

Pronouncing (South-)German Latin of the late 18th century,
with examples mostly from the Vespers of a Confessor

Most consonants as in Italian:

b, d, f, ph, k, l, m, n, p, s, t, v as in English, but:

s between vowels	exquisita	exquisite	Intervocalic s [z] seems to be a Salzburg specialty. Initial voiced s [z] is a rarer Dutch/northern variation
ti + o, a, u	justitia “justice”	eats	[tsi] for the second (soft) t
but:	hostias “sacrifice”	tea	exception when preceded by s
r	terra “earth”, erit “shall”		rolled or flipped
j	juravit “swore”	you	soft
th	Sabaoth		silent h after t

Characteristically German:

g	reges “kings” magna “great”	go	always hard
h	hereditatem “heritage”	hat	lightly aspirated
but:	mihi “me”, nihil “none”	humility	like <i>ich</i> [ç], only these 2 exceptions
x	dextris “right hand”	extra	[ks]
	excelsus “above”		[ksts], or more simply [kts]
but:	exultavit “rejoiced”	eggs	voiced [gz] when intervocalic
qu	quia “who”	kvetch	[kv]
c (hard)	sanctum “holy”, caput “head”, donec “until”		[k] before consonants, back vowels a & o and end of word
c (soft)	cœli “heavens”	Mozart	[ts] before front vowels e, i, æ, œ
cc	ecce “behold” [ektse]		
ch	Melchisedech [melçizedeç] brachio “arm”	humility Loch Ness	as in German: soft [ç] after e, i “ hard [x] after a, o, u
but:	Christe [kriste]	Christ	[k] in initial position

As a first approximation, vowels as in ‘italianate’ Latin, with 2 exceptions given first:

œ	pœnitēbit “repent”	as in Goethe	instead of Italian [e]. ö ; fr. <i>coeur</i>
eu	euge “well done”	boy	as in German
a	scabellum “low stool”	father	

2nd approximation:

In German Latin, the remaining vowels sound “open” in syllables ending in a consonant.

e	sem-per “ever”	effort	
i	il-lis “them”	ill	
o	nos-tros “our”	ought	
u	nunc “now”	nook	neither “nut” nor closed “noose”
2 exceptions:	et “and”, est “is”	‘ate’	“closed” e, without diphthong of ay,

When a syllable ending in a vowel is stressed or final of word, that vowel is always “closed”:

e, æ*	éjus “his”, sé-de “sit”	French <i>été</i>	all e’s closed
i, y**	Kyrie “Lord”	key ring	
o	Dó-mi-no “Lord”	dote, know	for o, syllable division always
	com-mo-vébitur “moved”	cough, motion	determines the sound
u	sú-per “over”	soup	

Note that hyphenation is thus important in a way that it is not in Italian!

dí-xit “saith”, jú-stus “just”, dé-xtris “righthand” all closed vowels followed by open

3rd approximation:

Now we can finally take account of unstressed syllables.

Unstressed syllables ending in e, i or u tend to be open, except at ends of words:

	hó-mi-nis “for man”	/hómInIs/	-mi- ends in vowel, but is unstressed
	sæ-cu-lum “ages”	cook	-cu- “ “
	gloria “glory”	glorify	open ih
	Pá-tri “to the Father”	tree	
but:	túum “thy”,	tomb	consecutives sound closed

Unlike Italian, German allows more than one stress per word:

Bénedicétur closed-open-o-cl-o secondary stress on first syllable

* æ seems to have been always “closed” in Mozart’s time, but nowadays has the same exception for unstressed syllables as e. It is often written as two letters, ae, but “Israël” is of course three syllables.

** Revival of the Greek üpsilon [y] pronunciation is relatively recent, documented as early as 1850 in school-Latin. In our period it is interchangeable with i, as seen in Beethoven’s respelling *Elisium* for Schiller’s *Elysium*.

Even more detail (but less consistency) can be found in:

Ron Jeffers *Translations and Annotations of Choral Repertoire: Sacred Latin texts* 1988

The only book to dare a single-page nutshell guide; much out of agreement with:

Harold Copeman *Singing in Latin, or, pronunciation explor’d* 1990

A long survey of the evidence, from the Middle Ages to contemporary north/southern usage
Copeman & Scherr “German Latin” in *Singing Early Music* ed. Mcgee et al. 1996

Concentrating on Renaissance & early Baroque periods

Vera Scherr *Aufführungspraxis Vocalmusik: Handbuch der lateinischen....* 2002

Not consulted, but rumored to contain some about-faces from the co-authored chapter above