CHAPTER 4

"Neuters of the Second Declension; Summary of Adjectives;
Present Indicative of Sum;
Predicate Nouns and Adjectives"

Despite its lengthy title, you'll find that much of this chapter only adds incrementally to concepts you've already learned. That's the way it's going to be for most of these chapters. Now that you've learned the basics, the details will be much easier for you to grasp.

NEUTERS OF THE SECOND DECLENSION

The second declension is the pattern of cases ending which has an "-o-" for its thematic vowel. The nominative singular has three possible forms -- "-us", "-er", and "-ir". Sometimes nouns which end in "-er" in the nominative undergo a stem change from the nominative to the genitive singular. To find the real stem of the noun, you simply drop off the genitive ending "-i" from the second entry in the dictionary. Finally, you may remember that the vast majority of nouns ending in "-us", "-er", and "-ir" in the nominative singular are masculine.

What you learned in the last chapter was not the whole story on the second declension. The second declension is divided into two parts: the part you know, and a set of endings which you're going to learn now. This second part contains only neuter nouns. This is important to remember. Unlike the first declension and the first part of the second, whose nouns could be either feminine or masculine, all nouns which follow this second part of the second declension are neuter. Next, the endings of this pattern are nearly identical to those of the second declension you already know. The differences are that (1) the nominative singular ending is always "-um"; (2) the stem is found by dropping off nominative "-um" ending and there is never a stem change; (3) the neuter nominative and accusative plural endings are "-a". You don't have to worry about the vocative singular; it's the same as the nominative singular. Remember, the only place in Latin where the vocative differs from the nominative is in the singular of "-us" ending second declension nouns and adjectives.

A dictionary entry for a noun of this type will look like this: "x"um, -i (n) (where "x" is the stem). Since there is never

a stem change, the second entry only gives you the genitive singular ending so that you can see the declension of the noun. The "-um" of the nominative singular and then the "-i" in the genitive tell you that the noun is a neuter noun of the second declension, and that it therefore fits into the subcategory of the second declension. Here are some examples for you to decline and a second declension noun of the "us" type for comparison:

	numerus, -i (m)	periculum, -i (n)	consilium, -ii (n)
Nom.	_____	_____	_____
Gen.	_____	_____	_____
Dat.	_____	_____	_____
Acc.	_____	_____	_____
Abl.	_____	_____	_____
Voc.	_____		
N/V.	_____	_____	_____
Gen.	_____	_____	_____
Dat.	_____	_____	_____
Acc.	_____	_____	_____
Abl.	_____	_____	_____

There are a couple of hard and fast rules pertaining to the inflection of all neuter nouns, no matter which declension they belong to, which you may want to commit to memory: (1) the nominative and accusative forms of neuters nouns are always like each other, and (2) the nominative plural -- and hence neuter plural because of rule (1) -- is always a short "-a".

ADJECTIVES

You recall that adjectives are words which modify nouns, and that in Latin an adjective must agree with the noun it's modifying. By "agreeing", we mean it must have the same number, gender, and case.

An adjective acquires number and case by declining through a declension -- just like nouns -- but how does an adjective change gender? An adjective changes gender by using different declensional patterns. If an adjective needs to modify a feminine noun, it uses endings from the first declension; if it has to modify a masculine noun, it uses the second declension endings which are used by "-us" and "-er" ending nouns. So how do you imagine will an adjective modify a neuter noun? Let's look at a dictionary entry for a typical adjective: "magnus, -a, -um".

The first entry, as you recall, tells you which declension the adjective uses to modify a masculine noun. It tells you by giving you the nominative singular ending of the declension it uses. The second entry is the nominative singular ending of the declension the adjective uses to modify a feminine noun. The third entry is the nominative singular of the declension the adjective uses to modify a neuter noun.

So how does the adjective "magnus, -a, -um" modify a neuter noun? It uses the "-um" neuter endings of the second declension, so "magnus", when it's modifying a neuter noun, will follow the same pattern as a noun like "periculum, -i (n). Write out all the possible forms of the adjective "great". (Check your work against Wheelock, p. 18.)

