

# Composition, Competition, and Community: A Preliminary Study of the Use of Latin Composition in a Cooperative Learning Environment

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents a method for incorporating Latin composition into beginning or intermediate level Latin courses to increase students' mastery of morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. This approach uses a semester-long team-based competition in a cooperative learning environment wherein students are accountable both for their own learning as well as that of their peers. Rather than inducing further anxiety into composition exercises, the element of competition proved to increase student preparation outside of class and engagement within the classroom. Two key elements of the method are the assigning of specific roles and tasks to each team member and reshuffling of team members. The end result was an engaged, respectful, and cooperative classroom community. Finally, this article presents the preliminary results of the first phase of a four-year study to test the effectiveness of this method.

## KEYWORDS

beginning, introduction, Latin, composition, cooperative learning, competition, peer-learning

## INTRODUCTION

Like many others, I belong to the camp of instructors who firmly believe that composition in Latin is essential to the acquisition of the language.<sup>1</sup> While students may not be hitting the streets with Latin on their tongues, active use of the language forces students to apply the rules of morphology and syntax, and consider the nuances of vocabulary and word order. In my experience, regular Latin composition

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<sup>1</sup> Latin composition and creative approaches to incorporating composition into introductory and intermediate classes has been the topic of scholarly conversation for some time; for some excellent discussions of the benefits of composition and creative pedagogical approaches, see Dugdale, Gruber-Miller, Beneker, Lord, Davisson, and Saunders. The approach I discuss here is not creative composition, but the use of cooperative learning in conjunction with regular composition exercises.

exercises create more confident students whose knowledge of vocabulary and proficiency in applying syntactical and morphological rules greatly improve. Latin composition, however, can be intimidating and I found my students grumbling whenever I assigned composition work. I wanted the composition assignments in the first year of Latin to be less onerous and more effective, and I therefore set about changing how I was incorporating composition exercises into my Latin courses.

My objective in this paper is not to defend the utility Latin composition, which others have convincingly argued, nor to prove the effectiveness of a cooperative approach to language learning, data for which I am beginning to compile, but to model one method of incorporating both composition and cooperative learning into beginning Latin courses. This method, which I have developed over six years, has increased student engagement and preparation in my Latin courses, and has also increased retention of students from one semester of Latin to the next. This is the first year of the formal collection of data to test the effectiveness of this method, and I will continue the study over the next four years to gauge whether and to what degree this method is an effective pedagogical tool. The data that I have collected thus far does indicate that this method may increase students' Latin proficiency, but the results are too preliminary to draw firm conclusions. My hope is that others may experiment with this method themselves and improve upon it to make it more effective.

## **BACKGROUND**

When I began to design a new method for incorporating composition into my Latin classes, my initial goal was to make the exercise less daunting and encourage students to be more invested in the quality of their composition assignments. To do this, I wanted to create a sense of accountability beyond completing work for a grade. As others have reported, collecting and correcting composition assignments or reviewing them briefly in class proved to be a marginally effective exercise.<sup>2</sup> Feedback given on composition exercises days after initial completion prevented the students' timely reflection on corrections, which hindered their ability to internalize and apply the corrections to new exercises. Furthermore, if students felt that the only risk for not completing the more difficult sections of composition assignments was a lower homework score or incurring my—rather than their peers'—disappointment,

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<sup>2</sup> For example, see Beneker 2.

some students would not finish assignments and their learning would predictably plateau.

My secondary goal was to create a cooperative learning community wherein students could make mistakes, receive direction from their peers instead of from me, and take responsibility for their own work.<sup>3</sup> Latin composition can indeed be challenging, and students would report that completing composition homework takes more time and review than translating Latin into English. In order to encourage more careful composition preparation, I wanted students to share their completed work in class, as well as receive correction and direction from their peers instead of from me. The added bonus would be that students would internalize the lessons better when they had to explain syntactical or morphological concepts to their peers. In other words, they would both learn by doing and learn by teaching. Having each student share his or her composition with the class, however, would take assignments that were already intimidating and turn them into exercises in terror and humiliation. Obviously this would amount to cruel and unusual punishment with little pedagogical value. Therefore, I wanted to add an element of fun and excitement, as well as incentivize careful completion of the homework. I came up with what I somewhat facetiously call Grammar Fun Days (GFDs).

