

# Caesar, *Bellō Gallicō*

Below is the first sentence in *Bellō Gallicō* "(On the) Gallic War" by **Gaius Julius Caesar**. This book is traditionally one of the first actual Roman texts encountered by Latin students. Therefore this particular sentence has become especially famous over the millenia, and deservedly so. It is a marvel of style and structure.

**Gallia est omnis dīvisa in partēs trēs, quārum ūnam incolunt Belgae, aliam Aquitānī, tertiam quī ipsōrum linguā Celtae, nostrā Gallī, appellantur.**

"Gaul as a whole is divided into three parts, of which the Belgians inhabit one, the Aquitanians another, and those who are called 'Celts' in their own language (but 'Gauls' in ours) the third."

This is a rough translation. A better one might use passive *be inhabited* by to parallel the passive *be called* in English, and might find a less awkward word order, whereas Caesar can use active *incolunt* in Latin with flexible word order and bidirectional Gapping to accomplish his dual goals of clarity and elegance.

For millenia students of Latin have sought to understand this sentence and to master the ways it achieves its goals. There are many traditions of Latin teaching and learning, but most use the fact that Latin is effectively dead (and therefore will hold still indefinitely) to allow the student to dissect it into its parts, not unlike a fetal pig. Some traditional terms for such dissection are the grammatical activities of:

**Parsing** (< *pars, partis*, f: 'part') in this context means to take each word in the sentence, to identify it by part of speech, form class, derivation (if any), and to give all its inflectional categories. It is an exercise in the reduction of the syntagmatic into its paradigmatic parts.

and

**Construing**, (< *con-struō, -struere, -struxī, -structus*, 3: 'heap up, build, construct') on the other hand, means to trace out all the relationships between and among the words in the sentence, telling what modifies what, what clause and phrase boundaries there are, what grammatical relationships exist between verbs and nouns, what kinds of agreement exist between various words, and what kinds of parallel structures inform the sentence. It is an exercise in the (re)construction of the syntagmatic from its paradigmatic parts.

In two pages or less, parse and construe this sentence. You need not distinguish the two activities as long as you pursue both of them. There is a graphic parsing of this sentence in a previous handout, showing how the phrases and clauses are organized.