

CHAPTER 7

"Third Declension: Nouns"

The third declension is generally considered to be a "pons asinorum" of Latin grammar. But I disagree. The third declension, aside for presenting you a new list of case endings to memorize, really involves no new grammatical principles you've haven't already been working with. I'll take you through it slowly, but most of this guide is actually going to be review.

CASE ENDINGS

The third declension has nouns of all three genders in it. Unlike the first and second declensions, where the majority of nouns are either feminine or masculine, the genders of the third declension are equally divided. So you really must pay attention to the gender markings in the dictionary entries for third declension nouns. The case endings for masculine and feminine nouns are identical. The case endings for neuter nouns are also of the same type as the feminine and masculine nouns, except for where neuter nouns follow their peculiar rules:

- (1) the nominative and the accusative forms are always the same, and
- (2) the nominative and accusative plural case endings are short "-a-".

You may remember that the second declension neuter nouns have forms that are almost the same as the masculine nouns -- except for these two rules. In other words, there is really only one pattern of endings for third declension nouns, whether the nouns are masculine, feminine, or neuter. It's just that neuter nouns have a peculiarity about them. So here are the third declension case endings. Notice that the separate column for neuter nouns is not really necessary, if you remember the rules of neuter nouns.

Masculine/Feminine Neuter

N/V.	-----	-----
Gen.	-is	-is
Dat.	-i	-i
Acc.	-em	(same as nom.)

Abl.	-e	-e
N\V.	-es	-a
Gen.	-um	-um
Dat.	-ibus	-ibus
Acc.	-es	-a
Abl.	-ibus	-ibus

Now let's go over some of the "hot spots" on this list. The nominative singular is left blank because there are so many different possible nominative forms for third declension nouns that it would take half a page to list them all. You needn't fret over this though, because the dictionary's first entry for a noun is the nominative singular. You'll have to do a little more memorization with third declension nouns because you simply can't assume that it'll have a certain form in the nominative just because it's third declension -- as you could with first declension nouns, where they all end in "-a" in the nominative.

The same is true for neuter nouns in the nominative singular -- although the possible forms for neuter nominative singulars is much more limited. It's just not worth the effort to memorize them. And remember, the accusative form of neuter nouns will be exactly the form of the nominative, so there's a blank in the accusative slot for neuter nouns. It'll be whatever the nominative is.

STEMS OF THIRD DECLENSION NOUNS

One very distinctive characteristic of nouns of the third declension is that nearly all of them are stem-changing nouns. But the concept of stem-changing nouns is not new for you. You've already worked with it in the second declension with nouns ending in "-er" in the nominative. Look at this entry for a second declension noun: "ager, agri (m)". The first entry for a noun is the nominative singular, the second is the genitive where you learn two things: (1) the declension of the noun (by looking at the genitive ending), and (2) whether there is a stem change from the nominative to the other cases. In this instance we learn that "ager" is a second declension noun -- because the genitive ending is "-i" -- and that there is a stem change. The stem of noun is "agr-", so it'll decline like this:

N/V.	ager	N/V.	agri
------	------	------	------

Gen.	agri	Gen.	agrorum
Dat.	agro	Dat.	agris
Acc.	agrum	Acc.	agros
Abl.	agro	Abl.	agris

Now look at an example entry for a third declension noun: "rex, regis (m)". Use your experience with second declension "-er" type masculine nouns to draw out all the important information you need about this noun. What's its stem? Now decline it.

N/V.	rex	+	--	=	rex
Gen.	_____		_____		_____
Dat.	_____		_____		_____
Acc.	_____		_____		_____
Abl.	_____		_____		_____
N/V.	_____		_____		_____
Gen.	_____		_____		_____
Dat.	_____		_____		_____
Acc.	_____		_____		_____
Abl.	_____		_____		_____

How did you do? Check your answers against page 31 in Wheelock. The nominative form is just what's listed in the dictionary -- there is no ending in the nominative singular to add. Next, the stem of "rex" is "reg-", which you get by dropping off the "-is" genitive ending of the third declension from the form "regis" which the dictionary gives. Now decline this noun: "corpus, corporis (n)".

