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## Prior, Richard E. *Latin Verb Tenses*.

New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006. ISBN: 13-978-0-07-146292. Including the answer key at the back, this text consists of 208 pages, divided into 20 units (what we would normally call chapters), Latin-English and English-Latin glossaries, and an answer key. Second-year Latin students will find the answer key especially helpful.

The author says he wanted to design a textbook “that would be most useful to the most people studying this ancient language.” To call this a “textbook” may seem surprising to those of us brought up on Wheelock. Latin students at St. Norbert College shared some cursory comments: “Clear information on forming verbs; answer key is nice for those not in a class setting; appears to provide information clearly; this book would be somewhat useful to those struggling with verbs.” The format of this book is that of a workbook, and workbooks mostly accompany and supplement textbooks. However, the concise grammatical explanations at the beginning of each unit do cut to the heart of the matter in a way that few texts do. Therefore, if the explanations are sufficiently illuminating as well as concise, maybe the author can boast of creating something really new: a textbook disguised as a workbook. On the other hand, this is a textbook/workbook of limited scope. The emphasis is on verb conjugation; the assumption is that if one can master the verb system, one can learn the language. *Latin Verb Tenses* is highlighted on the book’s cover, so it is obvious that verbs are key in this author’s mind.

First impressions are that this text is to the point and coherent. Since it mainly provides practice (writing assignments), it makes sense to dispense the grammatical

explanations as expeditiously as is possible. The distinction between tense and aspect (the speaker's point of view of "when") is useful in that it supplants the usual "Present System" and "Perfect System" distinction. As usual, discussion of Principal Parts of verbs follows quickly on the heels of the voice and conjugation section.

The "Practice Makes Perfect" theme is exemplified in Unit 2's Present Indicative Active writing exercises, which follow this format: fill in the blanks, provide the missing form, and translate.

The alphabetical list of common verbs, more than two pages long, recalls the "Living Language" technique first used to acculturate American GIs heading off to Europe during WWII. This reviewer benefited from this technique during his service days in Europe in the seventies; it helped him learn Italian, French, German, and Spanish. This "most used first" philosophy of instruction is a great reinforcer. The alphabetical listing of common verbs in each conjugation is continued to the end of Unit 3, moreover.

Alternating Latin to English and English to Latin enforces literally and psychologically the sense of learning the language forwards and backwards, another reinforcer. Variety and drills, a pattern throughout the book, challenge the learner to become seriously involved, rewarding the learning process with freshness attained by the planned avoidance of monotony. Illustrations (hopefully not puerile in nature) accompanied by instructions to verbalize wherever possible, although not present, would have included two more senses, hearing and speaking. The more senses you involve, the greater your chances of success.

Key irregular forms (e.g., *sum*, *esse*, and several compounds derived from them) are included in the exercises of units 3 to 7. This inclusion, in the midst of regular forms, has the effect of an "*In Medias Res*" immersion. Variety is refreshing and motivational, leading to good learning.

Unit 7, on the passive voice, repeats a winning sequence: introduce the concept; compare English and Latin M.O.'s; deconstruct by showing endings; display examples, fully conjugated with translation; finally, provide written exercises in each tense for "practice makes perfect."

The first three regular conjugations (1st, 2nd and 3rd) are presented, then the 3rd -io and 4th are presented separately. Since the M.O. of the passive voice has already been explained, the passive tense exercises of Unit 7 are followed, quite appropriately, with Deponent verbs in Unit 8. Deponents need to follow passives because deponents are passive in form but active in meaning. Surprisingly, however, the unit begins with a mention of the "Middle Voice" (a reference to possible reflexive interpretations of some deponents; e.g., *vertitur: He is turned, or he turns himself*, understood). This distinction is an element of ancient Greek, which also has separate forms to flesh out the concept.

The six separate tenses of a verb, Present and Perfect Subjunctive System (six patterns), follow. Active forms are listed on the left side of the page with corresponding passives on the right. Throw in the infinitive and the imperative, and you get a lovely demonstration of the complexity of the verb. Semi-deponents, variations of the Deponent, are then presented over two pages, thankfully, in

alphabetical order once again. The proclivity to present examples in alphabetical order wherever possible is a great time-saver. Energy saved is energy available for memorization and, thus, more new learning.

The exercises that follow, over the next four pages, alternate single verb translations with fill-in-the-blanks and complete sentence translations. Once again, variety adds sugar to the cod liver oil of grammar, resulting in new learning.

Unit 9's discussion of the Imperative Mood is short (4 pages) and to the point: two pages of presentation precede another pair of written practice pages. The discussions include both regular and Deponent verbs.

Unit 10, on Irregular Verbs, has helpful information on tenses (Present). The statement, however, that the "Perfect System... of irregular verbs is formed in the usual manner" is misleading. The 4th principal part, for instance, of all verbs relating to *sum, esse* (to be) show a future active participle instead of a perfect passive. This unit, in contrast with the short Unit 9, covers 25 pages, quite an extensive treatment of the eight most common irregulars. The impressive body of information is warranted as irregulars in Latin, as in most languages, are some of the most commonly used verbs. Hence, they need to be recognized and seriously addressed. The sequence found in most Latin texts of discussing first participles, then gerunds, gerundives, and supines makes perfect sense; the latter are constructed from participial forms.

The Infinitive of Unit 13 is followed by a lesson on Indirect Discourse (Unit 14). Those of us acquainted with Latin know that Indirect Discourse in Latin involves usage of the infinitive (unlike English which sometimes uses the infinitive, and other times doesn't). While Unit 15 presents the subjunctive mood at face value, the six remaining units deal with grammatical forms that either often or always require the subjunctive. The final six chapters, therefore, are a kind of "applied Subjunctive."

This book will be a great companion to classic college texts like Wheelock. On the other hand, it could introduce and immerse a new learner in the language. It might work best in the latter sense for someone who has already studied another language. Such a person will already be familiar with "conjugations" and noun/adjective "declensions."

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## **Publisher's Response**

McGraw-Hill is very pleased to respond to Dr. Manthey's detailed review of our new addition to the *Practice Makes Perfect* series, *Latin Verb Tenses*. His point that this text is more a workbook than a textbook is well taken; I would agree that it is best seen as a companion to a college text, providing a detailed focus on the Latin verb system that should benefit first and second year students. I thank Dr. Manthey, also, for his appreciation of the book's variety and "freshness," in conjunction with its logical sequence and presentation of content.

**Garret Lemoi**  
**Acquisitions Editor**  
**McGraw-Hill Professional**

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