

Teaching Advanced Authors and Their Works: What Worked for Me

Your students have graduated from an elementary Latin textbook series; they have all of the basics down, and now it is on to authentic texts! This transition is not an easy one, however. What I outline below is the routine I developed over the last few years of my career for all of my classes that involved reading authentic Latin texts (pre-AP, AP, and my senior Capstone classes), and I really liked the results it brought. I think it was effective without being burdensome (indeed I never assigned actual homework), and my students often said that class flew by because each class period was broken up into small chunks of time. It should be said that I also included various special projects outside of this routine in all my classes except for AP, where the pacing generally did not allow us to do so.

Here's the basic schedule (50-minute class period):

0-5 minutes: an extra credit translation quiz over the previous day's material

5-10 minutes: a Gimkit/Blooket/etc. game previewing the vocabulary the students would encounter that day

10-30 minutes: students translate in groups

30-45 minutes: we review the translation and talk about the reading

45-50 minutes: students take a review quiz

0-5 minutes: extra credit translation quiz

The beginning of every class period begins with a translation quiz over the hardest portion of the previous day's reading. I picked a portion that was 3-5 "segments" in length (segmenting is how the AP translation free response question is graded).

For example, take the first lines of the *Aeneid*:
Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris
Italiam, ~~fato profugus, Laviniaque~~ venit

I'd divide up the segments as:

- (1) Arma virumque cano
- (2) qui primus
- (3) Italiam venit
- (4) Troiae ab oris

This is not an exact science, but each segment is a sense unit (for instance, we can also just group *qui primus Italiam venit* together in one segment). Regardless, I'd pick the hardest part of the previous day's work because it gave the students extra practice. The students would have a limited amount of time (more for logistics than anything) to provide the translation, and then would turn it in. We'd then go over it quickly together.

These extra credit points earned would go toward their test grades, which the students generally needed to augment their raw scores on what was essentially a mini-AP exam (20 MCQs, 2 translation FRQs, 2 short answer FRQs).

5-10 minutes: a Gimkit/Blooket/etc. game

After the students turned in their translation quiz, they would get out their phones/Chromebooks and log into a Gimkit or Blooket with the code I displayed on the board. The game included all of the vocabulary the kids would see in that day's reading.

Each question was multiple choice, and it was simply the word presented in the same way they'd see it that day. For example, they wouldn't get "ora, -ae, f.: shore", they'd see "oris". The answer choices would be all in the same part of speech and all options of other words they'd see. So, for *oris*, the answer choices would be: shores, arms/weapons, Latium, and war.

Here are [all the Gimkit quizzes](#) I created for the now-retired AP Latin curriculum (many of the *Aeneid* quizzes, however, are still relevant).

When I created the quizzes, I would populate them with literally every word, but tried to keep them under 60 words in length. Thus, I would end up excluding the most common/obvious vocabulary (*et, puella, Aeneas*, etc.) My students would see about 70-80 questions on average, so a list of 60 words means that they would generally see every word at least once.

If I had to do it all over again, the question would not be just the word, but the word in context. For example, I would present *Troiae ab oris* instead of just *oris*, so that my students would be even more familiar with the reading and get used to using context to help decide on the meaning of the word.

Note that giving them a quiz every day over every word they'd encounter means that the highest frequency vocabulary rose to the top. There was no need to curate that, because the sheer volume of quizzes would do that automatically. I'm glad to say that this was very effective for vocabulary retention.

At the end of the Gimkit and as the students are putting away their phones/getting out their books and notebooks, I'm showing the most-missed data from the Gimkit and we are going over that tough vocabulary. I'll often try to give them a way to remember the word (e.g., a derivative).

When I started doing this, I was concerned that I was giving up 5 minutes of class time every day—that's half a class period a week! How much would it slow us down? In fact, the opposite; because the vocabulary was so fresh in their minds, the students read at a much faster pace. Conservatively, we broke even, but I'm guessing that, over the course of a semester, we probably gained at least a few days.

10-30 minutes: students translate

For the next twenty minutes or so, the students translated. They could work by themselves, with a partner, or with a small group. I didn't care as long as they were working and they were learning. I always tried to sum up the day's content in a funny or witty way (for *Aeneid* 4, it was a lot of Aeneas-shaming!).

There's a small but really important piece to this though: I gave them a [packet of the text](#) in 16 pt font and triple-spaced with one rule: they could not write out the translation. They can write anything else they want on those pages... glosses, notes on syntax, figures of speech, arrows and lines illustrating what words go together... anything but the actual translation. The first few weeks of the year are tough in this regard, because I promise them that if I see translations, I'll take up their packet and give them a new one. It always took a few incidents for them to believe me!

As the students translated, I was constantly walking around and providing help when and where I could. This individual tutoring mid-class was very effective. It also helped the kids stay on task.

