

# NOUN ENDINGS (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Declensions)

## The Nominative and Genitive Cases

So, you have decided to learn how to read Latin, the language of the ancient Romans. Well, the first thing you need to understand is English grammar so you can understand what I am talking about.

In Latin, as in English, there are names for the different words in a sentence. The most common of these are nouns and verbs.

The man loves his son.  
Vir amat filium.

In the sentence above, “man” and “son” are nouns (words that name things) and “loves” is a verb (words that describe actions).

Basically, there are two aspects of Latin words: the *stem* of the word which identifies its meaning and the *ending* of the word which identifies its usage in the sentence.

For example, whereas in English the word order of the sentence tells you its meaning (“The man is bringing the dog.” has an entirely different meaning from “The dog is bringing the man.”), in Latin word order is unimportant and is replaced in importance by the endings of the words.

Thus it is very important that you learn to recognize the endings of Latin words so that you can tell how those words are being used in a Latin sentence.

Here are the first two groupings (“*declensions*”) of noun endings that you will need to know to read and understand a Latin sentence, and the names of those endings (“*cases*”). Memorize these and you will be well on your way to reading Latin:

| Case       | 1 <sup>st</sup> Declension (Feminine) |        | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Declension (Masculine / Neuter) |          |
|------------|---------------------------------------|--------|---|----------|
|            | Singular                              | Plural | Singular  | Plural   |
| Nominative | -a                                    | -ae    | -us, -r / -um                                   | -i / -a  |
| Genitive   | -ae                                   | -arum  | -i  | -orum    |
| Dative     | -ae                                   | -is    | -o  | -is      |
| Accusative | -am                                   | -as    | -um   | -os / -a |
| Ablative   | -ā                                    | -is    | -o  | -is      |

### Uses of Cases: the Nominative Case

As I have said, each ending on a noun indicates what case it is and each case has certain prescribed uses. The *Nominative* case is used primarily for the *subject* of a sentence, that is, the person or thing that is performing the action of the sentence:

The boy brings the water.  
Puer portat aquam.

In this sentence, the word for “boy” will be in the Nominative case because it is describing the person who is doing the carrying. “Water” would not be in the Nominative case because the water is not performing the action.

Another use of the Nominative case is when a noun is used to name or identify the subject, most commonly with the verb “to be”. This is called a *predicate nominative*. An example of this would be:

The boy is Marcus.  
Puer est Marcus.

Marcus would be in the Nominative case because he is the *subject* of the sentence. “Boy” would also be in the Nominative case because it is *naming or identifying* the subject.

## Uses of Cases: the Genitive Case

As I have said, each ending on a noun indicates what case it is and each case has certain prescribed uses. The *Genitive* case is used to describe possession or ownership, often expressed in English with the word “of”, where the word in the Genitive case describes the possessor or owner:

The girls of the town defend the ramparts.  
Puellae oppidi defendunt valla.

In this sentence, the word for “girls” will be in the Nominative case because it is describing the people who are performing the action. “Town” would be in the Genitive case because the girls belong to the town. Whose girls are they? They are “the town’s girls” or “the girls of the town”.

**You should now understand this Latin sentence:**

**The waters of the stream are clear.**  
**Aquae rivi sunt clarae.**

## NOUN ENDINGS (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Declensions) The Dative, Accusative and Ablative Cases

Well, you put the effort into memorizing all those endings and you now understand how the Nominative and Genitive cases are used. I guess it's time for me to explain what those others cases are for.

| Case       | 1 <sup>st</sup> Declension (Feminine) |        | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Declension (Masculine / Neuter) |          |
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| Dative     | -ae                                   | -is    | -o  | -is      |
| Accusative | -am                                   | -as    | -um   | -os / -a |
| Ablative   | -ā                                    | -is    | -o  | -is      |

### Uses of Cases: the Accusative Case

The *Accusative* case is used primarily for the *object* of a sentence, that is, the person or thing that is receiving the action of the sentence:

The boy brings the water.  
Puer portat aquam.

In this sentence, the word for "boy" will be in the Nominative case because it is describing the person who is doing the carrying. "Water" would be in the Accusative case because the water is receiving the action of carrying.

Another use of the Accusative case is in certain prepositional phrases where the particular Latin preposition requires its object to be in the accusative. An example of this would be:

The boy comes to the town.  
Puer venit ad oppidum.

