

# **The Latin Heart of English**

## **English vocabulary practice of words of Latin origin Volume 1**

**Marc Loewenthal**

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Volume 1

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## Introduction

Vocabulary is an integral and fundamental part of any language learning programme. There are numerous ways for learners to expand their vocabulary, including associating words in semantic fields, making spider-grams, writing lists, practising affixation and identifying collocations. Another effective method is presenting and practising words derived from the same root, which helps learners to see relationships in form and meaning. This book extends this idea by selecting some of the most important roots in Latin to act as the focus for studying their derivations together, mainly through comparing their meanings and practising affixation.

The main reason for using Latin roots as the focus is that they form the basis of the major part of modern English vocabulary, especially the type of vocabulary that students need to learn in order to progress to more advanced levels. Another reason is that Latin provides a rich variety of prefixes and suffixes which work together with the roots to produce new vocabulary. This book provides a unique opportunity for students of English not just to learn important new vocabulary, but also to examine how words are formed and to generalise across the roots how affixes create and change meaning.

The book consists of explanatory notes on the history of Latin words in English, notes on pronunciation and prefixation, explanatory notes on the roots, and a hundred exercises practising over one thousand words. It is hoped that after completing all the exercises in this book, students will have a much greater command of vocabulary and a greater sense of how to interpret and deduce new vocabulary. Two more volumes are planned to cover other important Latin roots. For further information and more exercises and activities, visit <http://www.eflworksheets.com>.

### A short history of Latin words in English

In these notes, original Latin root words are given in bold, e.g. **agere**, modern English derivations are given in italics, e.g. *agenda*, and meanings are given in speech marks, e.g. “drive”.

Historically, at its height in the 2<sup>nd</sup> C CE, the Roman Empire stretched from Britain to Palestine, and Latin was spoken as its official language. Latin, like English, is a descendent of the Indo-European family of languages. By the 6<sup>th</sup> C CE, the modern descendents of Latin - French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Romanian (as well as Catalan, Sardinian and many other dialects) - had started to form as separate languages from the Latin vernacular. As these languages developed, vocabulary was altered both in meaning and pronunciation, especially in French.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> C CE, Germanic tribes began to settle in Britain, and brought with them the language which eventually became modern English. The dialects spoken by the first settlers were closely related to those spoken in modern Holland, Northern Germany and the Frisian Islands. Throughout its history, English has absorbed words from other languages. Old English even brought Latin and Greek vocabulary with it from Germany, such as *butter*, *cheese* and *cheap*. With the arrival of Christianity, many Latin and Greek words were borrowed and absorbed by English to such an extent that many are not

immediately recognisable as borrowings. These include ecclesiastical vocabulary like *bishop*, *church* and *parish*, as well as other words like *port*, *temple* and *candle*.

The next large-scale borrowing of vocabulary came from the Norse and Danes, who settled in Scotland and much of the north of England. They spoke dialects related to English, and may have even been able to communicate reasonably well with the English speakers, supplying words like *egg*, *scream*, *take* and *get*. However, the next great influx of words forms the bulk of modern English vocabulary, ironically from a people who were originally Norse, but who lost their Norse language.

The Normans had settled along the coast of Northern France in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, but they very quickly lost their native language and took on French, although they spoke a dialect different from standard French. In 1066, William, Duke of Normandy, invaded England and defeated Harold, the English king. From that point, England was gradually taken over by the French-speaking Normans, with the result that English was largely reduced to the language of the lower classes, while Norman French was the language of the ruling classes. Over the next 200 years, as the ruling classes began to identify themselves more with their English subjects than with the increasingly foreign French, English began to reassert itself. However, many everyday words in Old English were lost in the transition to Middle English, as huge quantities of French words came into standard usage. We can see this clearly in the works of writers like Geoffrey Chaucer.

By the 15<sup>th</sup> C, Middle English had accumulated a huge number of French words, as well as a large number of words borrowed from Latin (either directly or through French), which had remained the main language of learning. This list gives some examples of words borrowed from French: *achieve*, *affair*, *asset*, *cattle*, *chief*, *city*, *close*, *damage*, *defeat*, *despise*, *double*, *dress*, *fail*, *gentle*, *grief*, *join*, *lieu*, *maintain*, *please*, *point*, *power*, *print*, *prison*, *prize*, *push*, *rail*, *relieve*, *reply*, *rest*, *royal*, *saint*, *second*, *sense*, *sever*, *sign*, *size*, *sport*, *spouse*, *stage*, *sure*, *survive*, *tense*, *trail*, *treat*, *trouble*, *very*, *void*.

