

Latin Transcriptions & Translations

The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) transcriptions used on this site correspond to the pronunciation suggested by the Roman Catholic Church in the preface of the *Liber Usualis*. Although the *Liber Usualis* does not use IPA, the indications are clear as to which sounds are intended. Other texts that have been helpful are William May, *Pronunciation guide for choral literature*¹; John Moriarty, *Diction*²; and especially, Robert Hines' *Singer's manual of Latin diction and phonetics*³.

There are two systems of pronunciation of Latin, one Liturgical, and the other Classical or Academic Latin. Although the pronunciation of Classical Latin, the language of the early Roman scholars, poets, and writers is taught in school language classes, Liturgical Latin is the appropriate language for the singer and differs in pronunciation from that of Classical Latin.

Latin as a phonetic language. Latin is quite an easy language to read. For the most part, each letter corresponds to a single sound. The major problem for the American singer is the proper execution of the non-diphthongal [ɛ] and [ɔ]. One must be careful not to allow the diphthong to creep in to the pronunciation, especially in such common words as *Allelúia* [a.ɛ.'lu:.ja] and *Kýrie* ['ki:.ri.ɛ]. The sound of the open [ɔ] is also a difficulty vowel to master for the American singer often being either too open or too closed in execution. Listen closely to the sound recordings on the IPASource site to help gain the flavor of Liturgical Latin.

Latin vs. Italian. As the predecessor of modern Italian, there are, of course, many similarities of pronunciation between the two languages. The pronunciation of the *-c* and *-g*, the silent *-h*, and indeed, the general “dentalized” pronunciation of the consonants should be quite familiar to the singer. Deviations from Italian pronunciation are most notable in the large number of open vowels in Latin compared with the predominance of closed vowels in Italian. The darker, dropped jaw position of the [ɑ ɛ ɔ] are easy to demonstrate and quickly develop an even, homogenous tone in the choral situation.

The most clear deviation from Italian pronunciation is the sound of the *-s* when found between two vowels. In Italian, although the [s] is recommended for the spoken language, the sound for the singer is generally the voiced [z] as in *Così fan tutte*. In Latin, however, the sound should remain the sibilant [s] as in *miserére* [mi.sɛ.'rɛ.rɛ]. Robert Hines in his *Singer's manual of Latin diction and phonetics* suggests that we retain the singing pronunciation of [z]. This makes a certain amount of sense since the reason most often given for the use of the voiced consonant sound in Italian singing is its carrying power. Unfortunately, this practice does not adhere to the recommendations of the Roman church. For that reason I have exclusively used the unvoiced [s] in these transcriptions. (See *Italian Transcriptions & Translations* for a discussion on the difference between spoken and sung *-s*.)

Use of the accent marks. The texts contained here are all given an accent mark in the original Latin. Although this is not the practice in musical notation, it corresponds to the usage in the *Liber Usualis* and

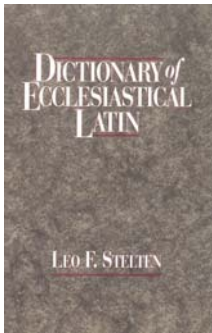
¹ May, William V. *Pronunciation guide for choral literature : French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Latin, Spanish*. Reston, VA : Music Educator's National Conference, c1987.

² Moriarty, John. *Diction: Italian, Latin, French, German; the sounds and 81 exercises for singing them*. Boston, E. C. Schirmer Music Co., 1975. ISBN: 0911318097.

³ Hines, Robert Stephan. *Singer's manual of Latin diction and phonetics*. New York : Schirmer Books, c1975. ISBN: 0028708008.

greatly simplifies determining the placement of the word stress. As in Italian, I will use the symbol of elongation [ː] to indicate the longer duration of the stressed vowel when followed by a single consonant.

Latin Ecclesiastical Dictionary. No IPA here but this will help with translations. I found that the normal Latin dictionary was geared for Classical Latin and was of little help in translating Church Latin. This is a hard cover book for @\$20 on-line at Amazon.com.



Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin by Leo Stelten (Author)
Hardcover: 352 pages; Dimensions (in inches): 1.10 x 9.34 x 6.28
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