### **GFDs: COOPERATIVE LEARNING WITH A COMPETITIVE ELEMENT**

GFDs are centered on cooperative learning strategies with a small dose of competitive learning mixed in. I should stress that the competitive aspect of GFDs is minor, but I strongly believe that low-stakes competition can be a positive incentive and foster stronger bonds between peers to create an effective learning community. Hostile competition that puts a single student on display and pits one student against others can be a detriment to learning, as studies have shown.<sup>4</sup> If, however, the pres-

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<sup>3</sup> For an excellent introduction to cooperative learning in first year Latin and examples of implementation, see Argetsinger, whose discussion greatly influenced my pedagogical approach to first year Latin. I also found Millis and Cottell, Jr., 3-19, a convincing summary of the benefits of cooperative learning in university classrooms. See also Argetsinger 83, no. 6, for further reading on cooperative and collaborative learning.

<sup>4</sup> For discussions of the negative effects on learning that the competitive classroom may have, see Millis and Cottell, Jr., 40-41 and Argetsinger 83, no. 5. The arguments against competitive classrooms focus on the individual-against-all approach, where in one student is put on display or grading is curved according to performance. The competitive game that I am presenting depends on cooperative learning and low-stakes team competition, wherein no individual is solely responsible for the team's work and there is no grade at stake.

sure of performance and responsibility for work outcome is diffused among a group that has collaborated on an answer, the pressure is greatly lessened. When a small amount of competitive learning is dovetailed into a cooperative learning environment, the low-stakes competition can add an element of excitement to the classroom.

Furthermore, students are not competing for grades, but for token Latin prizes (books vel sim.) awarded at the end of the semester. There is a portion of the final grade that is earned by thorough completion of homework and participation in class, and the assignments used in GFDs contribute to that grade. The grade earned for GFDs, however, is completely removed from the competition. A student can earn full credit for his or her assignment and participation on a GFD regardless of the performance of his or her team, which reduces much of the performance anxiety that can be associated with competition. Completion grades rely on individual accountability, while competition points for each team rely on shared accountability. Furthermore, since there may be more than one accurate translation for a sentence during a round, any well-composed sentence can earn a team a point. In fact, in some rounds, several or even every team may end up winning a point as long as they achieve the criteria set for the round. This not only reduces the anxiety of competing for a single point, but also emphasizes how decisions in word choice, order, and syntax can create nuance in meaning.

### SETTING AND ADAPTATION

I initially designed GFDs for Introductory Latin courses while using *Wheelock's Latin*. I have revised GFDs over the course of six years and have used it in introductory courses that used *Wheelock's Latin*, S. Shelmerdine's *Introduction to Latin*, and most recently, Keller and Russell's *Learn to Read Latin*. I have used this method in classrooms at a public university with enrollment numbers in the thirties as well as with smaller groups numbering in the teens at liberal arts colleges. Some classes met three times per week and others met four times per week. At my current university, Introductory Latin classes meet four days a week for 52 minutes each meeting and I typically can hold a GFD every five to seven meetings. I have also employed GFDs in Intermediate Latin courses that used selected passages from various authors as well as one that focused on Livy. In other words, this approach to competitive and cooperative composition is highly adaptable to different texts, levels, length of terms, types of institutions, and course goals. This method may be as equally useful in Greek courses as in Latin courses. It may be particularly useful

in a high school setting where the class meets more frequently and with more time devoted to mastering individual syntactical and grammatical concepts. Furthermore, it can be one tool with which instructors may aid and track student progress towards achieving the first goal of the Standards of Classical Language Learning: Communication in a Classical Language.<sup>5</sup> I continue to adapt how I employ this method and would be eager to hear from those who have tried similar approaches to Latin composition.