Since then, English has continued to accumulate Latin vocabulary, mainly through the Renaissance and also through new creations and discoveries in science and technology, including the following: *agent*, *capital*, *concrete*, *donation*, *dual*, *fact*, *finite*, *fracture*, *general*, *local*, *memory*, *minor*, *nature*, *person*, *progress*, *reside*, *solve*, *spectator*, *spectrum*, *status*, *tractor* and *vacate*. In fact, while the core vocabulary of English descends from the original Germanic, the vast majority of words in English have their ultimate origins in Latin.

While many derivations have come straight from Latin, most have passed through French. As a result, their forms have been significantly altered to the extent that they may no longer be recognisable as coming from the original Latin root. In addition, two derivations may exist, one from Latin (sometimes directly, sometimes via Old or Middle French), and another from French (substantially altered from the original Latin). In these cases, the meanings may be more or less similar, and they may be used in different ways, with different levels of formality and different collocations. Here are some examples:

<b>rex</b> , “king”	→ <i>regal</i> (from Latin via Old French) → <i>royal</i> (from Old French)
<b>vox</b> , “voice”	→ <i>vocal</i> (from Latin via Old French) → <i>vowel</i> (from Old French)
<b>securus</b> , “safe”	→ <i>secure</i> (from Latin) → <i>sure</i> (from Old French)
<b>jungere</b> , “join”	→ <i>junction</i> (from Latin via Old French) → <i>joint</i> (from Old French)
<b>pungere</b> , “pierce”	→ <i>puncture</i> (from Latin via Old French) → <i>point</i> (from Old French)
<b>caput</b> , “head”	→ <i>capital</i> (from Latin via Old French) → <i>chief</i> (from Old French) → <i>chef</i> (from Modern French) → <i>captain</i> (from Latin through Old French) → <i>chieftain</i> (from Old French).

### How students can benefit

It is hoped that these activities will be useful and stimulating to students of English whose first language is a Romance language. They can be particularly useful to them in comparing forms and uses across the two languages and within English, in particular the differences and similarities in meanings and uses, e.g. *sensitive* compared with *sensible*, as well as revealing “false friends” (similar words with different meanings), e.g. English *actual*, “real, true”, compared with French *actuel*, “present, current”. Such learners may not have a clear idea of these meanings and uses, and these materials are designed to help students fix the meanings and uses more firmly in their minds.

However, those learners whose first language is not a Romance language will also find these exercises useful in helping them understand the complex and rich mix of vocabulary, affixations, derivations and meanings of English vocabulary. At the same time, these exercises can stimulate in them an interest in investigating the history and nature of the English language further.

Regarding the level of these materials, they range from Intermediate to Advanced, though teachers should judge how suitable each exercise would be for their students. It may be best to use these materials to reinforce vocabulary work done from a course book, especially in preparation for an exam. Students can be given them for homework, or can work on them together in class and share their ideas. Alternatively, individual exercises can be used to expand on points which come up in class. The notes on pronunciation, prefixes and the exercises are designed to guide teachers, though they can also benefit students who want to gain a more detailed knowledge of word formation and meaning.

## Notes on Latin roots

### 1. 2. *agere* (set in motion, drive, lead, act)

All the meanings of this root contain the idea of “making things happen”, and we can see this in derivations like *act*, *agent* and *agenda*. It also originally had the sense of “drive” and “carry out”. Most English words derived from it still carry the ideas of action, movement or making something happen.

### 3. *caedere* (strike, cut, kill)

In ancient times, killing usually involved cutting, and this root covers both meanings. All the modern derivations are prefixed forms, which change the root **caed/caes** to **cid/cis**. The meaning of “cut” is evident in words like *concise*, originally “cut off, cut short”, and *precise*, also originally “cut off, shorten, abridge”, while the meaning of “kill” is evident in words like *homicide*, literally “man killing”. Only *decide* and *decision* have substantially changed their original meanings from “cut off, terminate” to “put an end to, settle”.

### 4. 5. *caput* (head, chief, person)

Most of the derivations from this root still carry at least an element of the original meaning, and are reflected in the uses of “head” in English. For example, a *chief* is the head person of a group, a *chef* is the head cook in a restaurant and a *cape* is a headland. Less obviously, *capitulate* originally meant “draw up a document in separate headings”, and later “surrender under certain terms”, and *precipitation* meant “throwing/falling headlong”. Even more obscure is *achieve*, from a phrase which originally meant “bring/come to a head” (see Spanish and Portuguese *acabar*, “finish”). However, the original meaning is still recognisable in most derivations.



## 1. agere 1

Put the most suitable word in each space. Think about the part of speech required in each space. Make sure you use the correct form.

