



Universal Latin Exam

FAQs

AWARDS

Question: How does the ULE determine awards for students?

Answer: Our goal is to provide a helpful tool for mapping how much progress students are making over time and where they are compared to national trends. Therefore, as we assign awards, a student's score is determined by how many concepts he proves his knowledge of, not just the percent of the questions on his exam that he gets correct.

Accordingly, students are compared by their percentile ranking within their grade group. When we grade a student's test, we compare his score with the scores of all other students from the same grade who took the exam, and those who place in the top percentiles nationally within their grade level will receive awards. Students earn an AVGVSTVS award for scoring in the 85th to 100th percentile; students earn a CAESAR award for scoring in the 60th to 84th percentile.

When schools receive their results, they can expect to receive data on several different aspects of their students' performance, such as total scores, percentage of correct answers, national percentile by grade level, and comparison to previous ULEs the students may have taken.

Question: Why does the ULE award students based off of their grade in school and not their number of years studying Latin?

Answer: As a national standardized test, we strive for an objective measure that compares apples to apples. There is a very strong trend in our data indicating that, developmentally, older students pick up Latin more quickly than younger ones. There are exceptions (just as one would see in a math program), but it is a strong trend. Thus, in order to prevent high schoolers from competing against middle schoolers and elementary students, we compare students according to their grade level and not according to when they started Latin.

We also do our best to provide an objective standard that cannot be easily misused by individual students or teachers. It has been observed that, using other Latin exams, teachers can choose what test they want their class to take and thus control how well they will do as a class. If not misused, this might be fine as a tool for praising individual students, but it is not a helpful

tool for mapping how much progress students are making over time and where they are in comparison to national averages.

Ultimately, then, our approach is similar to what you would see in other competitive programs, both academic and athletic: students compete against other students of like age. This strategy ensures we are providing schools with a meaningful measure.

However, we do recognize that students who have started Latin later in school—and so are less proficient than others in the same grade at other schools—may not receive awards as readily, even if they do well on the exam and would merit honor at a school’s award assembly. So, even though these students may not rank as high on the national percentiles, we recommend that schools recognize such students with an in-school commendation based on their score within their class. In this way, honor may be given where it is due based on individual performance, but also contextualized within a national contest. We believe that this two-level approach to honors provides a fair and reasonable way to both incentivize students and provide teachers with valuable feedback.

Question: Are students penalized for incorrect answers? If a student isn’t sure of an answer, is it better to leave the question blank or make a good guess?

Answer: In order to encourage schools to customize their tests as closely as possible to their classes’ Latin knowledge, there is a penalty for answering a question incorrectly. This means that generally, if a student has no idea what the answer for a question is, it is better to leave the question blank; if a student can narrow it down to a couple choices, it is better to make a good guess.

Question: Why does the ULE only ask one kind of question (grammatical syntax)?

Answer: Latin education consists of two main skills: part-to-whole reasoning (understanding a sentence by examining the function of the words within it) and whole-to-part reasoning (understanding a sentence by comprehending the flow of the broader passage). Some students do very well in Latin because they are good at whole-to-part reasoning and inference, especially if their Latin program allows them to progress on that skill alone. However, these students sometimes struggle when faced with a part-to-whole problem, such as determining the meaning of a particular word in a sentence for which they have no context. Our exam is designed to assess students’ ability to engage in that kind of reasoning without relying on guesswork or drawing inferences from context.

Accordingly, at this point in the ULE’s development, we have chosen to focus the exam on part-to-whole reasoning, because it’s an objective and teachable skill suitable for a standardized test—not because whole-to-part reasoning is for any reason “less important.” Because of this, please keep in mind that students who do poorly on the ULE are not therefore poor Latin students overall. They could still be very good at big-picture comprehension, but what

the ULE shows is that they lack sufficient proficiency in grammatical comprehension. Many students do not realize their weakness in part-to-whole reasoning because they can rely on other skills to progress through their Latin studies, so we hope that the ULE will provide a valuable assessment for teachers and students in this regard.

EXAM LOGISTICS

Question: Can different classes within the same school take the exam on different days? Or can an individual student take the exam on a different day than the rest of their class?

Answer: Every school should administer their exams for all classes on the same day. (E.g., a school may not administer their eighth grade test to the eighth grade class on Monday, and then give their tenth grade test to the tenth grade class on Wednesday.)

However, if an individual student is unable to take the exam on the same day as the rest of his or her class (because of illness or other pressing circumstances), we can possibly grant an accommodation for the student to take the test after his or her class took it. (Under no circumstances may a student take the exam before his or her class.) Please contact the ULE administration (team@instituteformodernlanguages.org) to arrange an accommodation for a make-up test. And please note that all the same protocols apply to a makeup test that apply to the regular group (e.g., the proctor cannot be the Latin teacher, the testing room cannot have any unauthorized materials on the wall, etc.)

Question: Can the exam proctor be the class's Latin teacher?

