

Training Guide for Teaching the Latin Responses of Mass

This guide has been produced to provide those who train altar servers their Latin responses a method that is both proven and effective. This method also maximizes the amount of knowledge that can be given to the server about the responses said at Mass.



In General

Consult the Server's Mass Responses Card from Romanitas Press for more information, especially regarding common pronunciation mistakes made by English-speakers and pertinent quotes about *more romano* pronunciation.

Trainer's Qualifications

The trainer¹ must meet the following criteria; he should be:

1. Able to perfectly make the various serving responses.
2. Proficient in reciting the celebrant's responses (as will need to be done during class and testing).
3. Thoroughly acquainted with the various *more romano* pronunciation rules, the reverences and gestures that are integral to the responses, the information related to the responses, and the teaching techniques as outlined below.²

Objectives to Obtain During the Classes

1. The memorization and correct Latin pronunciation according to the Roman Church, thus fulfilling the standards of the Archconfraternity of St. Stephen:³
 - A. All the words should be spoken audibly, each syllable articulated, every sentence reverently pronounced. The first thing that every server at Low Mass should be careful about is the correct pronunciation of the Latin.⁴
 - B. ...It is so easy to make mistakes without realizing it, and these mistakes tend to increase until in the course of time the answers will no longer be Latin at all but merely a succession of sounds somewhat resembling that language.⁵
2. The various gestures and reverences that accompany the various responses the server makes in conjunction with the celebrant.
3. An understanding of the translation of the responses made by the celebrant and the server at Mass.

¹ And whoever orally tests the altar servers for their Latin responses.

² As well as on the responses CD.

³ Hereafter referred to as simply the "Guild."

⁴ *The Altar Servers' Handbook* of the Guild (1962 edition, reprinted by the Society of St. Pius X, 2002), p 8.

⁵ *Ibid*, p 11.

4. An understanding of the structure of the Preparatory Prayers (*i.e.*, psalm, antiphon, doxology, sign of the cross).

These objects in turn specifically fulfill the **second object** (to serve according to the Church) and **third object** (to learn what the ceremonies mean) of the Guild's three-fold Object (the **first object** is the sanctification of the server, which also applicable via this form of spiritual discipline).

Class Structure

A proposed class structure is given later combined with short breaks and homework assignments. Actual testing for qualification is done outside of the class period.

Class Preparations

The trainer should have a dry erase or chalk board available with an eraser and several different color markers or chalk for dissecting, delineating and giving visual aids while teaching the responses.

Handouts

Every Latin class student needs to obtain from the parish bookstore⁶ the following items:

- Mass Servers' Response Card published by Romanitas Press.
- Mass Servers' Response CD available from Romanitas Press.⁷

Homework

The homework consists of these tasks:

1. listening and imitating the provided recording for at least 15 minutes every day for three consecutive weeks.
2. Transcribing at least once the English translations of the various responses made by the celebrant and server during Mass. This will help the server to learn *what* he is saying.
3. transcribing the server's Latin responses *in cursive while pronouncing each word*. This method will facilitate the memorization of the words as well as the *more romano* (or slight Italian) character of each word and flow of the phrases.

Classroom Exercises

Vowels

Properly pronouncing the vowels is one of the most important aspects of making the responses correctly; it is also where the most mistakes are made. **The exercises below should be performed even before explaining any of the actual responses.** This will allow the students to correctly *associate* the proper phonetic sound with each vowel and independently of words, thereby allowing them to actually *phonetically read* Latin words, an important aide for memorizing the responses.

A. Start by writing out vowels along with their phonetic rendering as such:

⁶ A recommended price is \$5.00 for the card and \$2.00 for the CD.

⁷ Eventually Romanitas Press will have a professional recording available with integrated instructions on how to serve Low Mass.

a	=	ah
e	=	eh
i	=	ee
o	=	oh
u	=	oo
y	=	ee (draw a line to connect with the letter “i” to show similarity)

B. Demonstrate sounds first giving examples:

- a = “Open up and say ‘Ah!’”
- e = “Eh? What did you say?” But not as *aaay* (as in *say*)
- i = Like the letter “e”
- o = “Oh!” or “O, Lord...”
- u = Like in “*moo*” (the sound cows make)
- y = (same as the letter “i”)

Explain and demonstrate the difference between the *pure* vowel sounds of Latin and the mixture of sounds (diphthongs) that is used in English.