N/V.	_____	+	_____	=	_____
Gen.	_____		_____		_____
Dat.	_____		_____		_____

Acc. _____

Abl. _____

N/V. _____

Gen. _____

Dat. _____

Acc. _____

Abl. _____

Did you remember the two rules of neuter nouns? Check your answers on page 31. How are you doing? Try to decline a couple more for some more practice.

pax, pacis (f) virtus, virtutis (f) labor, laboris (m)

N/V. _____

Gen. _____

Dat. _____

Acc. _____

Abl. _____

N/V. _____

Gen. _____

Dat. _____

Acc. _____

Abl. _____

One of the difficulties beginning students have with third declension nouns is that dictionaries only abbreviate the second

entry, where you're given the stem of the noun, and it's often puzzling to see just what the stem is. Look over this list of typical abbreviations. After a very short time, they'll cause you no problem.

ENTRY	STEM	ENTRY	STEM
veritas, -tatis (f)	veritat-	oratio, -onis (f)	oration-
homo, -inis (m)	homin-	finis, -is (f)	fin-
labor, -oris (m)	labor-	libertas, -tatis (f)	
libertas-			
tempus, -oris (n)	tempor-	senectus, -tutis (f)	
senectut-			
virgo, -inis (m)	virgin-	amor, -oris (m)	amor-

ENTRY	STEM
corpus, -oris (n)	_____
honor, -oris (m)	_____
humanitas, -tatis (f)	_____
frater, -tris (m)	_____
mutatio, -onis (f)	_____
pater, -tris (m)	_____
pestis, -is (f)	_____
scriptor, -oris (m)	_____
valetudo, -inis (f)	_____
cupiditas, -tatis (f)	_____

MODIFYING THIRD DECLENSION NOUNS

Modifying a third declension noun is nothing to cause any alarm. It's done the same way you modify first and second declension nouns: put the adjective in the same number, gender, and case as the target noun, and away you go. What causes beginners in Latin some discomfort is that they can't quite bring themselves around to modifying a third declension noun with an adjective which uses

first and second declension endings.

Let's go through this step by step. Suppose you want to modify the noun "virtus, -utis (f)" with the adjective "verus, -a, -um". You want to say "true virtue". You know that "virtus" is nominative, feminine and singular, so for the adjective "verus, -a, -um" to agree with it, it must also be feminine, nominative and singular. So look at the adjective's listing closely: how does "verus, -a, -um" become feminine? From the second entry, you see that it uses endings from the first declension to modify a feminine noun. Since "virtus" is feminine, verus" will use first declension endings. You now select the nominative singular ending from the first declension -- "-a" -- and add it to the stem of the adjective. The result: "vera virtus". Try some more. Decline the following expressions.

evil time small city

N/V. _____

Gen. _____

Dat. _____

Acc. _____

Abl. _____

N/V. _____

Gen. _____

Dat. _____

Acc. _____

Abl. _____

VOCABULARY PUZZLES

mos, moris (m) In the plural, "mos" takes on a new meaning: in the singular it means "habit", in the plural

"character". This isn't hard to understand. What a person does regularly to the point of being a habit eventually becomes what he is: it becomes his character.

littera, -ae (f) Like "mos, moris", in the plural "littera" takes on an extended meaning. In the singular it means "a letter of the alphabet"; in the plural it means either "a letter (something you mail to someone)" or "literature". To say "letters", -- as in, "He used to send her many letters" -- Latin used another word. "Litterae" is one letter.

post + acc. Means "after", but it is only a preposition in Latin, and cannot be used as a conjunction. For the English "after" in this sentence, "post" is not a correct translation: "After I went to the zoo, I went to the movies".

sub + acc./abl. This preposition, like a few others you'll see, can be followed by the accusative or the ablative case. When it takes the accusative it means motion to and under something; when it takes the ablative it means "position under". "She walked under the tree" -- in the sense that she was not beneath the tree at first but then walked there -- would be "sub" + accusative in Latin; "She sat under the tree" would be "sub" + ablative. Similarly, if you say "She walked under the tree" in the sense that she was walking around under the tree, that would be "sub" + ablative because no motion toward was involved.