

An important component of Advanced Placement Latin courses, or indeed almost any advanced course in Latin Literature, is writing critical essays about Latin texts. In the past I have taught my students to write their essays using the well-known SWIMTAG method (first presented in *Classical Journal* 85:2, Dec. 1989 - Jan. 1990, pp. 133-138, but modified and published elsewhere, too, e.g. *Teacher's Guide: AP Latin*, published by The College Board in 2001). The SWIMTAG mnemonic gives students a way to remember several aspects of a text that can be analyzed. The unpacked version of the mnemonic, more completely rendered SW₂IM₂T₂AG, is: S = Sounds, W = Word Order, W = Word Choice, I = Images, M = Meter, M = Mood, T = Tone, T = Theme, A = Allusions, G = Grammar.

While my students have found the mnemonic useful and have used it not without success, quite often they have had trouble remembering the proper combination of letters; students might remember one W, but have trouble remembering that there's another W (or M, etc.). Sometimes, too, my students have had difficulty seeing the relationships between the disparate elements (for example, they might not connect sound effects with metrical effects). Additionally, I have often wanted for my students a method of explication that would serve some broader tasks of critical reading, such as rhetorical analysis or situating a passage in its larger context. I have found in many cases that I'm not only teaching students how to write critical essays, but teaching them how to read, in all the senses of the word—students need a method that they can apply to any text.

It is with these goals in mind that I have been working on an alternative method to teach close reading and explication of Latin texts, which my students used with success during the past school year. I have strived for a method that is sequential, beginning with what the students can recognize quickly in a text and working toward increasingly difficult (and in some cases speculative) observations: Content and Context, Diction, Structure, Figurative (Language), Sound (& Meter), and Tone (& Rhetoric). Students do benefit from having a mnemonic, and one of my students came up with “Cicero and Caesar Don't Stand For Such Things” (I encourage others to develop their own mnemonics). In my presentation I will give a full explanation of the parts of the method, along with examples of student work to show the method in action. I have used this method with success in an AP Vergil course, but it can be used in any other context in which close reading of texts is a targeted activity.