"Boy" will be in the nominative case because it is describing the person who is doing the bringing. "Water" would be in the Accusative case because the water is receiving the action of carrying. And "town" will be in the accusative case because the Latin preposition "ad" requires its object to be in the accusative.

### Uses of Cases: the Dative Case

The Dative case is used generally for what is called the *indirect object* of a sentence, which is a noun that indirectly receives the action of the sentence. For example:

The boy walks to town and brings a gift to the teacher.  
Puer ambulat ad oppidum et portat donum magistro.

Another common use of the dative case is when you want to describe to whose benefit or favor or advantage something is done. For example, if my friend couldn't deliver the gift to the teacher on his own and had someone do it for him (for his benefit or advantage or favor), you would say:

The boy walks to town and brings a gift to the teacher for his friend.  
Puer ambulat ad oppidum et portat donum magistro amico.

Notice that datives are commonly translated as either "to" or "for".

### Uses of Cases: the Ablative Case

The Ablative case has many uses in Latin but here are three of the simplest:

Ablative of Location: just as some prepositions in Latin (“ad”) require the accusative, others (“in”) can require the ablative:

The boy and his friend live in the town.  
Puer et amicus habitant in oppido.

Ablative of Means: where the means or instrument or tool of accomplishing the action is described (translated as “with” but no Latin preposition is necessary):

The girl writes out her grammar lesson with her marker.  
Puella scribit grammaticum documentum stilo.

Ablative of Accompaniment: to name the person or thing who joins you in an activity (requires the Latin preposition “cum” for “with”):

The girl and the boy walk to town with their friends.  
Puella et puer ambulant ad oppidum cum amicis.

**You should now understand this Latin sentence:**

**The boy brings the clear waters to his friends in the town.**  
**Puer portat puras aquas amicis in oppido.**

## ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Declensions)

Adjectives and adverbs are descriptive words. Adjectives describe nouns (“the large town”) and adverbs describe verbs (“she moved beautifully”) or adjectives (“the beautifully elegant home”).

Since you put the effort into memorizing all those 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> declension endings, the Latin language has decided to reward you by using all of those endings on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> declension adjectives as well. No new endings to learn! And even better: 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> declension adverbs have no changeable endings: you simply put the letter “e” on the end of the stem of the adjective.

Thus:

The good boy freely walks to town and happily brings a gift to the teacher for my friend.  
Bonus puer libere ambulat ad oppidum et laete portat donum magistro meo amico.

So, now that you see how often you will be seeing these 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> declension endings, you can understand just how important it is that you have them memorized and in your head so you can better understand how the Latin words fit together.

| Case       | 1 <sup>st</sup> Declension (Feminine) |        | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Declension (Masculine / Neuter) |          |
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| Ablative   | -ā                                    | -is    | -o  | -is      |

### Uses of Cases: the Vocative Case

One more case to learn before we move on and it is the easiest of all. The vocative case is used only when someone is calling out or directly addressing someone or something else.

Marcus! Bring the water! Now!  
Marce! Porta aquam! Nunc!

In all but four instances, the vocative case is identical to the nominative case. Thus the only way to tell if a word is in the vocative case is by observing the context in which it occurs. Fortunately the vocative is almost always used with an exclamation point so that makes it easy to spot.

The four exceptions where the vocative does NOT look like the nominative are:

1. words that end with –us, i.e. second declension masculine words, change their ending to an “-e”  
“Marcus” becomes “Marce”
2. proper names that end with –ius and the word “filius” change their ending to “-i”  
“Tiberius” becomes “Tiberi”  
“filius” becomes “fili”
3. the masculine adjective “meus” changes its ending to “i”  
“meus” becomes “mi”
4. proper names derived from the Greek language change their ending to “-a”  
“Aeneas” becomes “Aenea”

Aeneas, Marcus and my son Tiberius! Bring the water! Now!  
Aenea, Marce, et mi fili Tiberi! Portate aquam! Nunc!

**You should now understand this Latin sentence:**

**The good girl quickly brings the cold water to the thirsty man.  
Bona puella rapide portat frigidam aquam sicco viro.**

## VERBS (1<sup>st</sup> Conjugation)

### THE PRESENT SYSTEM (Present, Imperfect and Future Tenses)

Now that you have firmly in your grasp the idea of nouns and how their Latin endings (totally memorized at this point, as solid as your multiplication tables--“Wait, what’s a multiplication table!?”), it’s time to turn your attention to verbs, those words in a sentence that describe the action.