Answer: The exam proctor should not be the students' Latin teacher, but can be anyone else who can read the instructions, make sure students can fill in answers properly, etc. Different Latin teachers may proctor tests for each other's classes.

We require this to keep the testing process as secure as possible, but if a school has no other option for a proctor besides the class's Latin teacher, the teacher may administer the test.

Question: Can I change my exam date if I need to?

Answer: If you need to change your exam date, you may do so as long as the new date falls within the testing window, and as long as all classes within your school will be taking the exam on the updated day. (If different classes must take the exam at different times during the day or on different days, please make sure that students do not discuss the exam with each other.) Regardless of your updated test day, exams must still be mailed by the postmark deadline. Please let the ULE administration know that you are changing the test date, so we can make sure your tests will get to you on time.

Question: Can I administer my test *before* the exam window begins?

Answer: We are able to accommodate you if you would like to take the test a few days before the exam window, but we may not be able to deliver tests significantly earlier. Regardless of your test day, exams must still be mailed by the postmark deadline.

Question: What happens if a student fills out a test incorrectly and it cannot be electronically graded?

Answer: If an incorrectly marked test cannot be graded electronically, it will be hand-graded and scored/awarded as usual. However, an additional fee of \$5 will be charged for each hand-graded test, in order to cover the labor for hand-grading.

We highly prioritize returning results in a timely manner. Because we determine awards for every student based on national percentiles (which we must calculate after grading all students), manual grading slows the process down for every school's awards. To keep this from happening, we provide proctors with exam instructions that they are required to relay to students. Proctors are also highly encouraged to actively supervise students during the test to make sure exam papers are being marked correctly.

Question: If I decide to cancel my test, can I receive a refund?

Answer: We will refund the per-test charge, but we will not refund the order fee or any processing charges associated with the order.

Question: If I wait to submit payment until after the deadline, will my test still be graded?

Answer: We will still grade tests that schools have not yet paid for, but we do not reveal their scores to them until they pay.

EXAM PREPARATION

Question: Can I see a sample test, a sample study guide, or a sample vocabulary list?

Answer: Contact the ULE team at team@instituteforclassicallanguages.org to receive sample ULE materials.

Question: If the exam is customizable, why does my test have vocabulary that my curriculum did not cover?

Answer: We work to produce an exam that is customizable by any teacher using any curriculum, and because Latin grammar is very systematic, we believe the most efficient way to do this is to break up the grammar system into a menu with various categories and subcategories (e.g., "Noun forms," "3rd-declension neuter nouns"). This allows teachers to relatively easily pinpoint where their students are, even if they aren't using a curriculum we have in the system. Our presets for common curricula take this menu and pre-select from it so you don't have to do it manually.

However, it's much more difficult to do this with vocabulary; we would need a menu that includes every one of the hundreds and hundreds of words that students might know by the end of high school. So, instead of asking teachers to select, one by one, each of the hundreds of words their students know (or using this huge menu to create presets for different curricula), we've determined that it is more efficient to create our own relatively small word bank and give it to teachers long before the test date. That keeps the whole customization process—which we know is already a bit of a task—simpler for teachers who have limited time. Ultimately, because every curriculum teaches vocabulary in a different order, we believe that standardizing vocab is the simplest way to keep grammar customizable.

Accordingly, we are intentional to release study guides containing this new vocabulary as soon as teachers customize their exams. Study guides are available within each school's online account as soon as teachers enter grammatical concepts, so that schools have the maximum amount of time to prepare their students vocabulary-wise. We also send out reminders to use the study guides in our announcement emails leading up to the exam.

Question: Why can't I download my study guide?

Answer: Study guides will not download properly if your test has not been customized appropriately. If your customization parameters are too narrow, our process won't be able to generate enough content to produce a study guide or a test. Please go back and check your customization selections to make sure that you have selected every concept that can possibly apply to your students. If you have done so, but you are still unable to generate a study guide, please reach out to ULE administration (team@instituteforclassicallanguages.org) for further assistance.

Question: Why does my test have so few questions?

Answer: The ULE's grading method uses forty possible test questions. This means the highest level students may be given all forty, but students will not see questions they do not know yet so younger students aren't overwhelmed. This method allows schools across the country to compare

5th graders to 5th graders, year 3 students to year 3 students, or simply see a metric of approximately how much of the language they know.

Accordingly, if your test has only a few questions, it may be because our procedure is hiding questions which it thinks your students do not know yet. Please go back and check your customization selections to make sure that you have selected every concept that can possibly apply to your students—even if some seem redundant with others.

Exempli gratia, if you have selected a general category such as “nominative,” but have left a more specific category unselected, such as “second declension nominative singular,” your students will not see any second declension nominative singular nouns on their test and your test’s possible content will be greatly diminished. If you have selected every possible concept that applies to your students and your question count still seems low, please reach out to ULE administration (team@instituteformclassicallanguages.org) for further assistance.