

LATIN IMPERSONAL VERBS FORMATION AND USAGE

Introduction. Latin impersonal verbs do not have a specific subject, instead their subject is the unidentified *it*. In English, the stand-in subject is usually : *it*, a neuter 3rd person singular pronoun. Examples of the unidentified *it* : *It is raining, It upsets me to hear this, It pleases me that you are here.* In Latin, there is no pronoun, just the personal verb ending

Impersonal verbs are in the 3rd person singular present indicative active voice and have the ending : *-t*, and the non-personal subject *it*. The verb : *iuvo, iuvare, iuvi, iutum* (1). *to help, aid or gratify, please* may be used personally, that is; the subject is expressed. Example : *boleti iuvant Quinto, mushrooms please Quintus.* However, the focus is *not* on *iuvo* (2) in the indicative, but *iuvat* (2) in the impersonal

Latin has approximately a dozen impersonal verbs. Impersonal verbs occur in both the indicative and subjunctive moods, and as gerunds and infinitives

Translation of a Latin impersonal verb construction should be re-phrased into idiomatic English. Example :

pudebatne Claudium claudum esse ?

Was Claudius ashamed to be lame ? [Literal : Was it shaming Claudius to be lame ?]

Two categories of impersonal verbs. Impersonal verbs may express one of two conditions. Example :

- Verbs expressing weather and time of day
- Verbs of feeling

As always, the writer's guide : *insanabile cacoethes scribendi*

IMPERSONAL VERBS EXPRESSING WEATHER AND TIME OF DAY

Impersonal verbs expressing weather and time of day. The impersonal verb is used when referring to either weather or a time of day. The construction uses the undefined *it*. The three most commonly used tenses are cited, the 3rd person singular present indicative active voice, the present infinitive, and the : 3rd person singular perfect indicative active voice. Example :

fulgurat, fulgurare, fulguravit

fulguro, fulgurare, fulguravi, fulguratum (1). *to glitter, flash, shine brightly.* Impersonal : *it is lightening*

grandinat, grandinare, __

grandinat, grandinare, __, __ (1. no passive, no perfect, no supine). *to hail.* Impersonal : *it is hailing*

lucescit (hoc), lucescere (hoc), luxit (hoc)

lucesco, lucescere, luxi, __ (3. no passive, no supine). *to begin to shine, grow light.* Impersonal : *it is getting light or it is dawn*

lucet, lucere, luxit

luceo, lucere, luxi, __ (2. no passive, no supine) *to shine.* Impersonal : *it is shining*

ningit, ningere, nixit

ningit, ningere, nixit, __ (3. no passive, no supine, impersonal). *to snow.* Impersonal : *it is snowing*

pluit, pluere, pluvit

pluit, pluere, pluvit, __ (3. no passive, no supine, impersonal). *to rain.* Impersonal : *it is raining*

rorat, rorare, roravit

roro, rorare, roravi, roratum (1). *to cause dew, drip, to be moist.* Impersonal : *the dew falls*

tonat, tonare, tonuit

tono, tonare, tonui, tonitum (1). *to thunder, to speak thunderously, sound like thunder.* Impersonal : *it is thundering*

(ad) vesperacit, (ad) vesperascere, (ad) vesperavit

vesperasco, vesperascere, vesperavi, __ (3. no passive, no supine). *to grow towards evening.* Impersonal : *it becomes evening, it grows late*



The impersonal weather verbs have no subject. However, the verb may be used personally in conjunction with the name of a deity as a subject. Example : **Iuppiter tonat**, **Jupiter thunders**. Poetry may also have a subject. Example : **fundae saxa pluunt**. **The slings rain stones**

Latin may express a condition or circumstance in an alternate manner. The below cited expressions cover a range of weather conditions. Example :

calidum est	it is warm
frigidum est	it is chilly
humidum est	it is humid
nubiliosum est	it is cloudy
partim nubiliosum est	it is partly cloudy
ventosum est	it is windy
lucet	it is sunny
partim lucet	it is partly sunny