During the first years that I used this method, I had students work in groups only on GFDs. Over time, however, I found that the cooperative learning environment on GFDs increased students' understanding of the material. Initially I was reluctant to surrender my lecture-driven pedagogical style to the unpredictability of peer instruction, but the results were hard to ignore. Students were more comfortable asking their peers for help or clarification of a concept in a small group—or calling me over for a small group workshop—than they were asking me in front of the entire class. Furthermore, students had to put syntactical explanations into their own words in order to explain it to their peers, which helped clarify their own ideas and understanding.

Due to the success of GFDs, I began devoting more class time to cooperative learning throughout the semester and have started this year assigning students to teams throughout the week, which then form the structure for GFDs. Every week to two weeks I assign students to teams of three with whom they work during in-class exercises until the next GFD. The team members are assigned specific roles and duties each day within their group, which rotate daily. On regular class meetings, the roles include a Facilitator, who acts as team leader, a Representative, who speaks for the group, and a Reporter, who records the team's questions and progress for the day, which I review after class. On GFDs, the roles are the same except that I replace the Reporter with an Expert role, who takes the lead during a GFD round. My hope is that when competition day rolls around, the team has already coalesced and the resultant camaraderie has instilled a sense of shared accountability for each member's learning success. I change the members of the teams weekly or bi-weekly and ensure that each team has students with different levels of ability. This helps to increase contact between all members of the classroom community, distributes high-achieving students throughout the teams, and prevents single-team dominance

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<sup>5</sup> The Standards are available online at several websites including that of the American Classical League: [http://www.aclclassics.org/uploads/assets/files/Standards\\_Classical\\_Learning.pdf](http://www.aclclassics.org/uploads/assets/files/Standards_Classical_Learning.pdf).

and competitive hostility. Furthermore, by rotating the roles and tasks that each team member must fulfill, stronger team members cannot dominate within a team by taking on the same role each day and ‘covering’ for weaker members. Instead, stronger team members must support and contribute to the learning of any team members who may be struggling in order for the team to succeed.

### METHOD

I hold a GFD every week to week and a half after spending an adequate amount of class time introducing new syntactical concepts and practicing new skills. Once the class has practiced translating from Latin to English in class and at home, I assign a number of English-to-Latin sentences from the textbook like those found in the Practice and Review section of each chapter in *Wheelock’s Latin*, although periodically I supply students with a short narrative using the vocabulary from their texts. Students prepare the assignment on their own, although they are not prevented from working with their team outside of class. Every student is responsible for completing the entire assignment for his or her own individual grade. In addition, each team member is designated as team ‘expert’ for two to three of the sentences from the entire assignment. This student takes the lead during the rounds in which these sentences are the focus, which I will explain below. On the day of the competition, which is divided into a series of rounds, students collaborate with their team to construct the most accurate translation and explanation.

In order to ensure that each student has completed his or her homework before class, I visit each group at the start of class and check for completion and also collect the homework at the end of the class session to verify careful completion and look for any widely shared mistakes. Any corrections students make to their homework while working with their team must be made in a different color pen or they must otherwise note where mistakes and corrections were made. This simple check for completion and evidence of correction, in addition to the interdependence of the team members for shared success, has all but eliminated incomplete homework on GFDs.

Effective cooperative learning requires a clear division of labor among the individuals with assignment of duties to each student, so that the success of the group requires that each individual fulfill his or her assigned task. Therefore, to increase individual accountability, each student is assigned a role that rotates after each round, and every team member has the opportunity to perform the duties for

each of the roles over the course of a single GFD. I typically have groups of three, as I have found this to be an ideal number to ensure that each member of the team is engaged, but additional roles could be developed for larger classes. For example, when I had a class size in the low thirties, I increased the team number to four and added the role of ‘scribe’ in addition to the roles discussed below. The scribe was responsible for writing the team’s final translation on an overhead (to save time spent writing on the board) during their deliberations, which I would collect from each team and display at the end of the round.