30-45 minutes: review of the translation

Over the next 15 minutes, we would review the translation. I would cold-call as many students as possible and grade them on a scale of 1-5. Those grades would become a classwork grade which

contributed a significant amount toward their semester average (because, of course, this is a huge part of what we are doing every day). Here is how I defined this scale on my syllabus:

- 5: completely prepared, mistakes, if any, are minor issues (the tense of verb, for instance)
- 4: prepared, but you make several mistakes, including vocabulary; your response is lucid and fluid
- 3: somewhat prepared, but you are making critical mistakes; your response is labored and unpolished
- 2: not prepared and there are many mistakes, but you roughly have the overall sense
- 1: totally unprepared; unresponsive

In reality, there were few instances in which a student earned a 3 and almost no grades of 2 or 1. I knew my students and their capabilities, so I would offer the easier selections to the struggling students or, if I had helped a student figure out a portion during their work time, I would often give that portion so they could show off what they learned to the whole class. This cold-calling and assessment was not meant as a “gotcha” exercise; the focus was always on positivity and success. The only difficulties were when kids simply had not done the work, in which case I would grade them appropriately and then have a follow-up conversation with them individually that usually informed them of the grade and encouraged them to balance that grade out with some good grades the next day. I will also say that, if I had a student with a couple low translation grades, I would try to set them up for success over ensuing cold-calls.

45-50 minutes: review quiz

The last five minutes (or so) of class was dedicated to students proving that they have understood the material by taking a 10-question quiz hosted on my learning management system (LMS) called Buzz. These quizzes, such as those for *Aeneid* Book 1 found [here](#), are almost exclusively multiple choice and could be taken multiple times (while each quiz was 10 questions, there were 2x-3x times that in the item pool, assuring that students would receive a different quiz each time). So, if a student knew the subject matter and earned a good grade at the end of class, that student had nothing else to do outside class. If that student needed more practice, then the quizzes provided that opportunity.

The results of these quizzes also helped my instruction, as I could see what the kids were struggling with and pivot to address those areas, whether those areas involved grammatical concepts or certain portions of the text we were reading.

The other benefit to this bank of quizzes is that they became a study resource when it came time for the test. I would “unlock” (i.e., take off the 10-minute time limit for each quiz as well as the due date) every quiz, and the students had hundreds of questions to augment their preparation for the upcoming assessment.

Also worth noting is that my LMS allowed me to attach files and videos to the instructions, so this became an easy way for me to connect my students to my [YouTube channel](#). For every reading we studied in class, I would make a simple YouTube video of me going over the lines (such as [this one](#) for *Aeneid* 1.1-3). Kids could use this as an answer key of sorts and verify what they did not understand and why they did not understand it. My kids told me they would watch all of them at once at 2x speed!

Assessments

I never gave vocabulary quizzes, because the daily Gimkits did that work for the students. My tests, however, were like miniature AP exams. My philosophy was that, if they were going to take a high-stakes AP Exam at the end of the year (or the year after), then they needed to become comfortable with that format. Plus, I felt that, generally, the AP exam format was an effective evaluation of the students’

understanding. This mimicked the now-retired curriculum, and the AP exam is now reformatted slightly, but this was the structure of my tests:

- 20 multiple choice questions (2 ten-question “long” MCQ sets)
- 2 translation sections (like the old FRQ1 and 2)
- 2 short answer sections (like the old FRQ4 and 5)

I diligently kept a library of published AP FRQs that went back to 1980, and I would use actual FRQs and their answer keys when possible. When I didn’t have a retired FRQ, then I created one that I felt could have been on an AP Exam.

For the MCQs, I used the multiple choice sets for every single line of the *Aeneid* and *de Bello Gallico* that I wrote for Bolchazy-Carducci’s *Lumina* series, and again I tried to copy the question difficulty level and distribution that would mimic what students would find on their AP Exam.

Notice that the old FRQ3, the long essay, was not included in my tests. I would give that prompt (again, using an old AP Latin one or creating similar one) as an extra credit essay due a few days after the test date. I graded these with the AP FRQ3 rubric of 0-5 points and multiplied that score x2, yielding up to 10 extra credit points.

In retrospect, I’m not entirely satisfied with the limited participation in the extra credit assignment nor the often cursory nature with which students often completed it (I’m assuming the general thought was, “Hey, let’s write one quickly before class because 2 or 4 extra points is better than 0 points.”). I think I would make the essay mandatory for any student whose score (even with the points from the daily extra credit translations) was lower than 80%.

The point of all of this extra credit (the daily translation quizzes and the long essay) was to empower students over their grades on what were (intentionally) very difficult tests of their understanding of the material.

Outcomes

I’m happy to say that the class averages in my Latin III, Latin IV, AP Latin, and Capstone classes were generally high (low-mid A range), and I think that is generally an accurate reflection of how well my students, on the whole, acquired what I was teaching them. Another measure was their performance on the AP Exam. Over the 15 years or so that I taught AP Latin, I had very few students earn less than a 3 (single digits... maybe 6-8 students total), with an average AP score of about 3.8-4.0.

I should add that I was an ardent believer that every student should take the exam; I was confident that every student could earn at least a 3, and thereby earn college credit (or at least course exemption) at their state institution (and most other colleges and universities).