"magnus, -a, -um"

	MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTER
Nom.	_____	_____	_____
Gen.	_____	_____	_____
Dat.	_____	_____	_____
Acc.	_____	_____	_____
Abl.	_____	_____	_____
Voc.	_____		
N/V.	_____	_____	_____
Gen.	_____	_____	_____

Dat. _____ _____ _____

Acc. _____ _____ _____

Abl. _____ _____ _____

THE VERB "TO BE"

As in most languages, the verb "to be" in Latin is irregular -- i.e., it doesn't follow the normal pattern of conjugation of other verbs. Wheelock says it's best just to memorize the forms by sheer effort and rote. That's a perfectly acceptable suggestion. But the verb is actually much more regular than it may first appear. If you wish, you may try to follow my discussion about the verb to get a glimpse behind its seemingly bizarre appearance. If not, just memorize the forms outright and skip over the paragraphs in between the lines of asterisks.

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For those of you going on with me, let's recall a couple of things. A verb conjugates by adding personal endings to the stem of the verb. You find the stem of the verb by dropping of the "-re" ending of the infinitive, and what you're left with is the stem. The final vowel of the stem tells you the conjugation of the verb: "-a-" for a first conjugation, "-e-" for the second conjugation, etc. So let's have a look at the infinitive of the verb "to be" to find its stem. The infinitive is "esse". What kind of an infinitive is this?

We need to back up a little. Although you were told otherwise, the real infinitive ending of a Latin verb is not "-re" at all, but "-se". Why does the "-se" become "-re"? It's an invariable rule of Latin pronunciation that an "-s-" which is caught between two vowels -- we call it "intervocalic" -- turns into a "-r-". So the reason "laudare" is not "laudase" is that the original intervocalic "-s-" became an "-r-". So let's look again at the infinitive for the verb "to be": "esse". If we drop off the infinitive ending "-se", we're left with the stem "es-" for the verb. But the stem has no final vowel. For this reason we call "esse" an "athematic verb", because its stem ends in a consonant, not a vowel, as other verbs do. To conjugate the verb, we should therefore add the personal endings directly to the final "-s" of the stem. This is what the formula should be (don't fill in the conjugated form yet).

STEM	+	PERSONAL ENDING	=	CONJUGATED FORM
1st	es	+ m	=	_____
2nd	es	+ s	=	_____
3rd	es	+ t	=	_____
1st	es	+ mus	=	_____
2nd	es	+ tis	=	_____
3rd	es	+ nt	=	_____

Try to pronounce the final form for the first person singular "esm". Do you hear how you're automatically inserting a "u" sound to make the word pronounceable? It sounds like "esum". Try to pronounce "esmus". The same thing happens between the "s" and the "m". You almost have to insert a "u". Now pronounce "esnt". Same thing, right? This is what happened to these forms. Over time, a "u" sound became a part of the conjugation of the verb, and the initial "e-" of the stem of all the forms with this "u" was lost. (I can't account for that.) Write out the resulting forms. Now look at the remaining forms. Is there any trouble adding an "s" or a "t" to the final "s-" of the stem? No. In fact, in the second person singular, the "s" of the personal ending just gets swallowed up by the "s" of the stem: "es + s = es". Where there was no complication in pronouncing the forms, the "e-" of the stem stayed. Now write out the remaining forms of "to be" in Latin.

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As with other Latin verbs, the basic form of "to be" is considered to be the first person singular, and that's how the verb will be listed in the dictionary, followed by the infinitive: "sum, esse". So when I want to refer to the Latin verb "to be", I'll say the verb "sum". You can also see why it's going to be important to memorize all these forms well. You can't look up "estis" or "es". You must reduce these conjugated forms to a form that will appear in the dictionary: you must know that these forms are from "sum".

THE SENTENCE: SUBJECT AND PREDICATE

We divide sentences into two parts: the subject, which is what's

being talked about, and the predicate, what's being said about the subject. Basically, the subject is the subject of the verb, and the predicate is the verb and everything after it. For example, in the sentence "Latin drives me crazy because it has so many forms", "Latin" is the subject, and everything else is the predicate. Of course, the full story of subject and predicate is more involved than this, but this will get us by for now.

PREDICATE NOMINATIVES, TRANSITIVE AND INTRANSITIVE VERBS

In Latin the subject of a verb is in the nominative case. You know that. So it may seem to follow that, if the subject of the verb is the subject of the sentence, that the nominative case should be entirely limited to the subject of the sentence. That is, we shouldn't expect there ever to be a noun in the nominative case in the predicate. Nouns in the nominative case should be the subject of verbs, and the subject of verbs is in the subject clause of the sentence, not in the predicate. But we do find nouns in the nominative in the predicate. When we do, we call them, logically enough, "predicate nominatives". How does it happen that a nominative case shows up in the predicate, after the verb?

