Latin Lessons 1 and 2

The goals of Lessons 1 and 2 are, one, to make you aware of the riches awaiting you in the etymologies of a good dictionary, two, to define the terms "etymology," "definition" and "root/base" and, three, to review the four rules for constructing a good definition. After you're done watching this presentation, please listen to the accompanying audio presentation. There, we'll look at the assignments and exercises in Lessons 1 and 2 of the Latin section of your textbook.

One purpose of this class is for you to learn to use a dictionary effectively and fully, especially the etymologies which are attached to most words, often in brackets. For instance, if you look up "pilgrim" in a good dictionary, it will give you more than just the word's definition ("a wanderer, a sojourner"). A good dictionary will also give you an etymology, often full of abbreviations, which, in the case of the word pilgrim, would read something like this: "from French *pelerin* which comes from Italian *pellegrino*, a derivative of Latin *peregrinus* meaning 'a wanderer, a traveler in foreign parts, a foreigner.' *Peregrinus* itself is a Latin word composed of a prefix *per-* meaning "through" and a base *ager* meaning "land." So etymologically pilgrim means "one who travels through fields." It is a long pilgrimage indeed from *peregrinus* to pilgrim, but the word has had a long time to make that sojourn, two millennia in fact. The real wonder is it didn't change more.

Etymology is the study of where words come from, and that process is a central aspect of this class. So let's start by defining the term itself. Etymology is "the origin and analysis of a word as shown by breaking it down into its constituent historical elements." Literally it means ─ in other words, if you etymologize the word "etymology" ─ "the study of the true or real (that is, the true or real meanings of words)." The Greek word *etymos* means "real, actual, precise," and the suffix *-ology* means "the study of." To the ancient Greeks, knowing the roots of something, in this case of a word, was to understand its true meaning. Thus, they dubbed the science of investigating word histories, the "study of truth." It's debatable how good a name that really is ─ as you'll learn in this class, there are a lot of false etymologies out there ─ but it's a nice compliment. I'm sure etymologists can live with it.

One way to look at the dictionary in this class is as the ultimate answer key for the exercises and tests in the course, which makes having access to a good dictionary a worthy goal here. Any of the larger dictionaries in print will do, such as Webster's Third International Unabridged or New Universal Unabridged. Of course, the definitive dictionary for etymologies in English is the Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, which focuses on the etymological source of words, not their definitions. Be aware that there are also many web sites of varying worth out there.

It's easy to see if a dictionary or web site will serve your purposes for this class. Just choose a few words and look at the etymologies attached. If there aren't any, it's not a good sign. Run away! If there are etymologies, look at them carefully. Are they complete? How far back do they tend to go? All the way to Latin or Greek or some other ancient language? If so, that source will probably be good enough for now. You should also be aware that between me and Mr. Ayers (the author of your textbook) you will have all the answers to all the exercises in the class, so you don't actually need to purchase anything here except the textbook itself. All the same, having a

good dictionary at hand is a beautiful thing, and learning to use it as a source for etymologies is one important reason for taking this class.

And that's it for Lesson 1. It will be our usual procedure in each of these video presentations to address two lessons. By doing two every time, we'll be able to cover all the lessons in the textbook. So let's move on to Lesson 2, where Mr. Ayers discusses an important principle, what makes a good definition, which is, I suppose, a good place to begin. Here's a good definition of the word definition: "the explanation or description of what a thing is; or what a word or phrase means or has meant." In order to work properly, definitions need to be precise. Hence, Mr. Ayers cites four rules for constructing a good definition. Be aware that many of the answers on tests and quizzes in this class will be definitions, so it's of utmost importance that you learn how to formulate them correctly. Not doing so will cost you credit! So think about the following rules carefully and follow them!

