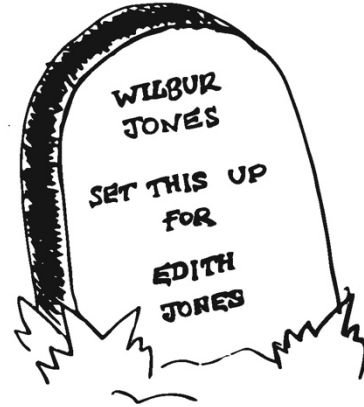


Roman Tombstones and the Dative Case



Modern tombstones can be very simple. Sometimes they just show the name of the person who has died and how long he/she lived.

The Romans did things differently. They carved **both** the name of the person who had died **and** the name of the person who paid for tombstone.



Roman names and the Dative Case

In Latin, the name of person who has set up the tombstone appears in the **nominative**. The name of the person that the tombstone is for is in the **dative**.

The dative case in Latin means “to” or “for”.

Most Roman women’s names (e.g. Octavia, Cornelia, Iulia) belong to the 1st declension.
Most Roman men’s names (e.g. Marcus, Lucius, Publius) belong to the 2nd declension.

	1 st declension	2 nd declension
Nominative	Octavia	Marcus
Accusative	Octaviam	Marcum
Genitive	Octaviae	Marci
Dative	Octaviae	Marco
Ablative	Octavia	Marco

Looking at the endings is especially important in Latin, because it’s the only way to find out who’s doing what. Unlike in English, it doesn’t matter what order the names appear in!

- a) Marcus Octaviae fecit
- b) Octaviae Marcus fecit
- c) Marcus fecit Octaviae
- d) Octaviae fecit Marcus

Marcus set this up for Octavia

fecit – ‘set this up’

The Latin word fecit literally means ‘did it’ or ‘made it’. But on a Roman tombstone, it means that the person arranged for the stone to be made and displayed.

Exercise 1:

Try translating these Roman tombstones into English.

1 D M
CORNELIA
TIBERIO FECIT

2 D M
DECIMUS
QUINTO
FECIT

3 D M
LIVIA
ARRIAE
FECIT

4 D M
MARCIAE ET IULIAE
FECIT
LUCIUS

5 D M
SEPTIMUS
FAUSTAE*

6 D M
CLAUDIAE PAULLUS FECIT

D M

D M stands for *Dis Manibus* – ‘For the Manes gods’ but which might be better translated as ‘To the spirits of the departed’. When Romans died, they joined the *manes* in the underworld, and were honoured like gods, with sacrifices. These letters appear at the top of many Roman tombstones.

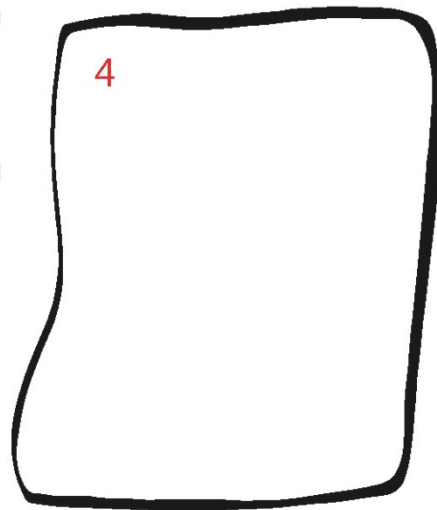
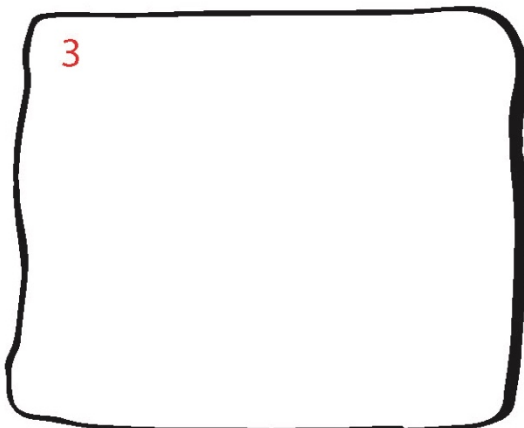
**Sometimes the Romans didn't even bother to include the word 'fecit'!*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Exercise 2:

Translate these phrases into Latin and write them on the blank tombstones below.

1. Romulus set this up for Remus
2. Octavianus set this up for Octavia
3. Tertia set this for Manius
4. Aulus set this up for Quarta
5. Faustus set this up for Plautilla
6. Quintus set this up for Caecilius



Exercise 3:

Make a Roman tombstone.

Some Roman tombstones were very small, some no bigger than an A5 piece of paper, and only a few millimetres thin.

You will need:

- A piece of plain paper or card, coloured to look like stone
- A pencil and ruler, to plan the layout of your letters
- The letters **D M**, one name in the **nominative**, one name in the **dative** and the verb **'fecit'**.

Tips:

- If you want to use your own name, or the name of someone you know, you will have to *Latinize* it. Look at the endings in the table above to help you.
- If you want to be authentic, you could write your letters like a Roman:
 - On tombstones, they wrote everything in capital letters
 - Instead of U, they wrote V (so *MARCUS* was written as *MARCVS*)
 - Instead of J, they wrote I (so *JVLIA* was written as *IVLIA*)
 - They didn't have W at all. You can use V instead, which the Romans pronounced in a similar way.
 - They did not use the letter Y in ordinary Latin words. Only in words borrowed from Greek. To make the same sound, they would have used the letter I.