IMPERSONAL VERBS EXPRESSING FEELINGS

Person : accusative, cause : genitive or infinitive. Cited below are five verbs of feeling : the person who feels is in the **accusative** and the cause of the feeling is in the **genitive**, if an action, an **infinitive**. Example :

me miseret	I pity	miseret, miserere, miseruit (2. impersonal) it causes pity
me paenitet	I regret	paenitet, paenitere, paenituit (2. impersonal) it causes regret
me piget	I am bored of	piget, pigere, piguit or pigitum est (2. impersonal) it causes vexation
me pudet	I am ashamed of	pudet, pudere, pudit or puditus est (2. impersonal) it causes shame
me taedet	I am tired of	taedet, taedere, taedit or taesum est (2. impersonal) it causes tedium

Example :

Genitive of the cause

hostium nostrorum me miseret
I am sorry for our enemies

avaritiae tuae te paenitet ?
Do you regret your greed ?

stultitiae meae piget magistrum
The teacher is vexed with my stupidity

gracilis porci pudet agricolam
The farmer is ashamed of his skinny pig

taedet nos horum veterum librorum
We are bored with these old books

Infinitive

porcos meos afuisse me miseret
I am sorry that my pigs have gone away

paenitet me hoc fecisse
I regret having done this

mecum in ludo sedere te piget ?
Does it irritate you to sit in school with me ?

hoc facere me tunc non pudit, fecisse nunc pudet
I was not ashamed then to do this, but I am ashamed now to have done it

taedet nos in ludo sedere
We are bored with sitting in school

Person : accusative with infinitive. Impersonal verbs that express a feeling or a moral judgment, the **accusative** of the person affected, with an **infinitive**. Example :

me ire decet	it is becoming for me to go	decet, decere, decuit (2. impersonal) it is becoming, fitting, suits
me ire dedecet	it is unbecoming for me to go	dedecet, dedecere, dedecuit (2. impersonal) it is unbecoming (to / for)
me ire iuvat	I like going	iuvat, iuvare, iuvit (1. impersonal) it pleases

Example :

bonum ducem decet hostibus parcere	It is fitting for a good general to spare the enemy
me non iuvit heri ad ludum ire	It did not please me to go to school yesterday or I did not like going to school yesterday

Person : dative with infinitive. Impersonal verbs that express a feeling and a judgment, **dative** of the person affected, with an **infinitive**. Example:

mihi ire displicet	I am displeased	displicet, displicere, displicuit (2. impersonal) it is displeasing
mihi ire libet	I like going	libet, libere, libuit or libitum est (2, impersonal) it is pleasant. <u>Nota bene</u> : of something desired
mihi ire (per eum) licet	I am permitted (by him)	licet, licere, licuit or licitum est (2. impersonal) it is permissible
mihi ire placet	I like going	placet, placere, placuit or placitus est (2. impersonal) it is pleasing. <u>Nota bene</u> : of something recognized as a right
mihi ire prodest	I am going to profit	prodest, prodesse, profuit (irregular. impersonal) it is beneficial

Example :

mihi displicuit audire te tuum librum non attulisse	I was displeased to hear that you had not brought your book
hic manere tibi non licet	You are not allowed to stay here
cur domum abire nobis non licebit ?	Why will we not be allowed to leave for home ?
placet mihi te videre	I am pleased to see you
tibi proderit libros tuos tecum ferre	It will be good for you to bring your books with you

REGULARLY CONJUGATED VERBS WITH AN IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTION

Regularly Conjugated Verbs with an Impersonal Usage. Select regular verbs may have an impersonal construction. They introduce a **result clause**, and they observe the rules for the **Sequence of Tenses**. In the impersonal, they all mean : **it happens**. Example :

accidit, accidere, accidit	accidit, accidere, accidit (3. no passive, no supine). transitive : to fall down. Impersonal : it happens
contingit, contingere, contingit	contingit, contingere, contingit (3). to touch. Impersonal : it happens
evenit, evenire, evenit	evenit, evenire, evenit (4) intransitive + dative to happen to, befall (someone). Impersonal : it happens
fit, fieri, factus est	fit, fieri, factus est (irregular). to occur, happen. Impersonal : it happens
efficit, efficere, effecit	efficit, efficere, effect (3, io-variant). to make or work out, effect. Impersonal : it is brought about

restat, restare, restitit

restat, restare, restitit (1. no supine). to stand firm, stay behind. Impersonal : **it remains**

sequitur, sequi, secutus est

sequitur, sequi, secutus est (3). to follow. Impersonal : **it follows**

Example :