- Rule 1: Define a word with **an equivalent grammatical form**. That is, use a noun definition to define a noun, or a verb definition to define a verb. To put it another way, don't confuse parts of speech. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs are all examples of different parts of speech which must be distinguished carefully in defining words. So, for instance, if you're defining the word "fidelity" which is a noun, don't say "faithful" ("faithful" is an adjective). Likewise, don't say "to be faithful" ("to be faithful" is a verb). Instead, say "faithfulness." That's a noun. You must use a noun like faithfulness to define another noun like fidelity. If you're unsure about how to do this, I have two suggestions.
  - First, there's an easy way for you to see if you've used the right part of speech. Take your definition and substitute it back into the sentence where you got the word. If the sentence still makes sense with the definition in it, you've got the right part of speech. For example, if the original sentence said "From all citizens this country demands fidelity to its laws" and you substitute "faithfulness" for "fidelity"— "From all citizens this country demands faithfulness to its laws," which makes good sense ─ then your definition "faithfulness" is in the correct part of speech. If, on the other hand, you substitute the wrong part of speech ─ "From all citizens this country demands 'faithful' to its laws" or "From all citizens this country demands 'to be faithful' to its laws" ─ those make no sense because you're replacing a noun with an adjective or a verb. Remember this: for the simple reason that you speak and understand English, you know the difference between verbs and nouns and adjectives. Use that knowledge to check the part of speech of your definition.
  - Second, if you would like to practice determining a word's part of speech, you can listen to some basic grammar presentations I've recorded. You'll find a link to them on the course web site.
  That's Rule 1.

- Rule 2: Stick to **the essence of a word**. Do not describe it or go on about it or say what you feel about it. This is a class on etymology, not ethics. So, for instance, if you are defining the word "evolution," please don't call it "Darwin's folly." Instead, say "the act of unfolding or rolling out," which is what it literally means: the prefix *e-* ("out") added onto the base VOLUT- ("roll") creates the sense "the process of unfolding" with the

implication "over time," that is, "change over time." Or let's say you're asked to define "time," don't make a joke like "nature's way of keeping everything from happening all at once." Haha! You'll make me laugh, and you'll get no credit. This is not a class on comedy either.

- Rule 3: Do not use **a word, or any part of a word, to define the word itself**. Instead, find a synonym, a word that means basically the same thing. For instance, if someone doesn't know what "uncontrollable" means, it's no help to say "unable to be controlled" or "out of control." Find another word that means basically the same thing as "control." How about "manage"? "Incapable of being managed." If you think about it, the whole dictionary is itself one big loop where the same sets of words (synonyms) are used to define each other ─ "control, manage, handle, govern, regulate, direct"; in the definitions of any of them you're bound to find some of the others ─ so if you don't know what all these words mean, you'll have a hard time figuring out what any of them means. But that's the best we can do. Use synonyms.

- Rule 4: Whenever possible, avoid **negative definitions**. Don't tell me what something isn't. Say what it is. Sure, a woman is not a man. Glad you've got that, but what *is* a woman? "A female human being." There is, however, one situation in which it is appropriate to use a negative word in a definition: when the word being defined has a negative element or quality, usually because it contains a negating prefix like *a-*, *un-*, *in-* or *anti-*. So if the word you're defining is "uncontrollable" or "inadequate," it's valid to use "not" in your definition: "*not* able to be managed" or "*not* sufficient."

Those are the four rules for constructing good definitions. Now let's look at some examples of bad definitions and talk about how to fix them. Please turn to page 34 of your textbook. Look at the definitions there and tell me what's wrong with them and what needs to be done to make them right, starting with the first one:

- diffident: "a person who lacks self-confidence." Well, it's true that diffidence is "a lack of self-confidence," but diffident is an adjective. It's what you call someone who exhibits diffidence. So what's wrong with this definition? It's in the wrong part of speech. It breaks Rule 1. How would you fix it? Change it to … "lacking self-confidence." Now the definition is an adjective just like the word. And make a note of this too: when the first word of a definition ends -*ing* ─ "having, being, doing" ─ the definition should be applied to an adjective. Remember this equation: -*ing* = adjective. Conversely, verb definitions should always begin with "to…," as in "to do." And noun definitions should always begin with "the, a," as in "the act of, a state of." Returning now to the textbook and the exercise, let's look at the next definition …

- raceme: "a simple inflorescence of the centripedal or indeterminate type, in which the several or many flowers are borne … blah, blah, blah." What is this? A definition or a whole chapter on botany? TMI. The point of Rule 2 is to cut to the point: "a simple flower cluster having its flowers on nearly equal stalks along a stem." Okay, that's still not very simple, but at least simpler. Next definition …

- supine: "not standing upright." "Not upright" leaves open many possibilities, such as "semi-vertical" or "gently listing in the wind"? But that's not what "supine" means. "Supine" means "lying on the back facing upwards," that is, "flat on your back," what you are after thirteen minutes into really long presentations like this. So what rule does this definition break? Rule 4: don't define something by what it's not. Instead, say what it is, what you are: "flat on your back." Next …