The three roles I use are ‘expert,’ ‘representative,’ and ‘facilitator.’ As mentioned above, each member of the team is required to prepare all the sentences, but is assigned certain sentences on which they are to be the team’s expert. The expert is the one who is responsible for the initial translation and syntax explanation of the round. They take the lead on the GFD round when that sentence is covered and are responsible for explaining the syntax of the sentence to the rest of the team. The person to the left of the expert becomes the facilitator for that round. The facilitator compares the expert’s translation with that of the other two members and asks the team where they would like to make changes to word choice and order, as well as any syntactical or morphological changes. All team members contribute to the process and collaborate on a final translation, which the facilitator writes on a sheet of paper. Finally, the person to the left of the facilitator is the representative. The representative is the one who will take the translation to the board and must explain the team’s decisions to the class, and therefore must ask the expert for any clarifications. This helps to encourage the expert to explain the syntax clearly and accurately enough to the rest of the team and gives the other members the opportunity to ask for clarification.

A breakdown of the round looks like this:

- I announce which sentence will be the focus of the round and how much time is allotted for preparing final translations.
- The team expert on that sentence shares his or her translation and explains the syntactical elements to the team.
- The facilitator compares this translation to those of the other two members and notes any discrepancies to discuss.
- The team discusses differences between the individual translations and finalizes their team translation, which the facilitator writes down.

- The representative repeats the explanation of the translation and syntax, and asks for any needed clarification from the expert.
- The representative writes the translation and any syntactical identification on the board.
- The class discusses any differences between the teams' translations.
- Each team representative explains his or her team's decisions and final translation.
- Accurate translations and explanations receive points.

The first GFD of a semester takes a bit of time to set up and explain, but once the teams have the hang of it, the rounds move very rapidly. Depending on the complexity of a sentence, I allot from four to six minutes for team consultation. After the sentences are on the board, which takes no more than a minute to two minutes, the team explanations may take upwards of five to seven minutes total. Usually, about ten minutes are spent on each round, which allows about five to six sentences to be reviewed in a fifty-two minute class (which is the length of the class at my university). Some sentences are quickly mastered, while others are more challenging and require more time for the round. The fast pace of the rounds keeps the teams focused and on task throughout the hour.

Below are three example sentences that were used at different point during the year. Each round consists of sentences that focus on syntactical and morphological concepts most recently covered in class and emphasize recently learned vocabulary. The first example comes from *Learn to Read Latin* chapter II Drill Sentences B.<sup>6</sup>

**English sentence:** The queen was pondering the deeds of (her) daughter, but (she was pondering) the words of (her) son.

**Target translation:** *Rēgīna facta fīliae, sed verba fīlii cōgitābat.*

At this point in the semester, students have practiced first and second declension nouns, and numerous case uses. Additionally, the irregular verbs *esse* and *posse* have been introduced along with the present, imperfect, and future active indicative forms of first and second conjugation verbs. Word order is a common obstacle that students struggle with in the opening weeks of the semester. I reiterate the advice given by the text to put expressed subjects at the beginning of the sentence, verbs at the end, and possessive genitives after the possessed noun.

<sup>6</sup> Keller and Russell 85.



In one class's experience with this round, there were two teams that repeated the verb in both phrases in spite of the parenthetical hint given in the text. While the repetition of the verb is a stylistic choice and not a syntactical error, it did allow us the opportunity to discuss balance in phrases that are in parallel sequence. One team put the verb at the end of the first phrase and argued that it gave better balance to the sentence, which we decided was valid. Aside from a few omissions of macrons and the repetition or placement of the verb, each team arrived at similar translations and gave accurate explanations of the syntax. Those teams that met all the criteria for the round received a point.

