

Latin Terms

Following each term is a literal definition in quotation marks; occasionally I have inserted "i.e." and a working definition as well.

a priori "from the former," i.e., presupposed. Used to denote something that is recognized or believed before a proof has been carried out. Its opposite phrase (much less common) is *a posteriori*. *He criticized the book because it was full of a priori arguments.*

ad hoc "to this," i.e., created for one specific, temporary purpose. Usually used in the sense of committees. *When the hurricane came, the city council formed an ad hoc relief committee.*

ad hominem "against the man." An argument that attacks one's opponent personally, instead of his own argument. *His speech was constantly interrupted by hecklers using ad hominem attacks, calling him a coward.*

ad infinitum "to infinity" Continues forever, or in all cases or examples.

ad nauseam "to nausea". Continuously repeating oneself, to the point of making your audience sick.

addendum "thing to be added" A supplement to a list or document.

anno domini (AD) In English, "in the year of the Lord." It used to precede the year being referred to, but now, out of analogy with BC, it is used after the year. *69 AD was the Year of Four Emperors in Roman history.*

ante bellum "before the war" Sometimes as one word, *antebellum*. Usually, before the Civil War in America, although it occasionally it refers to other periods.

casus belli "event of war" Refers to an event that is the justification for or cause of war. *The assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand was a casus belli for World War I.*

caveat emptor "let the buyer beware" The buyer needs to examine the product and terms of purchase, lest he be tricked.

circa , abbreviated *c.* or *ca.* "around" Almost always used for dates. *Herodotus wrote his Histories c. 430 BC.*

cui bono "for the benefit of whom?" This is a short way of asking, "For whose benefit was or is this done?"

cuus regio, eius religio "whose region, his religion" A principle established during the Protestant Reformation, that the king or ruler of a region would determine the religion of that area, established by the Peace of Augsburg, 1555.

de facto "by fact" *Although the young boy was officially the king, his uncle, as regent, was the de facto head of state.*

de jure "by law" By law or by right, as opposed to, what is actually the case. The opposite of *de facto*, which means what is the case, as opposed to what should be.

de novo "from the new" In law, a trial *de novo* is a retrial. In biology, a *de novo* mutation is a mutation that neither parent possessed or transmitted.

deus ex machina "a god from a machine" Any plot that involves an entirely unnatural and unexpected solution. Refers to the practice in Greek drama of lowering by machine (what we would call a contraption) an actor playing a god or goddess onto the stage to resolve an insuperable conflict in the plot.

ex nihilo "out of nothing" Said to describe the act of creating something, out of nothing. *God created the heavens and the earth ex nihilo.*

ex officio "from the office" By virtue of office or position; "by right of office". Often used when someone holds one position by virtue of holding another. *The Vice President of the United States is ex officio President of the Senate.*

ex post facto "from a thing done afterward" Usually used of a law with retroactive effect.

exempli gratia almost always, abbreviated *e.g.* "for the sake of example" It is followed by a comma. *The Romans were great builders: e.g., some of their canals still work today.* This is sometimes confused with *i.e.* *I.e.* refers to restating your words; *e.g.* refers to giving a specific example.

habeas corpus "you may have the body" A legal term referring to writs that would invoke the government to bring a person to court to hear charges against them, as opposed to keeping them locked up in a prison without any charges being filed. *During the Civil War, Lincoln had to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, because of all the people rioting against the war.*

id est (i.e.) "that is" Said to introduce a restatement of a position. *The President asked Congress for additional powers to deal with the insurrection; i.e., he wanted its support for declaring martial law.*

in media res "in the middle of the thing" Said of a plot that starts in the middle of an event. *The Iliad by Homer starts in media res, with the Trojan War already having taken place for several years.*

magnum opus "great work" Said of someone's masterpiece. *Virgil's magnum opus was the Aeneid,, an epic poem about Aeneas' escape from Troy, his adventures around the Mediterranean, and his struggles in Italy to create a new home for his people.*

nolo contendere "I do not wish to contend" That is, "no contest". A plea that can be entered on behalf of a defendant in a court that states that the accused doesn't admit guilt, but will accept punishment for a crime.

non plus ultra "nothing further beyond" Can be used to describe the point at which there is nothing left. In Roman mythology, inscribed on the Pillars of Hercules (the Rock of Gibraltar in Spain, and a nearby promontory from Africa) was this saying, indicating there was nothing left to see by going past those Pillars into the Atlantic. Based on this meaning, it has taken another meaning, that of perfection (in that there can be nothing better or after this).

non sequitur "it does not follow" A conclusion that does not follow from a premise. *His argument that we should ban wallets, to cut down on mugging, is a non sequitor.*

per capita "per head", i.e., "per person". *While America's overall Gross Domestic Product is much higher than Luxembourg, Luxembourg's per capita GDP is about twice as high.*

per se "through itself" In English, "in and of itself," as opposed to an external reason. *He isn't interested in his law degree per se, but only because he can use it as a springboard for a career in politics.*

persona non grata "person not pleasing" An unwelcome or unwanted person.

prima facie (prime-uh fay-shuh) "at first sight" Used to describe something based only on a brief looking-over. *His case was prima facie not good, although many experts could testify that the evidence against him was inconclusive.*

pro bono "for the good" Doing something for free, usually in the context of a lawyer taking a case.

pro forma "for form" In English, "for appearance's sake," as opposed to really wanting to do something. *A company that knows who it wants to hire, might hold interviews pro forma, to satisfy bureaucratic requirements.*

quid pro quo "something for something" Two people or parties will each do something that benefits the other.

reductio ad absurdum "leading back to the absurd" Often shortened to "ad absurdum." A tactic whereby a position is demonstrated to have unavoidable and unacceptable consequences, or whereby an argument is taken to the most ridiculous extreme.

sic "thus" or "just so." Used at the end of a quote in which the original writing is reproduced exactly, regardless of any spelling or grammar errors. This is used to let the reader know that the mistake is not yours.

sine qua non "without which not" Used to denote something that is a necessary requirement. *A sine qua non for statehood was their demand that they get a lot of foreign aid.*

status quo "the state to which" The current condition or situation. Often, but not always, it refers to those who are currently in control. *Samuel Rutherford's work Lex Rex challenged the status quo, and consequently was called to appear in Parliament, to account for it.*

tabula rasa "scraped tablet" In English, a "blank tablet." Enlightenment writers used this term to describe the human mind at birth, to the effect that there was no knowledge, or evil, in a new child. *Voltaire held that the human person was good at birth, and not evil, because the mind was a tabula rasa.*

verbatim "word for word" A perfect transcription or quotation.