

## LATIN GRAMMAR I

### Wheelock 6: Sum, Possum, Complementary Infinitives

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Ch. 4 introduced us to the Present forms of *sum/esse* (to be), and in Ch. 5 we learned the Future and Imperfect Tenses. In Ch. 6 we learn the forms of *sum/esse* in these new tenses. But first a Shakespeare reference to help us remember: What is the most famous line in Hamlet? *To be, or not to be: that is the question.* When it comes to the Fut and Impf of TO BE, the answer is not-B!

#### 1. Future and Imperfect Indicative Tenses of *sum/esse* (to be)

1.1. You do not have to memorize the Fut (I will be, you will be...) & Impf (I was, you were...) paradigms of *sum/esse* IF you can remember these two things: (1) Both use the verb stem *er-*, and (2) both use the Fut/Impf tense signs/morphemes + PEs, but WITHOUT-B.

Fut		Impf	
laudābis	you will praise	laudābās	you were praising
monēbis	you will warn	monēbās	you were warning
eris (not erbis)	you will be	erās (not erbās)	you were

1.2. Let's now view the whole paradigms

Person	Future	English Gloss	Imperfect	English Gloss
1s	erō	I will/shall be	eram	I was
2s	eris	you will be	erās	you were
3s	erit	(s)he/it will be	erat	(s)he/it was
1p	erimus	we will/shall be	erāmus	we were
2p	eritis	you will be	erātis	you were
3p	erunt	they will be	erant	they were

One more mnemonic device: to say “it was the end of an ERA” means the time is past (‘was, were’). All forms of the impf of ‘to be’ have ERA.

#### 2. Present, Future and Imperfect Active of Possum/Posse (‘to be able, can’)

2.1. How to form: This verb is a compound of *pot-* prefixed to forms of *sum* in the three tenses you already know.

2.1.1. Caveat: when followed by an *-s*, the final *-t* of *pot-* assimilates & becomes an *s*: \**pot*-sum > *possum* (I can), \**pot*-sumus > *possumus* (we can), but *pot*-estis stays *potestis* (you can) since there's no *s* to cause assimilation of *t*.

The Possum Posse  
CAN



2.1.2. The principal parts: possum, posse, potuī. Note that the infinitive posse is a contracted form of what we would have expected (\*potesse).

2.2. Here's a chart of the forms (the first 3 forms of each are artificially hyphenated to show the forms of *sum* more clearly).

Person	Present I am able/can	Future I will be able	Imperfect I was able/could
1s	pos-sum	pot-erō	pot-eram
2s	pot-es	pot-eris	pot-erās
3s	pot-est	pot-erit	pot-erat
1p	possumus	poterimus	poterāmus
2p	potestis	poteritis	poterātis
3p	possunt	poterunt	poterant

### 3. Complementary Infinitives

3.1. The infinitive (2<sup>nd</sup> prin part of verbs) is used with verbs whose meaning requires an infinitive to complete its meaning (the word complementary means completing):

to have to/must (+inf)	dēbeō laudāre	I must/have to/ought to praise
to be able to/can (+inf)	possum laudāre	I can/am able to praise

3.2. As we go on, we will meet other verbs (such as audeō, audēre 'to dare') that take a complementary infinitive in Latin. The complem. inf. may come before or after the main verb that it depends on:

Amīcus meus nōn potest remanēre.	My friend is not able to remain.
Amīcus meus remanēre nōn potest.	My friend is not able to remain.