- perjury: "dishonesty." Well, perjury *is* dishonesty but a specific form of dishonesty, lying in court under oath. There's a difference between telling your mother a lie about where you were last night and lying to a judge about the same. Mom just sends you to your room. The judge sends you somewhere way less pleasant. So what's wrong with this definition? It doesn't cut to the essence of the word perjury. It's too general. Like "raceme," it breaks Rule 2, but in a different way. Here there's not enough information; with "raceme" there was too much. Next …

- impervious: "not pervious." What's wrong with this definition? What isn't? For starters, "pervious" is not a word, though it should be. It sounds like something Shakespeare might use: "Thou brazen, pervious varlet! Lift thy hand from my impervious daughter!" Besides its pervicity, what *else* is wrong with this definition? It's negative, but is it wrong to be negative? No, because the *im-* prefix is negative, so it's okay, in fact, it's all but necessary to use a negating form when defining this word. So, what rule does "not pervious" break? Rule 3: don't use a word to define itself. What would be a better definition? "Not capable of being damaged." Let's look at one more example:

- dog: "man's best friend." Well, who can deny that? Dogs are so cute. But is that the point here? No. This breaks Rule 2 again. It doesn't give the essence of the word. Better would be a definition that goes something like "a four-legged carnivore that … barks like a maniac until you give it dinner." No, don't say that. That would be whimsical too. But I own several dogs and I can tell you it's true.

I think you get the point. So you do the rest of these! If you don't know what the word means, you can look it up in the dictionary where you'll find a proper definition. And if you can't see what's wrong, that is, which of the four rules is being broken, then contact me with your question. I love questions about course materials. They tell me you're doing your homework.

Now let's go back to the textbook and finish Lesson 2. Starting on page 27, Mr. Ayers discusses a feature of words we'll be studying and discussing throughout this class: the base, also called the root, of a word. All words, unless something's gone terribly wrong, have bases, so let's begin by defining what a base is: "the central element of a word which is left after the removal of all affixes." Hmmm, a little bit of a negative definition here, wouldn't you say? Let's see if we can say that another way: the base is the core of any word, the principal structure on which the word's meaning depends. For instance, in the word "removal" the base is MOV- meaning "move." [There's a shocker.] The *re-* on the front which adds a sense of "back, away" is a prefix (one type of affix); the *-al* at the end meaning "the act of" is a suffix (another type of affix). But the heart of the word is "move": "the act of moving away."

In this class we're going to follow a system Mr. Ayers uses to facilitate identifying bases and distinguishing them from other word components like prefixes and suffixes. We're going to write all bases in capital letters, with a dash after, for example, FIRM-, which is the base of the word "affirmative," for instance. One thing to note here is the annoying English habit of employing a silent -e following many words like "remove." Silent -e's are not part of any base. Ignore them! Note also that the silent -e disappears when the same base is used in re-MOV-al. Silent -e's appear only at the ends of English words. Ah, what's *not* irritating about that? Where does this silent -e come from? It's a custom that developed in English writing long ago to indicate the presence of a long vowel in the preceding syllable. Think "note" vs. "not," "pope" vs. "pop." Put simply, it's inexplicably idiotic. There are way better ways to indicate vowel length. I deplore the silent -e, but by now, after centuries of addiction to this awful habit, we're stuck with it. All we can do now is say "Fie upon our English-speaking ancestors. Thanks a lote!"

There are two other things to note about bases which relate especially to those which have entered English from Latin. They sometimes come in multiple forms for a number of reasons. First, some Latin bases enter English in a so-called "nominative" form, the form the Romans used when the word served as the subject of a sentence. Otherwise, a base will appear in a different form called the base form. Here's an example. The base HOMO- which means "human being" ─ you know it from the scientific term for our species homo sapiens, literally "wise human" ─ HOMO- is the nominative form, but this base also shows up as HOMIN-, its base form which was much more broadly used in Latin and thus had a much greater likelihood of generating derivatives. In general, the base form accounts for the vast majority of Latinate words in English, so you won't see the nominative form all that often, but often enough it deserves mention. As a rule, you can assume that the form of the base Ayers gives you is the base form. When we encounter nominative forms, I'll point them out.

