

## HISTORY, PURPOSE AND USAGE

*Lorem ipsum*, or *lipsum* as it is sometimes known, is dummy text used in laying out print, graphic or web designs. The passage is attributed to an unknown typesetter in the 15th century who is thought to have scrambled parts of Cicero's *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* for use in a type specimen book. It usually begins with:

*“Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.”*

The purpose of *lorem ipsum* is to create a natural looking block of text (sentence, paragraph, page, etc.) that doesn't distract from the layout. A practice not without controversy, laying out pages with meaningless filler text can be very useful when the focus is meant to be on design, not content.

The passage experienced a surge in popularity during the 1960s when Letraset used it on their dry-transfer sheets, and again during the 90s as desktop publishers bundled the text with their software. Today it's seen all around the web; on templates, websites, and stock designs. Use our generator to ge

## HEDONIST ROOTS

Until recently, the prevailing view assumed *lorem ipsum* was born as a nonsense text. “It's not Latin, though it looks like it, and it actually says nothing,” *Before & After* magazine answered a curious reader, “Its ‘words’ loosely approximate the frequency with which letters occur in English, which is why at a glance it looks pretty real.”

As Cicero would put it, “Um, not so fast.”

The placeholder text, beginning with the line “*Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit*”, looks like Latin because in its youth, centuries ago, it was Latin.

Richard McClintock, a Latin scholar from Hampden-Sydney College, is credited with discovering the source behind the ubiquitous filler text. In seeing a sample of *lorem ipsum*, his interest was piqued by *consectetur*—a genuine, albeit rare, Latin word. Consulting a Latin dictionary led McClintock to a passage from *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* (“On the Extremes of Good and Evil”), a first-century B.C. text from the Roman philosopher Cicero.

In particular, the garbled words of *lorem ipsum* bear an unmistakable resemblance to sections 1.10.32–33 of Cicero's work, with the most notabl

## REMIXING A CLASSIC

So how did the classical Latin become so incoherent? According to McClintock, a 15th century typesetter likely scrambled part of Cicero's *De Finibus* in order to provide placeholder text to mockup various fonts for a type specimen book.

It's difficult to find examples of *lorem ipsum* in use before Letraset made it popular as a dummy text in the 1960s, although McClintock says he remembers coming across the *lorem ipsum* passage in a book of old metal type samples. So far he hasn't relocated where he once saw the passage, but the popularity of Cicero in the 15th century supports the theory that the filler text has been used for centuries.

And anyways, as Cecil Adams reasoned, “[Do you really] think graphic arts supply houses were hiring classics scholars in the 1960s?” Perhaps. But it seems reasonable to imagine that there was a version in use far before the age of Letraset.

McClintock wrote to *Before & After* to explain his discovery;

*“What I find remarkable is that this text has been the industry's standard dummy text ever since some printer in the 1500s took a galley of type and scrambled it to make a type specimen book; it has survived not only four centuries of letter-by-letter resetting but even the leap into electronic typesetting, essentially unchanged except for an occasional 'ing' or 'y' thrown in. It's ironic that when the then-understood Latin was*