victis: 'woe to the conquered ones', used to imply that those who have been defeated have no right to expect kind treatment.

vale (plural *valet*): ‘be well, farewell’, used when taking leave of a person (*cf.* ‘valediction’ or ‘valedictory address’). The matching words *ave* (singular) and *avete* (plural) meaning ‘hail’, ‘greetings’, are not normally used in English.

verbatim: ‘in words’, an adverb formed from *verbum*, ‘word’. This is used when something that has been said or written is repeated in exactly the same words.

verbum sapienti satis est: ‘a word to a wise person is enough’, regularly abbreviated to *verb. sap.*, meaning that a wise person will need only a small indication to realise that something is wrong.

versus: ‘against’, used in legal language to indicate the opponents in a legal case (abbreviated to *v.*).

via: ‘by way (of)’ (ablative of the Latin 1st declension feminine noun).

vice: ‘in place of’ (*e.g.*, viceroy, vice-chancellor). This has no connection with the English word ‘vice’, which is derived from the Latin *vitium*, meaning ‘fault, crime’. It is the ablative singular of a noun of which the nominative singular form (which has not been found in any surviving document) would have been either *vix* or *vicis*, meaning ‘change’. The latter form is generally assumed to be more likely, and has the advantage of not being confused with the adverb *vix*, which means ‘with difficulty, hardly’. For some reason, this nominative form does not survive in ancient literature, and is now found as the name of a hedge fund in the U.S.A. which has come close to being shut down and, coincidentally, of a firm which is developing a helmet which may help players of American football to avoid having their brains permanently damaged. The third declension ablative form *vice*, meaning ‘as a change from, in place of’, is used to describe persons who can replace a high official when necessary.

vice versa: ‘the change having been turned’, used to describe a situation that is the reverse of the situation that has just been mentioned.

vide infra (supra): ‘see below (above)’, used in writing to indicate that something on the subject that is being discussed will be found later (or earlier) in the text.

videlicet: ‘it is allowed to see’, a contracted form of *videre licet*, often abbreviated to *viz.* (the last letter is not really a letter, but an attempt to reproduce a squiggle at the end of a contracted form of the word that is normal in mediaeval manuscripts). The word is now out of fashion, but was used to introduce explanations of words that needed to be explained.

virgo intacta: ‘an untouched virgin’, used of a woman who has never been penetrated sexually.

viva voce: ‘with the living voice’, used to describe an examination that is conducted orally rather than in writing, regularly referred to as ‘a viva’ (pronounced to rhyme with ‘diver’).

vis inertiae: ‘the force of inertia’, used in scientific language (or metaphorically in non-scientific language) to describe the way in which matter continues to exist in the same state, or move in the same direction, unless a sufficiently strong external force forces it to change.

vox populi: ‘the voice of the people’ an expression used to express the idea of a popular demand that must be heeded by a governing authority. A longer version, *vox populi vox Dei*, ‘the voice of the people (is) the voice of God (or a God)’ strengthens this idea.

Some Common Abbreviations

A.C., see *ante Christum*
A.D., see *anno Domini*
a.m., see *ante meridiem*
c.v., see *curriculum vitae*
e.g., see *exempli gratia*
i.e., see *id est*
inst., see *instante*
n.b., see *nota bene*
p.m., see *post meridiem*
p.p., see *per procurationem*
p.s., see *post scriptum*
prox., see *proximo*
q.e.d., see *quod erat demonstrandum*
q.v., see *quod vide*
R.I.P., see *requiescat/ant in pace*
sq(q), see *sequens/sequentes*
SPQR, see *Senatus Populusque Romanus*
s.v., see *sub voce*
ult., see *ultimo*
v., see *versus*
viz., see *videlicet*

£sd: see *librae*.