

ARLT Reading Competition 2018

We were delighted to receive 51 entries for this year's competition from 15 schools – record numbers for the competition! We were also very impressed with the high standard of entries, particularly in the Junior section, and we commend students and teachers for the hard work that had clearly been put in to prepare the readings. The passages, being quite long, present a challenge to readers and need thorough rehearsal before recording.

The best entrants read with no hesitations or stumbles at all, setting the bar very high. Generally candidates pronounced the sounds of Latin well, and we were particularly impressed with Ffion Shute's nasalised final –m, which is often not observed by English readers. Both passages allowed for some very dramatic moments, and some entrants threw themselves into a spirited rendition and conveyed the emotion very well indeed.

Suggestions for improvement:

Given that the focus for this year was quantities, we were a little disappointed at how many errors were made with long and short vowels, as this is germane to the correct pronunciation of Latin. (I apologise for the omission of the macron on the 'o' of 'clamore'. Well done those who ignored me and read the word correctly in any case!).

Occasionally English vowels slipped in, particularly English 'yew' for 'u'! This was particularly noticeable with names (Die-do for Dido, Die-ogenes for Diogenes).

There also seems to be some uncertainty about the accentuation of words: the accent in Latin goes on the penultimate syllable if this is 'heavy' or long, and the antepenultimate if the penultimate is 'light' (short). This needs to be observed even when reading poetry. Most Latin poetry when read aloud exhibits a tension between the word-stress and the verse ictus, a 'beat' falling in hexameter verse upon the first syllable of the foot.

Elisions in poetry can be difficult to deal with, and we suggest that they are not made mechanically when this interferes with the sense or phrasing of the words. For example, it seems better to pronounce both syllables in 'tandem his', 'etiam hiberno' and 'ego has'. There is rich evidence that the Romans did not fully elide, i.e. drop, final long vowels but shortened them (correption).

Another challenge in poetry is when enjambment occurs between lines of poetry. Very many candidates observed it very well, but some showed their uncertainty about the meaning by failing to make appropriate enjambement.

We would encourage teachers and candidates to listen to the winning entries to get an idea of the standard that can be reached. Please do continue to enter in future years!

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