The second example is taken from Chapter 25 of *Wheelock's Latin*<sup>7</sup>, which students tackled about midway through the two-semester course sequence.

**English sentence:** We thought that your sisters were writing the letter.

**Target translation:** *Cōgitāvimus tuās sorōrēs scrībere litterās.*

This sentence is taken from a chapter that focuses on infinitives and indirect statements. In this example, not only do the teams need to recognize that 'we thought' introduces indirect speech, but they must also apply the rules of sequence of tenses and use a present active infinitive for 'were writing.' Furthermore, the second person possessive adjective 'your' requires the teams to discuss the ambiguity of the English adjective and decide whether to interpret it as a singular or a plural. Either option is valid so long as the form they choose agrees with 'sisters.'

The representatives from the teams all write their team compositions on the board at the same time and are not allowed to consult with their team mates or other team representatives to make further changes to their sentence once they put it on the board. Each team representative then gives a brief explanation of the choices they made by discussing the syntactical elements of the sentence. They explain their verb tenses, noun-adjective cases and agreement, and summarize indirect statements. Often when the representative is explaining the sentence or listening to the other team representatives they see an error their own team has made. Although the representatives cannot make changes to their team's final composition, the immediate feedback and correction by class peers encourages more engagement with and better retention of the language than if I were collecting homework and returning delayed feedback. The active feedback method fostered by GFDs also serves as another chance to review points of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and word order.

<sup>7</sup> Wheelock and LaFleur 167.

For example, one team used the personal pronoun ‘tuī’ instead of the possessive adjective, which provided the class the opportunity to discuss the select cases where the genitive of the pronoun is used. I stay largely silent during this exercise and allow the students to guide one another through explanations and corrections. Only if an error is not noticed will I ask a question myself, but this rarely occurs since the teams are alert to find points to correct. Corrections are not limited to only the new concepts covered in that chapter, but rather the entire sentence must be accurate. The feedback and correction by the teams is fun, respectful, and lively, and it allows the students to demonstrate their growing proficiency and internalization of previous and current concepts, which is especially rewarding to observe. After the team representatives have explained their translations, each team that has met the criteria for the round receives points. We then move onto the next sentence and round.

While the exercises emphasize the syntactical constructions introduced in the chapter under study, the sentences also necessarily incorporate concepts from earlier chapters, which serve as an opportunity for review. When I want to explicitly integrate review into the rounds, I have the students label syntactical usages below their sentences when they write them on the board. For example, in the following sentence, taken from Wheelock Chapter 31, the primary objective of the exercise is to illustrate the chapter’s introduction of cum clauses and use of the irregular verb *ferre*, but it also incorporates an indirect question and two different ablative uses, which had been introduced in previous chapters.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, in addition to translating the sentence, each team must identify the indirect question, its use of the subjunctive and, the use of the ablative of agent with a passive verb and the ablative of manner. When I announce the round, I only tell them to identify all subjunctive and ablative uses and do not hint as to how many there may be in the sentence.

**English sentence:** Since you know what help is being brought by our six friends, these evils can be endured with courage.

**Target translation:** *Cum sciās quod ferātur auxilium ā sex amīcīs nostrīs, haec scelera cum animīs possunt ferrī.*

Most teams correctly identify the first subjunctive (*sciās*) used in a causal cum clause, as this was a primary focus of the chapter. The second subjunctive (*ferātur*) is used in an indirect question, signaled by *quod*. Most of the teams supply the correct form, since it is the secondary topic of the chapter, but often miss the in-

<sup>8</sup> Wheelock and LaFleur 215.

direct question usage, which is a concept covered in the previous chapter. Likewise, the first ablative (*ā sex amīcīs nostrīs*) usually is correctly translated and labeled as an ablative of agent with a passive verb, but the second ablative (*cum animīs*), can present problems. Some teams label it as an ablative of means, which provides the opportunity to review the differences between the two usages. Furthermore, students have learned that the ablative of manner only uses *cum* when there is not a modifying adjective, in which cases it is omitted. This presents another opportunity to review the rule of ablative usage. Four points are available during this round for valid translations and accurate syntactical explanations.

