

# How Visual Latin Works

The purpose of Visual Latin is to learn to read Latin in a nonlinear way. Your habit, as an English-speaker, of looking at a sentence as a linear code is so deeply rooted that you can't think your way out of it. Using Visual Latin breaks the habit gradually. A Latin sentence is a nonlinear mosaic-like image of an idea or situation. To read it properly, you have to break the linear habit and look at it as an image being built up one element at a time. Each word, or cluster of words, is an element. An element contains all of its meaning, semantic and syntactic, within itself. There is no syntactic meaning to be found in the sentence. In fact, there really is no such thing in Latin as a sentence the way we think of it in English.

There is no sharp distinction in Latin between semantic and syntactic meaning. The two are integral parts of the complete meaning of an element. Their respective qualities intermingle. For example, the semantic meaning of a noun is colored by its case. Case, in turn, has a certain semantic quality.

Each page begins with a line of text, without capital letters or punctuation. The words are separated by dots, in the style of some Roman manuscripts, to remind you to look for all the meaning in the words themselves.

Below this, the line is spread out in a series of quasimusical staves. The staff shows the line in a nonlinear way and the series shows how the images builds, element by element. Below this is a box containing all the new vocabulary in the line. Each item is given in its generic dictionary form, but is defined according to the immediate context. Each item is staggered to fall below its place in the staves. You only have to drop your eyes to see it. Below this is another box in which elements of the line are translated, not always in good English prose, but in ways that help reveal the structure of the element. Finally, there may be a box containing supplemental information.

The staff contains six lines, five for the cases and one for verbs and everything else that doesn't fit on a case line. Relational elements, including prepositions and phrasal conjunctions, go on their respective case lines. Verbal elements, adverbs, clausal conjunctions, interjections, and locatives go on the verb-plus line. Locatives are marked (loc.). Vocatives go on the nominative line and are marked (voc.).

<i>n</i>	( <i>nominative case</i> )
<i>g</i>	( <i>genitive case</i> )
<i>d</i>	( <i>dative case</i> )
<i>ac</i>	( <i>accusative case</i> )
<i>ab</i>	( <i>ablative case</i> )
<i>v+</i>	( <i>verbs, adverbs, etc.</i> )