

Latin Phrases in English

Many Latin phrases are still used in English, though generally more in written English than in spoken English. This page lists some of the more common phrases from Latin, with meanings, comments and contextual examples. Although you may not need to use Latin phrases yourself, it's useful to recognise them when you come across them.

Latin phrase	meaning	example or comment
<i>ad hoc</i>	formed or done for a particular purpose only	An ad hoc committee was set up to oversee the matter.
<i>ad nauseam</i>	repeating or continuing to the point of boredom	The apparent risks of secondary smoking have been debated ad nauseam.
<i>bona fide</i>	genuine; real	Only bona fide members of the club may use the clubhouse.
<i>caveat emptor</i>	let the buyer beware	The principle that the buyer is responsible for checking the quality and suitability of goods before a purchase is made.
<i>circa; c.</i>	around; approximately	The house was built circa 1870.
<i>compos mentis</i>	in control of the mind (often used ironically)	Please call me back later when I'm compos mentis.

Latin phrase	meaning	example or comment
<i>de facto</i>	in fact; in reality	Although the Emperor was the head of state, the <i>de facto</i> ruler of Japan was the Shogun.
<i>ergo</i>	therefore	cogito ergo sum
<i>erratum</i>	error; mistake	Lists of errors from a previous publication are often marked "errata" (the plural, meaning errors).
<i>et cetera; etc</i>	and the rest; and so on; and more	We urgently need to buy medical equipment, drugs <i>et cetera</i> .
<i>ex gratia</i>	from kindness or grace (without recognizing any liability or legal obligation)	They received an undisclosed <i>ex gratia</i> payment.
<i>ex libris</i>	from the books; from the library	In the front of a book: <i>Ex Libris</i> John Brown
<i>habeas corpus</i>	a court order instructing that a person under arrest be brought before a judge	The right of <i>habeas corpus</i> has long been regarded as an important safeguard of individual liberty.

Latin phrase	meaning	example or comment
<i>in loco parentis</i>	in the place of a parent	Teachers sometimes have to act in loco parentis.
<i>in situ</i>	in its original place	The paintings have been taken to the museum but the statues have been left in situ.
<i>in vitro</i>	(in biology) taking place outside a living organism (for example in a test tube)	in vitro fertilization
<i>inter alia</i>	among other things	The report covers, inter alia, computers, telecommunications and air travel.
<i>per</i>	for each	This petrol station charges \$5.00 per gallon.
<i>per annum;</i> <i>p.a.</i>	for each year	The population is increasing by about 2% per annum.
<i>per capita</i>	for each person	The country's annual income is \$5000 per capita.

Latin phrase	meaning	example or comment
<i>per se</i>	in itself/themselves; intrinsically	These facts per se are not important.
<i>post-mortem</i>	examination of a body after death; autopsy	The post-mortem revealed that she had been murdered.
<i>pro rata</i>	proportional; proportionally	The car rental charge is \$50 per day and then pro rata for part of a day.
<i>quid pro quo</i>	favour or advantage given or expected in return for something	Similar to "tit for tat", "give and take" and "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours."
<i>re</i>	about; concerning; regarding	Re: Unpaid Invoice I spoke to the manager re your salary increase.
<i>sine qua non</i>	essential condition; thing that is absolutely necessary; "without which not"	Words are a sine qua non of spoken language.
<i>status quo</i>	existing state of affairs	Monarchies naturally wish to maintain the status quo.

Latin phrase	meaning	example or comment
<i>terra firma</i>	dry land; the ground as opposed to the air or sea	Shackleton and his men set foot on terra firma after three weeks at sea.
<i>verbatim</i>	in exactly the same words	I had to memorize the text verbatim.
<i>versus;</i> <i>vs.;</i> <i>v.</i>	Against	What are the benefits of organic versus inorganic foods? In the case of Bush versus Gore, the judges decided...
<i>vice versa</i>	the other way round	My telephone serves me, and not vice versa.
<i>persona non grata</i>	unacceptable or unwelcome person	From now on, you may consider yourself persona non grata in this house.