

Recitation E

## **When in Rome, Do as the Romans Do**

This expression means that when we visit a place, we should follow the customs of that place. This expression shows an attitude or a mindset: You are willing to change your way of doing things to fit in with those around you.

The place does not have to be a new country. It can simply be a new situation or environment. For example, let's say you usually speak very loudly. But in an art museum or library, you whisper in a low voice. You follow the rules of that place.

This expression has another meaning. When you are in an unfamiliar situation, you should follow the lead of those who know the rules. These people know how to behave with the others there. They know how to play the game. They know how to work within the system. They don't do things differently. They blend in.

But what does Rome have to do with following other people's customs? Several websites describe how the expression may have begun. And if they are correct, this expression is very old.

Here's how the story goes:

During the time of the Roman Empire more than 1500 years ago, a Christian leader, Saint Augustine, moved from Rome to Milan. Once in the new city, he found some parts of religious life to be different. For example, in Rome he fasted, or did not eat, on Saturdays. But in Milan, people did not fast on that day. Another church leader, Saint Ambrose, gave him some advice. St. Ambrose said that when he is in Rome he should do as the Romans do, and fast on Saturdays. But when he is in Milan, he should not. Problem solved.

This good advice has survived over the years. Some word experts say it first appeared in English around 500 years ago.

But we still use it to this day -- either to give advice or to describe a situation where we have to change our behavior to fit in.

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