- C. Have all students repeat the sounds with you, while pointing to each Latin letter (and/or each phonetic rendering).
- D. Then have each student individually say the sounds in order.
- E. Erase the phonetic renderings (*ah, eh, ...etc.*), and have the students go through the vowel sounds again as a group, then individually, both from the top vowel to the bottom, and finally from the bottom to the top. This ensures that they have correctly memorized the appropriate sound for each vowel.
- F. While pointing to the vowels randomly, have each student pronounce the vowel as you indicate them. This exercise reinforces their vowel phonetic identification and ensures that they are attributing the appropriate sound for each vowel.
- G. Write up composites of consonants and vowels and have students pronounce each one; certain examples that should be used are:
- me (to break instinct of English pronunciation and to read it as Latin): *meh*
 - tuum (to accustom them to doubled “u”s): *too-oom*
 - meam (to accustom to e-a combination): *meh-ahm*
 - Deo: *deh-oh*
 - si: *see*
 - my (to break instinct of English pronunciation): *mee*
- H. Later, explain use of these joined-vowel characters:
- æ = eh (just like the Latin “e”)
 - œ = eh

These vowels were in ancient times pronounced separately but eventually became one vowel sound, focusing on just the “e” at the end.

- I. Explain a diphthong vowel (two vowels pronounced consecutively) **au** = ow (like a verbal punch).

Consonants

The pronunciation of these can be absorbed while learning the responses. However, there are a couple of consonants that should be specially taught:

- **h** = almost silent; not *ha* (e.g., *habemus* = *ah-beh-moos*).
- **j** = like the consonant “y” in English; not a *ja* sound; NB: the true Latin character is actually an “i”, but it is often shown as a “j” to avoid confusion.
- **gn** (combination) = like *ny* but pronouncing the “n” and “y” separately.

Review of Responses

1. Always write out the response(s) on the board.
2. Start by saying the response yourself to give the example of what it should sound like.
3. Where necessary, automatically dissect certain troublesome words for easier learning; e.g., **læ** | **ti** | **fi** | **cat** .
4. Cover the difficult words first (e.g., *lætificat*, *juventutem*). Say each one a couple of times, then have whole class say it a couple of times. Explain (dissect) why the word is difficult and work on it until satisfied.
5. Accents can be emphasized by underlining the vowel and drawing out its sound when reviewing the word (e.g., *læ—tiii—fi—cat*).
6. Cover difficult phrases; dissect and draw out lingual “jumps” (with horizontal, converse arcs) to obtain proper rhythm; e.g., *Ad Deum qui* (jump and do not combine *qui* with next word to make *qui* sound like *quæ*) *lætificat* (or “*quare me repulisti*”; here the three sets of “re” often get combined as two sets).
7. Integrate the liturgical reverences, gestures and posture that accompany the responses; e.g., when ready, have the students kneel (with their cards in front of them) and go through the Preparatory Prayers (while you enact the celebrant’s position standing) having them kneel (erect and without fidgeting) and making the sign of the cross and striking their breasts, bowing, and turning toward the celebrant during the *Confiteor* as they would when serving. Correct these former actions as necessary.
8. When working on the *Confiteor*, divide the prayer into two sections, and work on the first section until satisfied before moving on to the second.
9. Another exercise involves the students understanding better the Italian cadence (or flow) that Latin should have; this can be done in two ways:
 - Exaggerate the Latin responses with a mock Italian accent.
 - Have the students extend their arms vertically and make a horizontal figure eight (i.e., the infinity symbol ∞) while saying the responses.

Division of Classes

Following is a proposed method of presenting the classes. The classes are held consecutively (e.g., on four consecutive Saturdays) and for two hours each. If the division into four classes is impractical, these can be consolidated into three classes held for two and a half hours to three hours each. Otherwise, the division can be lengthened into five consecutive classes for one hour each (e.g., because attention spans are limited).