### **PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

After the initial GFD this year, which as I mentioned above is the first time I have used cooperative learning techniques on a daily basis instead of only on GFDs, I am hopeful that this approach is effectively increasing student learning and engagement. When I reviewed their individual homework after class, I could see that students had more difficulty working through the sentences on their own. As I moved around the room during the round, however, it was clear that they came to their team members with precise questions and explanations. Only once during this GFD did a team call me over because each member was stumped and could not guide each other through the construction. They also moved seamlessly through their assigned roles and tasks for each round, having practiced with similar roles within their teams throughout the week. I hope that this portends that the cooperative approach to learning that I am implementing this year may be having a positive effect: students are actively instructing one another, asking questions, and expressing the syntactical concepts in their own words.

While students reported through anonymous feedback in previous years that the GFDs were aiding in their understanding of Latin, I wanted more quantifiable evidence for improvement. As a small and initial step toward gathering evidence for measurable improvement, I have started to collect data this year and have selected sentences to track through several stages of students' composition: initial translation, corrected translation after team consultation, and translation of a similar sentence on an exam or quiz. The sample size is too small to be able to provide much basis for analysis at this point and I will not draw firm conclusions as to the effectiveness of this method until I have collected more data over the coming years. Nonetheless, even this small and imperfect pool of data indicates improvement in students' ap-

plication of syntactical and morphological rules as well as a better command of the vocabulary. Below are three example sentences that I have tracked this year.

**Sentence in workbook:** The Romans used to have a great empire (Use Dative of the Possessor).

**Target translation:** *Rōmānīs erat magnum imperium.*

**Sentence on exam:** Great poets have many good books.

**Target translation:** *Magnīs poētīs sunt multī librī bonī.*

The initial sentence provided difficulty, which was anticipated since several teams had reported that they were struggling with the possessive dative construction. As mentioned earlier, I ask students to indicate their corrections on their homework so that I can easily see where they originally made errors before consulting with their team. For this example, there was nearly a fifty-fifty split in accuracy on their initial translation. Eight of fifteen students, or about 53 percent of the class, wrote a correct translation that used the possessive dative, imperfect verb tense, and noun-adjective agreement while seven, or about 47 percent of the class, made errors. The most common errors were neglecting the instructions to use the possessive dative rather than expressing possession with the verb *habēre*, putting Romans into the accusative case instead of the dative, and using the plural *erant* instead of *erat*. When the team members consulted with one another, however, four of the five teams had accurate translations while one team had the correct case usages, but used the plural form of the verb. Therefore, even after team consultation, twenty percent of the class (three students) did not compose an accurate sentence, but there was a twenty-seven percent increase in accuracy. We reviewed the construction as a class before moving on to the next round.

Finally, I adapted the sentence slightly for the exam by changing the vocabulary, verb tense, and adding another adjective. Granted, the conditions for composition on an exam were significantly more demanding than those on homework or the GFD. The composition section was the last of four sections on the exam, which students had fifty-two minutes to complete. The results were mixed. Six of fifteen students, or 40 percent of the class, composed translations that were accurate in all respects, including macron use and word order. Four additional students made a single error (two used the singular *magnō poētae*, one used the imperfect tense, and another omitted the *multī*), but had correct constructions. Five students, or one-third of the class, did not demonstrate clear understanding of the construction and use of

cases, although all used the correct vocabulary. There was improvement overall, but not total mastery.

In the second example, students did show more significant improvement from the time of the initial composition to the exam. This sentence focused on case usage, the irregular verb *īre*, and the passive voice.

**Sentence in workbook:** I was going out from the forum toward the fields and (what's more) I was being seen by (my) enemies.

**Target translation:** *Ē forō ad agrōs ībam atque ab inimīcīs vidēbar.*

**Sentence on exam:** The Roman farmers will go out from the fields toward the town and (what's more) they will be seen by (their) friends.