*act (n), acting (adj), active, actor, actual, agency, agenda, agent, agile, agitate, navigate, reaction*

1. The narrow channels and small islands on this part of the coast are very difficult to \_\_\_\_\_ . You need a ship's pilot who knows the area.
2. These monkeys are extremely light and \_\_\_\_\_. They can run up and down trees and swing through them quickly and easily.
3. If you want to be a writer, you need to have an \_\_\_\_\_ who knows the business and who can talk to publishers for you and offer them your work.
4. When I told Jan she had passed all her exams, she just looked blankly at me and carried on watching TV. It was not the \_\_\_\_\_ that I had expected.
5. The dog had been sleeping quietly, but suddenly jumped up and became extremely \_\_\_\_\_. Then I realised that he had felt the earthquake before it hit.
6. OK everyone. Let's get the meeting started so we can finish on time. The first item on the \_\_\_\_\_ is the company's move to the new building next month.
7. My new car is in such good condition that all my friends thought that I had paid at least £10,000 for it. The \_\_\_\_\_ price was only £5000.
8. Nowadays it's much cheaper and less complicated for the college to hire a temporary teacher from an \_\_\_\_\_ than to employ one directly.
9. When Sam saw the little girl screaming for help at the window of the burning house, he ran in and brought her out. It was an incredibly brave \_\_\_\_\_.
10. While Mr Johnson is recovering from his operation, I'll be the \_\_\_\_\_ head teacher. Until he returns I'll try to perform as well as he has.
11. While the President may well be involved in this political scandal in some way, the principal \_\_\_\_\_ in this affair is the President's Chief of Staff.
12. Nowadays more and more people live longer, remain in good health and stay \_\_\_\_\_ into their old age, even taking up new sports.

## 2. agere 2

Put the most suitable word in each space. Think about the part of speech required in each space. Make sure you use the correct form.

*act (v), acting (n), action, actionable, activate, counteract, enact, exacting, interact, proactive, react, transaction*

1. Don't forget to press the red button by the door before leaving the house. It will \_\_\_\_\_ the security system ten seconds after you close the door.
2. If you start to feel sick on the journey, take these pills. They'll \_\_\_\_\_ the effects of the travel sickness and you'll quickly feel a lot better.
3. I saw that new science fiction film "Star Sailors" last night. The camerawork and special effects were really good but the \_\_\_\_\_ was absolutely awful.
4. After I finish putting your details into the computer, your new savings account will become \_\_\_\_\_ and you can start using it straight away.
5. The government intends to \_\_\_\_\_ a new law to create more jobs and bring more unemployed people back into the workforce.
6. The problem with the management in this company is that there's too much talk and not enough \_\_\_\_\_. The managers need to do something soon.
7. I think someone has been using my credit card. There's a \_\_\_\_\_ for a new television on my statement, but I don't remember making it.
8. Remember that our opponents in this game are a very hard team. If one of their players kicks you, it's vitally important that you don't \_\_\_\_\_.
9. I thought that I was really fit and healthy, but I found this army training course far more \_\_\_\_\_ than I thought. I'm exhausted! I need a good rest tonight.
10. This is a commercial opportunity that won't last forever, so you need to \_\_\_\_\_ now and take it if you want to make the best of it.
11. The great thing about travelling around other countries is that you meet a lot of people that you can \_\_\_\_\_ with and really get to know.
12. Your problem is that you always wait for work opportunities to come your way. You should be far more \_\_\_\_\_ and create your own opportunities.

### 3. caedere

Put the most suitable word in each space. Think about the part of speech required in each space. Make sure you use the correct form.

*concise, decide, decisive, excise, fratricide, homicide, incision, incisive, précis, precise, precision, suicide*

1. Jim's comments in the debate were so \_\_\_\_\_ and persuasive that he completely destroyed the other team's arguments and his team won easily.
2. In the past when a king died his sons would often compete to succeed him on the throne, and this often led to \_\_\_\_\_, when one brother killed the others.
3. I can't tell you the \_\_\_\_\_ amount you will get from the return on your investment until we complete the process, but it should be around £100,000.
4. In this reading test, the important information is usually contained in only one or two words, so you should make your answers as \_\_\_\_\_ as possible.
5. The operation was a success as the surgeons managed to \_\_\_\_\_ the whole of the brain tumour, so we expect your husband to make a full recovery.
6. Both universities have made me a good offer of a place for next year, but I simply can't \_\_\_\_\_ which is better. Which one should I choose?
7. When the police found the gun in the dead man's hand they thought it was \_\_\_\_\_, but now there's new evidence that he didn't actually kill himself.
8. The whole annual report is about 20,000 words, so I have to read through it and then write a \_\_\_\_\_ of it in about 1000 words for the next meeting.
9. William's victory at Hastings in 1066 was a \_\_\_\_\_ event in English language history, because it meant French would become the dominant language.
10. At the start of the operation, the surgeon picked up his scalpel and carefully made a deep \_\_\_\_\_ in the patient's chest.
11. I'm afraid this microscope isn't good enough to examine micro-organisms. We need one with far greater \_\_\_\_\_ and detail.
12. When the police entered the house they found three dead bodies, so they called in detectives from the \_\_\_\_\_ division to investigate.

