

Strategies for the unseen

Pre-reading

Read the passage through from beginning to end, at least once, in the context of the contextual information about text title and author you have been presented with. What impressions do you have of the passage and its content? Don't worry about whether you *understand* everything that you're reading – just try to get a sense of the passage as a whole first before tackling it word by word.

Think about the vocabulary

From your pre-reading, think about the 'groups' of vocabulary that are appearing in the passage. This will give you a sense of the topic that the passage is dealing with (the passage will be from love elegy so expect something to do with relationships!). If there are words you definitely do not know, look them up before attempting to translate so you know if you're looking at a noun, a verb, something indeclinable or something else.

Follow the Latin word order

The ancient Romans would have read a sentence in exactly the same way as you do; they were just better at resolving ambiguities and recognising verbs, nouns and so on more or less immediately. As you read through a sentence, look backwards in it and see if you can resolve any ambiguities in the word you are currently looking at; if there is no clue, see whether the next word helps. Don't start trying to go outside the Latin word order until you have got to the end of the sentence and know exactly what you are dealing with. Elegy tends to be contained within couplets.

Look for agreements

Tackle the passage by trying to work out which words modify each other.

- Are there any noun-adjective pairs that agree in number, gender and case? Be aware that adjectives may appear separately from the nouns they agree with in poetry.
- Are there any adjectives that cannot possibly agree with a noun (e.g. because they're different genders), telling you something about the noun and its grammatical role?
- Are there any nouns in parallel constructions? That is, in *puellam puerumque voco*, both *puellam* and *puerum* are the subject of *voco* and so are in the same case. Are there any strings of nouns (and adjectives and subclauses) that are the subject of a single verb?
- Are there any nouns that do not agree in person or number with the verb?
- Are there any prepositions with noun/adjective groups following them?
- Think about the Latin word order when trying to resolve ambiguities; what clues do you get when? You can scan nouns to work out if ablative or nominative.

Look for structures

Are there any obvious grammatical constructions in play? Have you got a verb of saying, thinking or feeling, which must introduce an indirect statement? Is there a relative clause, or a gerundive?

Read back over your work

Don't assume once you've got to the end of the passage that you're done with translating. Read back through your work and check if it makes sense (or some sort of sense). Does a sentence you translated later in the passage help you make more sense of something going on at the start?

Practice (including in timed conditions. Learn the vocab you don't know)