First Class

- A. This class introduces the students to the teacher, who should begin by outlining these points:

- serving at the altar is the most important privilege a layman can have (Guild's handbook: "*To serve at the altar... is next to the priesthood the greatest privilege a layman can enjoy.*" Cardinal Griffin's preface).
 - hence one should take the various duties of serving seriously, and do one's best (because it is being offered to God); one of these is making the Latin responses correctly.
 - learning the Latin responses will be one of the hardest things to learn, and will include homework, both memorization and written!
 - for boys: you are being asked to do a man's job, as clerics (acolytes) are men; rise up to meet the challenge!
- B. Ensure all already possess a response card and CD.⁸
- C. Following the classroom exercises notes (and the Latin pronunciation card), begin with principles of Latin phonetics.
- D. **Take a short break.**
- E. Then write out and explain (use the Latin pronunciation card's notes) the **three rules for making the responses**:
1. **Clearly,**
 2. at a **moderate pace,**
 3. and in an **audible voice.**
- Demonstrate this by saying the *Confiteor* as an example.
- F. Write out the first five lines of the Preparatory Prayers (*Judica me*, or Psalm 42), then begin teaching the servers their first two responses. After having reviewed this a few times, have the servers kneel up straight with hands folded, and sign themselves in the proper manner and in unison with the celebrant when he signs himself (*e.g.*, he prepares the chalice on the altar, then comes back down to the foot, and says...).
- G. **Take a short break.**
- H. Continue with Preparatory Prayers, again, reviewing first, then having the server enact the entire sequence with the accompanying gestures and reverences (give a quick review of these before integrating them with the responses), but stop at the *Misereatur*.
- I. **Take a short break** (if time is still available).
- J. Give a brief explanation of the meaning of Psalm 42.
- K. [If time is still available, introduce the *Misereatur*, otherwise, transfer to second class as step "D". The *Misereatur* is the second hardest prayer to learn as it is a tongue-twister [the *Suscipiat* is the hardest, and the *Confiteor* is only third, due to its length]; cover difficult words].
- L. Assign homework:
- listen and practice with the pronunciation recording for 15 minutes every day.
 - transcribe (write-out) two times the English translations of the Preparatory Prayers from the beginning to the last three prayers said after the *Confiteor* (*i.e.*, up to "*Oremus*").
 - write out in cursive five times the Preparatory Prayers from the beginning to the last three prayers said after the *Confiteor*.

Second Class

⁸ If not purchased through the parish bookstore, the trainer can sell them directly to the servers for the same prices listed above.

- A. Collect written homework assignments.
- B. Begin by briefly reviewing the pronunciation of the vowel sounds and various combinations to ensure memory retention.
- C. In connection with the Preparatory Prayers (Psalm 42, *Judica me*), explain the structure⁹ and individual parts that make up a typical psalm:
 - what is an **antiphon** and what role does it play in relation to its appointed psalm (in this case, the antiphon is derived from the psalm).
 - what is a **psalm** and from whom did the psalms originate (Psalm 42 is used here to express joy in going to the altar of God and because of the mention of sacrifice).
 - what is a **doxology** and where did the *Gloria Patri* originate (attributed to the Holy Apostles to show belief in the Holy Trinity). Mention that the *Gloria*, sometimes referred to as the Angelic Hymn, is also a doxology.
- C. **Take a break.**
- D. Review once the Preparatory Prayers (the servers enacting all accompanying gestures and reverences).
- E. Review [or demonstrate if step K from first class could not be accomplished; this is the *Misereatur* is the second hardest prayer to learn as it is a tongue-twister [the *Suscipiat* is the hardest, and the *Confiteor* is only third, due to its length] the *Misereatur*; review difficult words.
- F. **Take a break.**
- G. Review twice the Preparatory Prayers with the *Misereatur* with the students enacting all accompanying gestures and reverences.
- H. Conclude with reminder of homework assignments:
 - listen and practice with pronunciation recording for 15 minutes every day.
 - transcribe (write-out) two times the English translations of the Preparatory Prayers from the beginning to the last three prayers said after the *Confiteor* (i.e., up to “*Oremus*”).
 - write out in cursive five times the Preparatory Prayers from the beginning to the last three prayers said after the *Confiteor*.

Third Class

- A. Collect written homework assignments.
- B. Begin again with a brief review of the pronunciation of the vowel sounds and various combinations to ensure memory retention.
- C. **Take a break.**
- D. Quickly introduce (in five minutes or less) the *Confiteor*; explain why it is “hard” because:
 1. It is long.
 2. The endings change halfway through [this is because the *Confiteor* starts in the dative (the giving) case (“*Confiteor...*,” “*I confess to...*”) and then changes to the accusative case (“*Ideo...*,” “*Therefore, I beseech...*”). Also, the endings to the saints’ names differ because of their gender (*Maria* is feminine; *Michaeli* is masculine).

⁹ Drawing this on the board helps the student to visualize the structure better. One example is to draw it as a sandwich, the antiphon is the bread, the psalms the meat and the doxology the cheese.