We divided verbs into two broad classes: verbs which transfer action and energy from the subject to something else (the object), and verbs in which there is no movement of energy from one place to another. Consider this sentence: "George kicked the ball". Here George expended energy -- he kicked -- and this energy was immediately applied to an object -- the ball -- which was changed as a result of what George did to it. We call a verb like this a "transitive" verb and the object affected by it the direct object. In Latin, the direct object of a transitive verb is put into the accusative case. Now look at this sentence: "The river is wide". Is the river doing anything in this sentence to anything else? Does the verb "is" imply that the subject is acting on something else? No. There is no movement of activity from the subject to something else. Verbs like this are called "intransitive" and don't take direct objects. In Latin that means they are not followed by an accusative case. Some more examples of this: "The dog was running away", "We'll all laugh", "The clown didn't seem very happy".

Sometimes it's hard to tell whether a verb in English is transitive or intransitive. A rule of thumb is this. Ask yourself, "Can I 'x' something?" (where "x" is the verb you're investigating). If the answer is "yes" then the verb is transitive; if "no" then it's intransitive. "Can I see something?"

Yes; therefore the verb "to see" is transitive. "Can I fall something?" No; therefore "to fall" is intransitive.

THE COPULATIVE VERB "SUM"

The verb "to be" is obviously an intransitive verb -- there is no movement of energy from the subject to an object -- but it has an interesting additional property. What are we actually doing when we use the verb "to be?" We are in effect modifying the subject with something in the predicate. In the sentence "The river is wide", "river" is the subject and "wide" is an adjective in the predicate that is modifying "river". Even though it's on the other side of the verb and in the predicate, it's directly tied to the subject. In Latin, therefore, what case would "wide" be in? Think of it this way. "Wide" is an adjective, and it's modifying the "river", even though it's in the predicate. Adjectives in Latin must agree in number, gender and case with the nouns they modify, so "wide" has to be in the nominative case. It's modifying "river", right? What the verb "to be" does is to tie or link the subject directly to something in the predicate, and for that reason we call the verb "to be" a "linking" or "copulative" verb. This principle has a special application in Latin, which has a full case system. When the verb "sum" links the subject with an adjective in the predicate, the adjective agrees with the subject.

Donum	est	magnum.	Dona	sunt	magna.
nominative	=	nominative	nominative	=	nominative
neuter	=	neuter	neuter	=	neuter
singular	=	singular	plural	=	plural

When "sum" links the subject with a noun in the predicate, however, we have a bit of a problem. Nouns have fixed gender, so the noun in the predicate can't agree with the subject noun in quite the same way an adjective can. A noun in the predicate has its own gender which it cannot change. But a noun in the predicate which is tied to the subject by "sum", will agree with the subject in case. Think of the verb "sum" as an equal sign, with the same case on both sides.

Mea vita	est	bellum (war).
nominative	=	nominative
feminine	~	neuter
singular	=	singular

VOCABULARY PUZZLES

Look at these two dictionary listings:

1. bellum, -i (n) "war"
2. bellus, -a, -um "beautiful"

The first is an entry for a noun, the second an entry for an adjective. What are the differences? An entry for a noun starts with the nominative singular form, then it gives you the genitive singular. It actually starts to decline the noun for you so that you can tell the noun's declension and whether the noun has any stem changes you should be worried about. The final entry is the gender, since nouns have fixed gender which you must be given. For a noun, therefore you must be given (1) the nominative form, (2) the stem, (3) the declension, and (4) the gender.

An entry for an adjective, by contrast, has different information to convey. For an adjective, you must know which declension it'll use to modify nouns of different gender, and that's what the "-us, -a, -um" is telling you. But there is an important omission from the adjective listing. There is no gender specified, and how could there be, adjectives change their gender. As you'll see later, this is the one sure sign that a word you're looking at is an adjective: if it has declension endings listed but no gender.

You may also be concerned that, given the similar appearance of these two words, you may mix them up in your sentences. Certainly there will be some overlap of the two forms. For example, "bella" is a possible form of the noun "bellum" and the adjective "bellus, -a, -um". But there are also many forms which "bellus, -a, -um" can have which "bellum, -i (n)" can never have. For example, "bellarum" can't possibly come from a second declension neuter noun. Neither can "bellae", "bellas", "bellos", "bella", and some others. If you see "bell- something" in your text, first ask yourself whether the case ending is a possible form from the neuter noun for war. If not, then it's from the adjective for "pretty". In the instances where the forms do overlap, you'll have to let context and your good judgment tell you which it is.