**Target translation:** *Agricolae Rōmānī ex agrīs ad oppidum ībunt atque/ac ab amīcīs vidēbuntur.*

On this sentence seven students, or about 47 percent, had correct initial translations and eight, or about 53 percent, had incorrect translations. Most common mistakes were incorrect case usage with the prepositions and incorrect forms of the verb. All teams (100 percent) composed an accurate translation after team consultation. Once again, I altered the vocabulary and verb tense on the exam sentence, but kept the same syntactical construction. Similar to the first sentence, six students, or 40 percent, had completely accurate translations on the exam. Although it was not the exact same six students as those who had completely accurate translations on the first sentence, there was an expected overlap. Five students, or a third of the class, made a single error (one used the wrong form and another the wrong tense of *īre*, while three used *Rōmānae* to modify *agricolae*). Only four students had incorrect translations, which was half the percentage of incorrect translations as on the initial attempt.

With this third and final example, I intended to test students' command of the use of the Ablative of Separation and the morphology of i-stem nouns. Once again, the students composed a Latin translation on their own for homework before revising it with their team during GFD. Nearly five weeks later, I put this exact same sentence on the cumulative final exam to test what, if any, of the syntactical and morphological rules the students had internalized.

**Sentence in workbook and on final exam:** On the sea few sailors are free from cares and dangers. Many humans, moreover rightly fear the sea.

**Target translation:** *In marī paucī nautae cūrīs et periculīs car-ent/līberī sunt. Multī hominēs autem mare timent.*

Thirteen students were present for this GFD. On the individual homework, five students, or roughly 38 percent of the class, had correct Latin translations. After consultation, all teams had a correct Latin translation using the ablative of separation, but one team of three, or 20 percent of the class, used *mare* as the ablative form instead of *marī*.

The results were mixed on the cumulative final exam; owing to special circumstances, there were twelve students present for the exam. Eight of the twelve, or nearly 67 percent, had near perfect translations with the proper use of the ablative of separation. Four students, or roughly 33 percent, inaccurately used a preposition (*ā* or *dē*) with the ablative when none should have been used. Not a single student, however, used the correct ablative form for “on the sea” (*in marī*), but instead translated the phrase “*in mare*.” This example demonstrated that they all understood the correct usage of the ablative of place and used the correct preposition with the correct vocabulary word, but no student showed competency in applying the i-stem rules to neuter third declension nouns. Overall, there was significant improvement from homework performance to GFD performance to final exam performance, however there was this one glaring area of deficiency. While it may be a minor error, it nevertheless indicates the limited success of GFDs to enable total mastery of all syntactical and morphological rules by the students. It may go without saying that it is unlikely to expect total mastery by every student of all rules and that GFDs are not a silver pedagogical bullet, but I expected better understanding of the neuter i-stem rules than what was demonstrated on the exams.

As I continue to track performance on select sentences, I hope to be able to pinpoint more accurately what is working with this method and what still needs to be adjusted. I am eager for feedback from other instructors who may try this or a similar method and help improve upon it, as well as from those assessing the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies.

Countless variations can be made to a competitive composition exercise such as this method, and it does not require excessive planning or set-up. The benefits,

however, have been notable. What was once an intimidating exercise has become my students' favorite part of the class and they often ask for more composition exercises. It has consistently received the most positive feedback from students in the anonymous semester evaluations over the years. While they praise the excitement of GFDs, they most often comment on their effectiveness and motivational value. This is an on-going experiment and as I collect data over the next years to track performance, I will continue to fine-tune the method. Student performance, retention, and feedback over the past years have convinced me that competition, when used in a respectful manner where students share accountability for failure and success, can be a powerful learning tool and incentive. It works. It's fun. It creates an active and respectful learning environment. Most of all, students are eager to tackle Latin composition assignments, take them seriously, and elevate their own learning as well as that of their peers.

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