saepe fit ut lupi e silva veniant

It often happens the wolves come out of the wood

ergo sequitur ut porci infelices sint

Therefore it follows that the pigs are unhappy

restabat ut pastor lupos in silvam ageret

It remained for the shepherd to drive the wolves into the wood

NECESSE EST AND OPUS EST

Usage of 'necesse est' and 'opus est'. **necesse est** and **opus est** mean, **it is necessary**. They take the **dative** of the person affected and either an **infinitive** or a **clause**, which may or may not be introduced by **ut**. If they introduce a clause, the verb in the clause will be : **present subjunctive in primary sequence** and **imperfect subjunctive in the secondary sequence**

oportet, oportere, oportuit (2. no passive, no supine). it is fitting, ought. Impersonal : **it is proper** takes the **accusative** of the person affected and either an **infinitive** or a **clause** with or without **ut**. Example :

Infinitive

Subjunctive clause

nobis necesse erat urbem fortiter defendere
We needed to defend the city bravely

necesse erat (ut) urbem fortiter defenderemus
We needed to defend the city bravely

nobis opus urbem fortiter defendere
We must defend the city bravely

opus est (ut) urbem fortiter defendamus
We must defend the city bravely

pastorem oportet porcos pascere
A shepherd should feed his pigs

pastor porcos pascat oportet
A shepherd should feed his pigs

Nota bene : **opus est** may also take an **ablative** of the thing needed. Example : **opus est mihi libris multis**, I need many books

Nota bene : Translating **oportet** be careful regarding **should** and **ought to**. English has **should have done** or **ought to have done**. Latin uses the past tense of **oportet** with the present infinitive, since the obligation was in the past. Example : **Catonem non oportuit ridere**. Cato should not have laughed. [Literal : Cato did not ought to laugh]

INTEREST AND REFERT

Usage of interest and refert. **interest** and **refert** mean, **it concerns** or **it is in the interest of**. They introduce either an **infinitive** or an **ut** clause with the verb in the **present subjunctive in the primary sequence** and in the **imperfect subjunctive in secondary sequence**

For the person designated by **interest**, there are two possible choices : either the **genitive** or the **ablative feminine singular** form of the pronominal adjective : **mea, tua, et cetera**

Nota bene : Classical Latin did not use the genitive for **refert**. In **mea refert**, **mea** modifies **re**, the ablative singular of **res**. An alternative to **interest** with the genitive is **mea interest**. Further, **mea interest** developed by analogy with **mea refert**. In this instance, **mea** has nothing to agree with

A subjunctive clause with **interest** or **refert** is rarely negative. If the clause is negative, the negative is **ne**. Example :

With : genitive of the person affected

With : ablative feminine singular with : pronominal adjective

Caesaris interest hodie domi remanere
It is in Caesar's interest to stay at home today

tua interest hodie domi remanere
It is in your interest to stay home today

civium omnium interest ut Brutus Caesarem interficiat
It is in the interest of all the citizens that Brutus should kill Caesar

vestra refert ut Brutus Caesarem interficiat
It is in your interest that Brutus should kill Caesar

Romanorum interest ne Caesar rex fiat
It concerns the Romans that Caesar should not become king

nostra interest, Romani, ne Caesar rex fiat
It concerns us, Romans, that Caesar should not become king

Latin, as for all languages, the idiom may be varied, a demonstrative pronoun in the neuter singular to indicate the thing that is of interest. Example :

hoc Caesaris non interest
This is not in Caesar's interest

hoc mea non interest / refert
This is not in my interest

Nota bene : In the cited examples, **hoc** is the subject, therefore **interest / refert** is not impersonal

THE FUTURE INFINITIVE OF SUM IN THE IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTION

The future infinitive of sum in the impersonal construction. The following sentence : **Caesar knew that our city would be destroyed by the enemy**, is to use the **future passive infinitive**, **deletum iri**

sciebat Caesar urbem nostrum ab hostibus deletum iri

Literal : Caesar knew our city to be about to be destroyed by the enemy

The Romans avoided the **future passive construction**. An alternate approach is the **impersonal** of the **future infinitive of sum**, **futurum esse** or its indeclinable equivalent, **fore**

sciebat Caesar fore / futurum esse ut urbs nostra ab hostibus deleteretur

Literal : Caesar knew that it would be that our city was destroyed by the enemy

Nota bene : In the cited example, the infinitive is used impersonally to introduce the **ut** clause. The sentence observes the rules for the **Sequence of Tenses** and **negation**, as if it were a **result clause**