## 4. caput 1

Put the most suitable word in each space. Think about the part of speech required in each space. Make sure you use the correct form.

*achieve, cape, capital (2), capitation, cattle, chapter, chef, chief, recapitulate*

1. This book is so exciting I can't put it down. I started it this morning and I've almost reached the final \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Some farms in Australia are so big that they have thousands of \_\_\_\_\_ which roam over huge areas of open country.
3. The sea was quite rough, but after we sailed round the \_\_\_\_\_ we found a sheltered harbour to anchor the boat for the night.
4. The first \_\_\_\_\_ of Roman Britain was Colchester, but it was later moved to London, which had become the biggest city.
5. There are many reasons why this business plan failed, but the \_\_\_\_\_ reason is that we simply didn't have enough money to make it work.
6. Right, so just to make sure everyone understands what we have to do, I'm going to \_\_\_\_\_. If you're still not sure, please tell me.
7. The tennis player, Roger Hinton, has announced his retirement. During his career the highest position he \_\_\_\_\_ in the world rankings was number three.
8. We've decided to go on strike for more money, so everyone has to pay a \_\_\_\_\_ fee in order to support our action against the management.
9. After three years in France studying haute cuisine, Paul Taylor became a \_\_\_\_\_ at one of the best restaurants in London.
10. If we're going to set up this company properly we need to raise a lot more \_\_\_\_\_. We could ask the bank for a loan or get people to invest.

## 5. caput 2

Put the most suitable word in each space. Think about the part of speech required in each space. Make sure you use the correct form.

*cape, capital, capitalise, capitulate, captain, chieftain, decapitate, precipice, precipitation, precipitous*

1. The north coast of the island has gentle slopes and long beaches, but the south coast is lined with \_\_\_\_\_ cliffs, which drop straight into the sea.
2. The manager tried desperately to keep his job, but when he realised he had lost the trust of the players, he finally \_\_\_\_\_ and announced he was leaving.
3. When I was a girl, I had a big waterproof \_\_\_\_\_, which I would put on to cover my clothes whenever I went out in the rain.
4. Good morning. This is your \_\_\_\_\_ speaking. We will be flying at an altitude of ten thousand metres and the flight time to New York is four hours.
5. A good chess player should \_\_\_\_\_ on the mistakes that an opponent makes. You have to be ruthless and single-minded if you want to win.
6. The road through the mountains was so narrow and dangerous that we were very lucky not to go over a \_\_\_\_\_ and down into the river far below.
7. In ancient times, it was customary every summer for the \_\_\_\_\_ of all the tribes in the area to come together and settle disputes over a great feast.
8. The British government finally abolished \_\_\_\_\_ punishment in 1965. Since then, the sentence for murder has been life imprisonment.
9. The guillotine was used in the French Revolution to \_\_\_\_\_ enemies of the state as quickly as possible.
10. This area has such a low level of annual \_\_\_\_\_ that most of it is desert and it is very difficult to grow crops without irrigation.

## Answers

### Exercise 1.

1. navigate; 2. agile; 3. agent; 4. reaction; 5. agitated; 6. agenda; 7. actual; 8. agency; 9. act; 10. acting; 11. actor; 12. active

### Exercise 2.

1. activate; 2. counteract; 3. acting; 4. actionable; 5. enact; 6. action; 7. transaction; 8. react; 9. exacting; 10. act; 11. interact; 12. proactive

### Exercise 3.

1. incisive; 2. fratricide; 3. precise; 4. concise; 5. excise; 6. decide; 7. suicide; 8. précis; 9. decisive; 10. incision; 11. precision; 12. homicide

### Exercise 4

1. chapter; 2. cattle; 3. cape; 4. capital; 5. chief; 6. recapitulate; 7. achieve; 8. capitation; 9. chef; 10. capital

### Exercise 5

1. precipitous; 2. capitulated; 3. cape; 4. captain; 5. capitalise; 6. precipice; 7. chieftains; 8. capital; 9. decapitate; 10. precipitation

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