

3. On Optimal Input and Actual Input: How can we turn rote memorisers into readers?

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ABSTRACT

As part of the Comprehensible Input in Ancient Languages Teaching Conference Ana Martin (*Latin Tutor Online*; University of Barcelona alumna) shared practical examples from her online Latin teaching, showing how storytelling, images, gestures and digital interactivity can enhance vocabulary acquisition and comprehension within examination constraints.

PRESENTATION

Ideally, input should be just one level above the current level (i+1).¹ However, pupils who are studying Latin in the UK must prepare for official examinations that require dealing with texts containing large amounts of previously unseen vocabulary.

In this session, first I look at the different vocabulary presentation methods currently in use in published textbooks and online resources, then I outline the desirable process to foster fluent reading rather than translation, and finally I present an example of how this can be applied to an A level Verse Unseen.²

Vocabulary introduction and glossary presentation across Latin textbooks:³

- *Latin to GCSE* and *Latin Beyond GCSE*: glossary in order of appearance at the bottom of the text, underlined.
- *Cambridge Latin Course*: glossary on the right side of the text, not underlined.
- *De Romanis*: vocabulary pre-taught by part of speech, and then glossary at the bottom of the text in order of appearance, underlined.
- *Suburani*: combination of glossary on the right of the text and boxes across the graphic novel style sections, not underlined).
- *Lingua Latina per se illustrata*: glossary on the right and left side of the text, depending on the side of the book, not underlined.
- 'Kilpelätion' and deictic boxes/visual aids used in online resources (e.g. *Marcellus* and *Legentibus*).
- Interlinear translations.
- Online use of *Suburani* and *Cambridge Latin Course* where all words are hyperlinked to the dictionary.

¹ See Krashen (1982).

² A level examinations are taken by pupils aged 18+. Success at A levels provides access to universities. The verse unseen is a component of the examination in which pupils translate a passage of around 15 lines of pentameters or hexameters taken from Ovid. For details, see <https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/220734-specification-accredited-a-level-gce-latin-h443.pdf> (accessed 26 February 2026).

³ Details of these books are given in the Bibliography section of this chapter.

Having used all these methods and based on classroom observations, I propose an efficient way to introduce new vocabulary in a static textbook/handout: interweave it into the text through boxes and images, allowing for seamless transitions and retention. I also discuss the dangers of unrestricted online look-up tools, which can turn reading into transcribing exercises, with little pedagogical value.

In my online classroom at [Latin Tutor Online](https://www.latin-tutor.com/), my focus to foster a reading-over-translation approach involves:

1. Semantic and auditory priming.
2. Social interaction and engagement.
3. Lowering affective filter: speaking vs private writing.
4. Multi-modal acquisition.

As an example, I present an input-rich acquisition-focused approach to reading Horace's *Fons Bandusiae*.

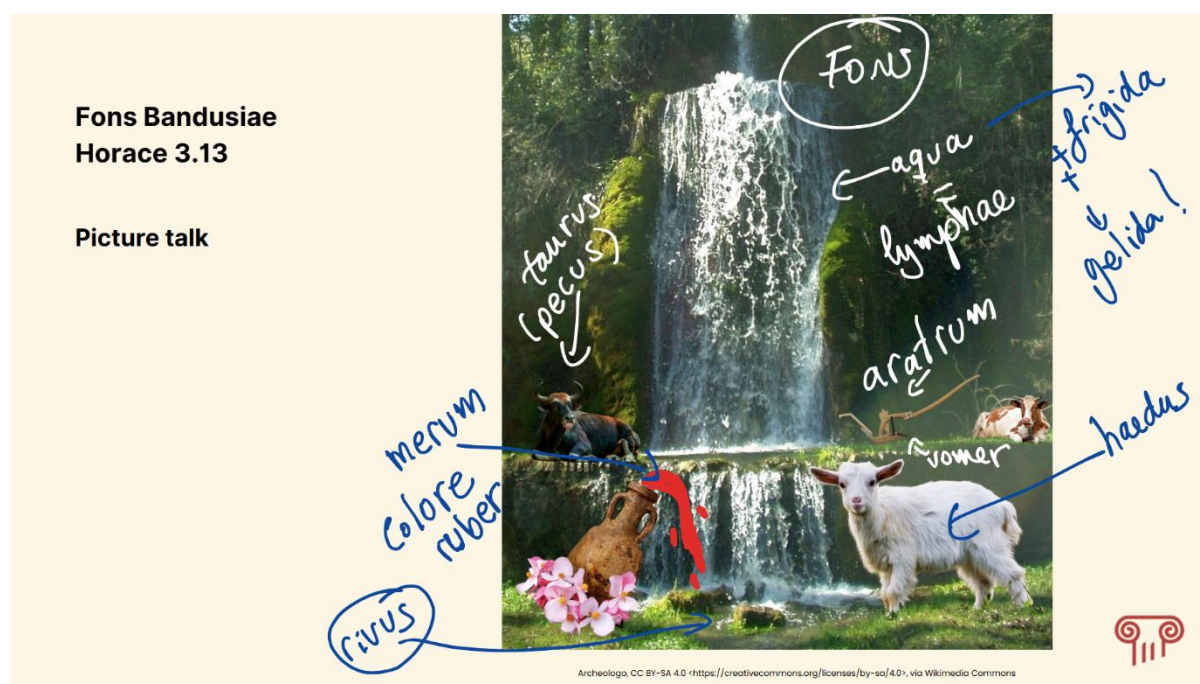


Figure 1: Input-for-acquisition-rich image for Horace's *Fons Bandusiae*

It is October, so we are going to talk about *Fontanalia* and use the text to understand sacrifices at fountains (1, 2). Rules of engagement are explained: the affective filter is lowered by allowing for speaking/gesturing/private writing in chat (2, 3). I then set out to prime the vocabulary I have previously chosen using picture talk (1, 2, 3, 4). We annotate together an image created for the poem (see Figure 1). Consolidation is achieved by playing with the images and discussing the changes in Latin (1, 2, 3, 4): e.g elements are removed from the image and pupils spot them, and questions about relative position are asked, including T[true] or F[false] responses, etc. Finally, pupils tackle the original text with very minimal glossing.

Key takeaway: We are preparing pupils for a translation exam, but it is neither necessary nor desirable to train for it by means of repeated translation practice. A multimodal, interactive, input-rich and conversational approach is necessary to make the text comprehensible and a true source of effective input likely to lead to acquisition.

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