

P-Latin by Renae Elam, CP, NCCP

P-Latin? As in, Pig- Latin? No, I mean P-Latin, or Latin phrases commonly seen and used by legal professionals. Or, *Paralegal Latin*, if you will.

Have you ever seen a Latin term in a pleading or a motion and continued reading as if you knew or could figure out what it meant without looking it up? It is not that difficult to not only understand what we are reading, but to incorporate appropriate Latin terms or phrases into our work product.

I have kept an index-card file with Latin terms and their definitions since I began studying for the NALA Certification exam a number of years ago, and I still use it for quick reference in conjunction with Black's Law Dictionary and Internet usage searches.

Let's take a few minutes to examine 10 frequently used Latin phrases with which every paralegal should become familiar.

1. *et al* - Perhaps the most commonly used Latin term. It is an abbreviation for "et alii," which means, "and others."

2. *pro se* - "appearing for oneself, personally." This simply means that a party does not have an attorney and has chosen to handle the case for himself or herself.

3. *pro hac vice* - We see this term when an out-of-state attorney wishes to appear in our state in a case. Normally a local attorney must submit an application, notice or motion for the out-of-state attorney to appear "pro hac vice," or, literally, "for this occasion." It allows the attorney to establish an appearance in a case in a state where he or she is not licensed to practice law.

4. *lis pendens* - There are two important words here. "Pendens" literally means "pending." "Lis pendens" means "litigation pending." For example, a *lis pendens* filed with real estate records to notify the world that the real estate is involved in litigation.

5. *ad litem* - as in "Guardian ad litem," which literally means, "guardian for this litigation." So, "ad litem," means "for the suit," or, "for the litigation."

6. *in limine* - Mainly used in the context of a Motion in Limine. "In limine" simply indicates that the action is taken "in the beginning, threshold." So the Motion in Limine is filed at the beginning, or just before, a trial.

7. *ex parte* - "One side only, by or for one party only." If a motion or other court filing is done "ex parte," it means the other side has no say in the matter, at least for this particular motion.

8. *in camera* - Have you ever filed something that is "in camera and under seal?" In camera simply means "in the chamber," which means it is not in open court, but is seen only by the judge. Privilege logs are commonly filed "in camera."

9. *nunc pro tunc* - Which means, "now for then." If something is filed nunc pro tunc, it could mean there has been a clerical error in a previous order and the current filing is being filed to correct the error.

10. *pro bono* - "Free of charge, without cost." If an attorney handles a case "pro bono," it means he or she is providing legal services free of charge.

When you come across a Latin term or phrase (and you will!), take the time to look it up and become familiar with its usual meaning and also the reason it is being used in the legal writing in which you have seen it. It is helpful to keep a dictionary of legal terms handy, or save one to your "favorites" on the Internet for quick reference. Additionally, it is helpful to discuss Latin terms with your supervising attorney to become familiar with the circumstances under which he or she uses them. *Bona fortuna!* ("Good Luck!")