The **fore / futurum esse** construction is also useful in posing **indirect questions**, when the verb does not have a **future active infinitive**, **nolle**. Here is how the future active infinitive is normally used in indirect questions. Example :

scit pastor porcum agrum relictum esse

The shepherd knows the pig will leave the field

When a verb has no **future active infinitive**, use **futurum esse**, or **fore** (the indeclinable equivalent)

scit pastor fore ut porcus agrum relinquere nolit

The shepherd knows that the pig will not wish to leave the field [Literal : The shepherd knows that it will be that the pig does not wish to leave the field]

IMPERSONAL PASSIVE CONSTRUCTION

Impersonal passive construction. **Intransitive verbs** do not have a **passive voice**. Latin uses the 3rd person singular (neuter) of the passive of intransitive verbs to denote the mere occurrence of an action, without precisely indicating the person by whom the action is carried out. This construction is called : **the impersonal use of the passive of intransitive verbs**. There is no English language equivalent to the Latin intransitive verb with a passive construction. The Latin construction emphasizes the act rather than those who do the act. Example :

diu pugnatum est

The fighting went on for a long time [Literal : It was fought for a long time]

curritur ex omnibus partibus urbis

People come running from all parts of the city [Literal : It is run from all parts of the city]

post multos dies Romam ventum est

Rome was reached after many days [Literal : It was come to Rome after many days]

Nota bene : The impersonal passive may be modified by an adverb. Example :

acriter resistebatur

Fierce resistance was being offered

Nota bene : The impersonal construction use of the passive sails around the rule by which intransitive verbs that take a dative or ablative cannot be used passively

Nota bene : A transitive verb in the passive, the direct object becomes the subject, the subject becomes the agent in the ablative. Example :

Active Voice

porcos agricola amat
The farmer loves the pigs

The passive periphrastic construction. In the passive periphrastic construction an intransitive verb is used impersonally, but keeps its own case construction. Example :

pugnandum est

tibi pugnandum est

nobis eundum est

ei proficiscendum est

Caesari persuadendum est

iniuriarum nobis obliviscendum est

cuique utendum est iudicio suo



Passive Voice

porci ab agricola amantur
The pigs are loved by the farmer

A battle must be fought

You must fight a battle

We must go

He must set out [**Nota bene** : the passive periphrastic construction is always passive, includes deponent verbs]

Caesar must be persuaded

We must forget our wrongs

Every man must use his own judgment

If the intransitive verb takes a dative of reference instead of an accusative, the above cited switch is not possible. Use the passive verb impersonally. There is no subject, the person or thing affected by the action remains in the dative and a personal agent is expressed with **a / ab** and the ablative. Example :

Active Voice

nemo tibi credit
No one believes you

militibus imperavit ut progredierentur
He ordered the soldiers to advance

nemini credere possumus
We can believe no one

principibus persuadere non poteramus
We could not persuade the chiefs

Passive Voice

tibi a nullo creditur
You are believed by no one

militibus imperatum est ut progredierentur
The soldiers were ordered to advance

nemini credi potest
No one can be believed

principibus persuaderi non poterat
The chiefs could not be persuaded

Nota bene : The impersonal passive construction is cumbersome. The active construction is preferred and common

Double dative present. Where there are two datives, one of the agents, one governed by a verb, may lead to ambiguity. The agent is expressed by **a / ab** and the ablative. Example :

Caesari a te persuadendum est

You must persuade Caesar

Usage 'praesto' in the impersonal passive construction. **praesto** is a transitive verb, with its passive voice restricted to the 3rd person singular. Its regular meaning is : **to stand out, be superior (to), surpass, answer for, excel.** Employed as an impersonal verb, its sense : **it is better.** **praesto** is cited below in its personal ending : the 3rd person singular present indicative active voice, the present infinitive, and the 3rd person singular perfect indicative active voice. Example :

praestat, praestare, praestitit

praesto, praestare, praestiti or praestavi, praestatum or praestitum (1). to stand out, be superior (to), surpass, answer for, excel. Impersonal : **it is better**

