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# **Basic Word Order in *De Agricultura***

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## Abstract

Latin word order has been the subject of scholarly debate for centuries, yet the question is far from resolved. In terms of the basic order of the clause's core constituents, some analysts argue that the basic order is SOV, while others argue for SVO. Some scholars argue that basic order is determined primarily by pragmatic principles, others hold the view that order is primarily syntactically determined, and others suggest that both syntactic and pragmatic principles are in operation.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the debate on basic order in Latin and its determinants. Specifically, I examine the order of subject, object and verb in *De agricultura*, an agricultural manual written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. The study shows that the orders SV and OV are so overwhelmingly predominant that we are justified in labelling them as basic; indeed they are so common that we could argue that the order of these elements is relatively fixed. Departures from the basic order fall into two categories: those instances where a subject or object comes later in the clause than usual (i.e. after the verb) and those instances where they appear earlier in the clause than usual (i.e. in a fronting construction). It will be shown that there is a constellation of factors which must be taken into account to explain the distribution and function of these deviations, including the information status of a fronted or postposed NP's referent, its pragmatic function in the clause, and the function of the clause in structuring the discourse. In summary, I argue that in *De agricultura* there is a syntactically determined basic order for subject, object and verb, and that departures from the basic order are motivated by pragmatic factors, viz either (a) the need to draw attention to an NP's referent(s) for a specific discourse-structuring reason or (b) the positioning of certain 'focally heavy' information after light verbs.

**Dedicated to Jan, Rhys and Simon,  
who got me started and kept me going.**

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## Abbreviations

2ps	second person singular
3pp	third person plural
3ps	third person singular
abl	ablative
acc	accusative
adv	adverb
dat	dative
FI	future imperative
fqp	future perfect
fut	future tense
gen	genitive
ger	gerundive
imp	imperfect
indecl	indeclinable noun
inf	infinitive
int	interrogative particle
n/a	indeterminate as to nominative or accusative coding (applied only to fronted elements and their modifiers)
neg	negator
nom	nominative
pass	passive
PI	present imperative
perf	perfect tense
pres	present tense
sub	subordinator
subj	subjunctive

NB: Unless otherwise indicated, verbs are in the indicative and are present tense (i.e. tense and mood are only marked if the tense is not present or the mood is not indicative).