

Rules for the Pronunciation of Latin

Alphabet

a	“father”
b	
c	“cat”
d	
e	short: “bet” long: “bait”
f	
g	“get”
h	
i	short: “bit” long: “beat”
j	before another vowel, an initial i is regarded as consonantal (does not count as a separate syllable) and is sometimes written in modern editions as j. It is pronounced as “y”
k	
l	
m	
n	
o	short: “bought” long: “boat”
p	
q	always with u which is not a vowel after q: the two make one consonant cluster. (This hold sometimes for gu as well).
r	
s	“hiss”
t	
u	short: “book” long: “boot”
v	before another vowel, u is regarded as “consonantal” (does not count as a separate syllable) and is usually written in modern editions as v. It is pronounced as “w”.
x	“box”
y	Greek upsilon, like a French u pronounced with the tongue rolled, giving a slight long e sound
z	Greek zeta “z” or “dz”

Diphthongs (two vowels that sound as one and make a single syllable):

ae	“bite”	Rare:	
au	“bout”	ei	“bait” in the word <i>deinde</i>
eu	“ay ooh”	ui	“wit” in the words <i>cui, huic</i>
oe	“oil”		

Syllabification and Accent

1. Begin at the end of the word. Every vowel or diphthong is a syllable. Each syllable must contain a vowel or diphthong. A word has as many syllables as vowels or diphthongs, so it is important to know which combinations of vowels make diphthongs and which do not.
2. a) Split all double consonants. b) Let every syllable begin with a consonant if it can. Example: in the word “consonant”, a) you must split the “-ns”; b) the syllable containing the “-ant” must begin with the “n” = “-nant”. The final syllabification is “con-so-nant”.
3. The syllables have names. The last syllable is called the ultima. The second-to-last is the penultima; the third-to-last is the antepenultima. In Latin the accent always goes on the penultima if it is long, otherwise on the antepenultima.
4. Analyze the penultima: is it open or closed? Open syllables end in a vowel. Closed syllables end in a consonant. (Remember “c”: closed syllables end in a consonant).
5. All closed syllables are long. Open syllables are long if the vowel is long, short if the vowel is short. In your first year book, long vowels are marked with a long mark as follows: in the word *occāsiō*, the first “o” and the “i” are short because they lack marks. The “a” and the second “o” are long because they have “macrons” (long marks).
6. If the penultima is long, the accent goes there. If it is short, the accent backs up to the third-to-last = antepenultima. ** Note well: there can be short vowels in long syllables. Do not forget that you are looking for long syllables (with a long vowel or ending in a consonant).

Practice:

1. The word *occāsiō* has four syllables because it has four vowels. The combination -io- does not form a diphthong, so they form two separate syllables.
2. The syllable containing -i- must begin with the -s- by rule 2b) “let every syllable begin with a consonant if it can”. The double consonant cc must be split by rule 2a). The final syllabification is *oc-cā-si-ō*.
3. The penultima is the syllable containing -si-.
4. This syllable is open because it ends in a vowel.
5. It is short because the vowel is not marked long by a macron above it.
6. The accent cannot go on the penultima because it is short, so it must go on the antepenultima - the syllable containing -ca-. The final pronunciation will be: *oc-cá-si-ō*.