It's not the *Eclogues*, but your students can read it: Late Latin grammar

If intermediate-level Latin students are given the relatively small amount of assistance that they need in order to comprehend a passage on a topic—say the gender of nouns—addressed by any of the Late Latin grammarians—say Probus—then they are prepared to read a passage on that same topic by any other Late Latin grammarian, including Charisius, Diomedes, Donatus, Priscian and half a dozen others collected in Keil’s *Grammatici Latini*. In my talk I will provide a handout with parallel passages showing how easy it is to transfer reading ability for one author to another. I will also share experiences that various students have had using my “commentary” of such grammarians.

There are a number of advantages to working with this body of writers for the intermediate student:

1. The vocabulary is relatively limited and is highly repetitive.
2. Sentence structure is straightforward. It leans heavily on relative clauses and makes less frequent use of clauses and constructions requiring the subjunctive; there is virtually no hyperbaton.
3. Clearly stated principles are backed up with examples—sometimes lots of examples.
4. Once a sample text is learned, the passages of the other grammarians on the same topic can actually be read by the student, who begins to develop the habit of moving his eyes across the page without stopping to translate each word. The joy at finding oneself taking in Latin sentences phrase by phrase and understanding the meaning of each sentence as it unfolds will, I hope, more than offset the (to some) rather dry nature of the content.
5. The Late Latin grammarians wrote for readers who were conversant in Latin on some level, and some of the concerns they address are different from the ones that occupy us. It is interesting to give our students the chance to compare the grammarians’ approach with the methods used today in Latin instruction.
6. The content of the Late Latin grammarians is of immediate relevance to the intermediate-level Latin student. Reading this body of writing allows a student to review and also to learn the morphology that she has not yet seen.

The Latin here is of the type that can be readily adapted to oral work, as in fact it already has been in John Traupman’s *Conversational Latin for Oral Proficiency* and Hans Orberg’s *Lingua Latina per Se Illustrata*. Teachers of Latin who are interested in using oral techniques and who want to develop oral proficiency themselves will find no better place to start than with the subject of basic grammar. The sentence structure required to explain morphology is very simple, and after all, almost all the grammar and syntax terms we use in English are Latin derivatives.

I am preparing a student reader based on the Late Latin grammarians that could be given to a first- or second-semester Latin student as they leave school for winter or summer break. The material as presented is completely self-contained and would serve as a resource for reviewing basic grammar and for developing proficiency in reading Latin as Latin. A draft version of the reader will get a second round of testing by a number of students over the 2010-2011 winter break. It is possible that the forthcoming book will be published in time for the 2011 CAMWS meeting.