Example :

praestat hic manere

It is better to remain here

praestat te abire

It is better that you should depart [Literal : For you to depart is better]

praestat copias instruere quam fuga salutem fore / petere

It is better to draw up our forces than to seek safety in flight

IMPERSONAL VERB AND THE COMMAND IN THE SUBJUNCTIVE

The impersonal verb and the command in the subjunctive. Impersonal verbs are in the 3rd person singular, a command must be expressed by the subjunctive. **miseret, miserere, miseruit** (2. no passive, no supine, impersonal). **to feel pity (for) / sorry (for)**. Example :

Indicative

te nostri non miseret
You are not sorry for us

Subjunctive

ne te nostri misereat
Do not be sorry for us

Summary of impersonal passive constructions. Summary and study these sentences, impersonal verbs in passive constructions. Example :

pugnatur
A battle is fought

pugnandum est
A battle must be fought

tibi pugnandum est
You must fight a battle



Caesari persuadetur
Caesar is being persuaded

Caesari persuadendum est
Caesar must be persuaded

Caesari a te persuadendum est
You must persuade Caesar

SOLEO AND DEBEO

Usage of 'soleo' and 'debeo'. **soleo** and **debeo** are two verbs that appear to be impersonal as they are often used in the 3rd person singular construction with a complementary infinitive. Both verbs take a personal subject. Example :

- **soleo, solere, solitus sum** (2. + complementary infinitive). **to be accustomed, to be in the habit (of)**
- **dedeo, debere, debui, debitum** (2. + complementary infinitive). **to owe, ought, must, should**

Caligula solebat crudelis esse
Caligula was in the habit of being cruel

Caligula debet propter crudelitatem puniri
Caligula ought to be punished for his cruelty

INTRANSITIVE VERBS USED IMPERSONALLY

Intransitive verbs used impersonally. Intransitive verbs do *not* take a direct object. However, they often appear in the 3rd person singular passive construction, with the implied subject of *it*. Example :

ab imperatore ad munera perventum est

The emperor arrived at the public show [Literal : It was arrived by the emperor at the public show]

The intransitive verb is used impersonally when the speaker wishes to emphasize the action rather than the person performing the act. English requires rephrasing verbs used impersonally. Example : **fortiter pugnabatur, the fighting was fierce** [Literal : it was fought fiercely]

The following verbs appear impersonally in the passive. Example : **parco** (3). **to spare**, **persuadeo** (2). **to convince**, **pugno** (1). **to fight**, and compounds of **venio** (4). **to come**, such as **pervenio** (4). **to arrive**



Model verb 3rd conjugation : **pluit, pluere, pluvit, ___** (3, impersonal, no passive, no supine stem). **it rains, it is raining**

	Singular			Plural		
Indicative	1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd
Active						
Present	-	-	pluit	-	-	-
Imperfect	-	-	pluebat	-	-	-
Future	-	-	pluet	-	-	-
Perfect	-	-	pluvit	-	-	-
Pluperfect	-	-	pluverat	-	-	-
Future Perfect	-	-	pluverit	-	-	-
Passive						
Present	-	-	-	-	-	-
Imperfect	-	-	-	-	-	-
Future	-	-	-	-	-	-
Perfect	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pluperfect	-	-	-	-	-	-
Future Perfect	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Singular			Plural		
Subjunctive	1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd
Active						
Present	-	-	pluat	-	-	-
Imperfect	-	-	plueret	-	-	-
Perfect	-	-	pluverit	-	-	-
Pluperfect	-	-	pluvisset	-	-	-
Passive						
Present	-	-	-	-	-	-
Imperfect	-	-	-	-	-	-
Perfect	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pluperfect	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Singular			Plural		
Imperative	1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd
Present	-	-	-	-	-	-
Future	-	-	pluito	-	-	-
Non-finite Forms	Active			Passive		
	Present	Perfect	Future	Present	Perfect	Future
Infinitives	pluere	pluisse	-	-	-	Gerundive
Participles	pluens	-	-	-	-	-
Verbal Nouns	Gerund			Ablative	Supine	
	Genitive	Dative	Accusative	Ablative	Accusative	Ablative
	pluendi	pluendo	pluendum	pluendo	-	-