- E. Review the first part of the *Confiteor* (and give emphasis to the proper pronunciation of *Micha-ël-i*). Recite with students a few times, and then have them recite while enacting all accompanying gestures and reverences.
- F. **Take a break.**
- G. Review the second part of the *Confiteor*. Recite (just the second part) with students a few times, then have them recite while enacting all accompanying gestures and reverences.
- H. **Take a break.**
- I. Finally, recite the entire *Confiteor* with students twice, while making gestures and reverences.
- J. **Take a break.**
- K. Review the four responses that immediately follow the *Confiteor*; ensure they understand they need to remain bowed during these. Enact a couple of times.
- L. Review *Kyrie*; explain how each response is alternated between celebrant and server for a total of nine times (demonstrate on board)
- M. Then the homework should be assigned:
 - Listen to and practice with the pronunciation recording for 15 minutes every day.
 - transcribe two times the English translation of the *Kyrie* to the end of Mass.
 - write out in cursive five times the servers responses made from the *Kyrie* to the end of Mass.

Fourth Class

- A. Collect written homework assignments.
- B. Begin again with a brief review of the pronunciation of the vowel sounds and various combinations to ensure memory retention.
- C. **Take a break.**
- D. Review twice the *Confiteor* and following prayers up to the Collect, with the servers making the accompanying gestures and reverences.
- E. **Take a break.**
- F. Review responses to Collect, Epistle and Gospel. Include accompanying gestures (e.g., Gospel crosses) and reverences (bowing for “*Oremus*” and the Holy Name, Mary or the name of the saint).
- G. **Take a break.**
- H. Review again (once) the responses for the Collect, Epistle and Gospel, include the various gestures and reverences.
- I. **Take a break.**
- J. Review twice the *Suscipiat* (this is the hardest prayer to learn) with the students enacting all accompanying gestures and reverences. Cover difficult words several times.
- K. **Take a break.**
- L. Review twice remaining prayers (mention the fact of the second *Confiteor*, but do not practice reciting it); include the parts of Mass and the celebrant’s actions that accompany these prayers for context, and have servers enact all connected gestures and reverences.
- M. **Take a break.**
- N. Review all of the prayers in proper sequential order with the students enacting all accompanying gestures and reverences.

O. Inform about testing.

P. Assign homework:

- Listen to and practice with the pronunciation recording for 15 minutes every day.
- transcribe two times the English translation of the celebrant's (*i.e.*, those listed on the pronunciation sheet, so **not** including the silent parts, *e.g.*, during the Offertory and Canon) and server's responses made from the *Suscipiat* to the end of Mass (but skip the second *Confiteor*).
- write out in cursive five times the servers responses made from the *Suscipiat* to the end of Mass (but skip the second *Confiteor*).

Oral Latin Testing Tips

The standards of the Guild require a 100% score for passing one's test; this object is imperative, for whatever bad habits the student has at present needs to be corrected immediately. Otherwise, these bad habits will remain to the detriment of the student and the other servers.

This is not too high of standard to set, even for young boys. Every teacher and parent knows that if one sets a goal for a young boy, he will consider the challenge and rise to meet the goal in its entirety. However, this will *only* occur if the standard is firmly held to as a passing requirement. When one considers what every first grade teacher (and parents) expects of their students concerning the proper recitation of the rosary (*i.e.*, the Creed, Our Father, Hail Mary, Fatima Prayer, and Hail Holy Queen), the memorization of the *server's prayers at Mass* in the Church's official language (which are even more important and contain less words to memorize), becomes a relatively small requirement indeed.

Ideally, the testing should take place within a week or so after the last class. This testing is in reality a period for the server to hone the accuracy of his responses, so unless the server has an exceptional aptitude, it will take him a minimum of two sessions, though usually more are required (even as many as 20 separate sessions). When testing, the trainer should have a colored pen and photocopies of the servers' response card for grading purposes (one for each student).

It is also recommended that the testing of the responses is segmented as follows (even over several sessions if necessary):

- From the antiphon, "*Introibo ad altare...*" to "*Adjutorium nostrum...*".
- The *Misereatur* on its own (due to its complexity).
- The *Confiteor* on its own.
- From "*Deus tu conversus...*" inclusive to the Gospel, and (if practical) from the Preface inclusive to the Last Gospel (NB: it is not necessary to re-test for the second *Confiteor*, etc.).
- The *Suscipiat*.