There's another way English ended up with two forms of the same Latin base ─ and this helps explain why we have so many doublets ─ some Latinate words come to us directly from Latin, whereas others have passed to us through French. Think about it. France lies in between England and Italy. Latin words could reach English over land by traveling through French-speaking territory, or they could circumvent France and sail directly to England in Latin texts. Here's an example: the noun re-CEPT-ion contains the original Latin form of the base that means "take," as opposed to its close linguistic relative, the verb re-CEIVE, which has the French form of the base. When a base form has entered English through French, Mr. Ayers will put it in square brackets, e.g. [CEIV-].

To conclude this lesson's lesson, Mr. Ayers introduces one suffix, probably the one most commonly seen in English derivatives. Indeed, you'll find it all over the place. It's the verb-forming suffix -*ate*/-*ite*, meaning "to ..." It signifies that a base is being used as a verb, so you can just define it on tests and in exercises as "verb suffix." Memorize it now! As we'll see later in the class, -*ate*/-*ite* is the linguistic equivalent and cognate of English -*ed*, and just as -*ed* is used widely and in different ways in English, -*ate*/-*ite* has several meanings and usages in Latin. It can form not only verbs but adjectives too (as we'll see in Lesson 10) and nouns as well (as we'll see in Lesson 15). Learn it! You'll see it a lot.

And that's the end of this video presentation on the linguistic principles covered in Lessons 1 and 2 of Ayers' textbook. Next you should listen to the audio presentation about the assignments in these same lessons, in particular, the bases you'll be asked to memorize in Lesson 2. You'll find a link to that audio presentation on the course web site.

Happy etymologizing!

ASSIGNMENT

This audio presentation covers the exercises in Lessons 1 and 2 of your textbook. For every lesson ─ or more often pair of lessons ─ you'll have an audio presentation of this sort to help you understand the bases and affixes you've been assigned to memorize. There are no slides attached to this presentation so you can stay focused on the book and take notes.

Let's start with Lesson 1. Please turn to page 23. The assignment exercises for Lesson 1 on pages 23-25 center around the use of the dictionary, meaning you should be able to find the answers to these exercises for yourself in a good dictionary or etymological web source. Please do as many of these exercises as you like, but know this: you will not be tested on any questions of the sort you'll see here.

With that, we'll move on to Lesson 2 and its assignment and exercises which start on page 31. The assignment here entails thirteen bases you're asked to memorize, the first of which is ALIEN- meaning "of another," that is, "belonging to someone else." This base is found in English words of Latin origin like "alien" and "alienation."

The next base is ART-, meaning "art, skill." It gives us words like "art, artifact." That shouldn't be too hard to memorize. See how to do this? Memorize the base and its meaning/s. And use derivatives like "art" to help you remember it if need be.

I won't go through all the bases or whatever you asked to memorize in each lesson, only those things which I think need some further explanation or if I have ways I think are useful for memorizing them. So, for instance, the next base FIN- where Ayers gives the meanings "end, limit," has another important meaning: "border." Please add that to the definitions of this base, since some English derivatives use that sense, for example, our word "confine" which means "to put borders around something."

Among other things worth commenting on in this list, note that the base NULL- can appear with one L or two. Also please take careful note of [GRIEV-], the French form of the base GRAV-, and [LIGN-] the French form of the base LINE-. Moving down the list, be careful not to confuse the base VERB- ("word") with a different base which is not in this lesson, VERBER- ("lash, stroke"). VERBER- gives us derivatives like "reverberate." So if the BASE is just VERB-, it means "word"; but if there's an -ER- after the -B, it means "stroke." The same sort of principle holds true for VEST- ("garment") at the bottom of the list which looks a lot like VESTIG-, a different base meaning "step." The vestiges of something are the footsteps it leaves behind. But know this too: you're not responsible for memorizing anything that's not explicitly introduced in the textbook, unless I say otherwise. And I'm not saying otherwise here. So you don't need to

memorize VERBER- or VESTIG-. I'm just trying to help you avoid making easy mistakes further down the road.

Finally, the answers to the etymologies in the sentences of this Lesson (Lesson 2, pp. 32-33) can be found on line on the course web site. The link is at the top of the syllabus. To access the answers, you'll need the username and password I gave you in the syllabus. If you missed those or lost them, email me and I'll send them to you. Since I give you the answers, I'm always going to leave it to you to do these exercises on your own but, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me in person or by email with any concerns you have about the sentence exercises, or indeed about any aspect of this class. I'm happy to work with you to resolve any problem you may be having.

And that's the end of this audio presentation covering the exercises in Latin Lessons 1 and 2.

Happy etymologizing!