This allows the server, especially if he is a young boy, to work on improving his responses in easy segments, rather than one large block.

When testing the trainer must be careful to recognize those hesitations and slow rendition in making the responses that customarily betrays the symptom of a subtle lack of confidence in reciting the responses, which is a result of not knowing those responses well enough.

However, the trainer must also take care to recognize those errors that are made by the student due to nervousness while being tested. As a general rule, such errors should not be counted against the student's grade. Though if these types of mistakes are numerous, the student should be asked to repeat them to ensure he has the confidence to say them correctly when actually serving.

Common mistakes or bad habits that need to be corrected immediately are:

- Mispronounced vowels, consonants, diphthongs and words (common mistakes; remedies include writing out the words in cursive, successively repeating the word or phrase, breaking the word down into its separate syllables and then repeating each one slowly and then gradually increasing the speed until the word is said normally, pronouncing the words in an exaggerated "crazy Italian" manner).
- Slurred sounds (due to laziness or a speech issue that can usually be corrected).
- Non-annunciated words (due to laziness or lack of precision, often the result of not knowing the spelling of the word).
- Rushing the response (this often occurs because the server is not completely confident of what he is saying; this is also a common problem with boys who often think that "faster is better"; they must be reminded that they are praying to God though).
- Difficulty with connecting words together [e.g., "*quare me repulisti, et quare tristis incedo*"] (this can occur due to the succession of sounds which are difficult to say, or to not jumping to each syllable correctly; only by repeatedly saying the connecting words and writing them out in cursive can this be overcome).
- Forgetting the next response or the following words (merely a memorization issue).
- Substituting one part of a response in another ["*et*" for "*ad*" and vice versa] (ditto).
- Omitting a word [e.g., "*et*"] (writing the connecting words out in cursive repeatedly will remedy this problem).
- Rushing the end of a phrase [e.g., "...*orare pro me ad*..."].

These errors require careful attention, especially for younger boys, for once they have formed a certain habit, it can be very difficult to correct them at a later time.

Terms and Facts Used During the Latin Classes

Antiphon

Greek for "to be sounded again" (or "repeated"). During the Preparatory Prayers, the antiphon: *Introibo ad altare Dei, ad Deum qui lætificat juventutem meam* is derived from Psalm 42 (which is only partially used). Like a sandwich, the antiphon are the pieces of bread that enclose the meat (the psalm verses) and the cheese (the doxology).

Consonant

A non-vowel, e.g., b, c, d, l, m, t, s, etc.

Diphthong

This is Greek for "with two sounds" (or "with two tones"). When two vowel sounds are consecutively sounded. In Latin, the *au* combination is a Latin diphthong (like *Paulo*). In English, most vowels are pronounced as a diphthong (e.g., a = ay), though in Latin vowel sounds are pure (i.e., a monophthong, also Greek for "a single sound").

Doxology

A solemn and consecutive invocation of Three Persons of the Holy Trinity. The *Gloria Patri* is the most commonly used doxology, and it usually concludes the ending of every psalm verse. It is dropped for during Requiem services and for some penitential times.

Phonetic

This is Greek for “*sound*” (or “*voice*”), and in English terminology, refers to how a vowel or consonant is *pronounced*.

Psalm

This is Greek word (*psalmoi*) means “*songs sung to a harp*” (derived from the Hebrew word, “*Tehilim*” or “*praises*”). Refers to the 150 songs (or hymns of praise) that King David composed and sang while playing a harp (one of his titles is the “*Psalmist*”). The psalms form the basis of the Church’s liturgical prayer in the Divine Office and the Mass and the ancient book that contained the psalms was called the “*Psalter*.” The rosary is often called the “*People’s Psalter*” as 150 *Aves* are said when having recited all 15 mysteries, thereby commemorating the 150 psalms. Usually in the context of the liturgy, a psalm is preceded by an antiphon and then concluded with a doxology with the antiphon repeated; this is called a “*psalm structure*”.

Syllable

A part of word that is pronounced separately from the other part, which can consist of just a vowel, or a consonant(s) combined with a vowel. The word “*Deo*” consists of two syllables: *De-o*. In Latin, one of the syllables is accented, or stressed, meaning that the accented syllable is stressed a little more than the others.

Vowel

a, e, i, o, u, y; plus these combinations: **æ, œ** and the diphthong **au**. Except for the occasional diphthong, all Latin vowel sounds are pure.