Every sentence has at least one verb. Sometimes they describe very physical actions (“I killed the bug.”) and sometimes they describe something as simple as existence (“I am a bug.”). Sentences can have more than one verb, in which case each verb would define one of the clauses in a multi-clause sentence (“I killed the bug and my mom felt safe again.”).

All verbs have tenses which refer to when the action is occurring. A verb in the present tense is happening right now “in the present” (“I bring the water for my town.”) as opposed to a verb in the future tense that describes an action occurring sometime later “in the future” (“I will bring water into the town.”) or a verb in the imperfect tense that describes action happening in the past (“I was bringing the water with my friend.”). English verbs signal these changes in tenses by either changing the spelling of the verb or adding words to the verb. Latin verbs do it the same way.

Just as there are groupings of nouns that behave the same way (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> declensions), there are groupings of verbs called conjugations. For this lesson, you will start with the 1<sup>st</sup> Conjugation which is the simplest and most regular in its formation.

All verbs in Latin have four parts, called principle parts, which are used as building blocks for all of the different verb forms. The principle parts of a 1<sup>st</sup> conjugation verb almost always follow the same pattern: -o, -are, -avi, -atum. Take for example the verb “to bring” which you have seen before. Its principle parts are:

porto – this first principle part is always the present tense form (happening now) in the first person singular (“I”): I bring

portare – the second principle part is called the infinitive of the verb, translated as “to bring”

portavi – the third principle part is always the perfect tense form (happened in the past) in the first person singular (“I”): I brought

portatum – the fourth principle part (you don’t need to think about this one yet but it will be very important later)

porto, -are, -avi, -atum – to bring

Each verb has six tenses (indicating when the action is happening) and each tense has six personal endings (indicating who is performing the action).

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Conjugation

|                          | Present                   | Imperfect                         | Future                          |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Singular | porto – I bring           | portabam – I was bringing         | portabo – I will bring          |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Singular | portas – you bring        | portabas – you were bringing      | portabis – you will bring       |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> Singular | portat – he/she/it brings | portabat - he/she/it was bringing | portabit – he/she/it will bring |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Plural   | portamus – we bring       | portabamus – we were bringing     | portabimus – we will bring      |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Plural   | portatis – you bring      | portabatis – you were bringing    | portabitis – you will bring     |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> Plural   | portant – they bring      | portabant – they were bringing    | portabunt – they will bring     |

Note these important patterns:

Personal endings follow the pattern of: o/m, s, t, mus, tis, nt

The imperfect tense always has a –ba-

The future tense always has a –bo or –bi- or –bu-

**You should now understand this Latin sentence:**

**The girl was living alone and now lives with her friend but tomorrow they will live in the large town.  
Puella habitabat sola et nunc habitat cum amicā sed cras habitabunt in magno oppido.**

## THE VERB “TO BE” (sum, esse, fui, futurum) and QUESTIONS

Note, in English, how similar to each other the different forms of the verb “to bring” are: I bring, he brings, we were bringing.

But on the other hand, see how irregular the forms of the verb “to be” are: I am, he is, we are, you were, they will be.

Just as in English, in Latin the forms of the verb “to be” will not follow a regular pattern:

|                          | Present            | Imperfect            | Future                   |
|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Singular | sum – I am         | eram – I was         | ero – I will be          |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Singular | es – you are       | eras – you were      | eris – you will be       |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> Singular | est – he/she/it is | erat – he/she/it was | erit – he/she/it will be |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Plural   | sumus – we are     | eramus – we were     | erimus – we will be      |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Plural   | estis – you are    | eratis – you were    | eritis – you will be     |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> Plural   | sunt – they are    | erant – they were    | erunt – they will be     |

But once you master these forms of this very important verb, added to all that you have learned so far, you will have an understanding of most of the mechanics of the Latin language from which you will be able to build a fluency in the literature of Caesar and Cicero and Vergil.

Questions:

A simple concept in Latin as opposed to English. Basically there are four types of questions in any language: those expecting a yes or no answer, those expecting a yes answer, those expecting a no answer, and those expecting a more detailed answer. In English, these distinctions are often expressed in intonation or the tone of the question.

Fortunately, in Latin, these ideas are expressed much more concretely:

A question expecting a yes or no answer: the first word of the question will have a –ne attached to it  
Is Marcus walking to the villa?  
Marcusne ambulat ad villam?

A question expecting a yes answer: the question will start with the word “Nonne”  
Marcus is walking to the villa, isn’t he?  
Nonne Marcus ambulat ad villam?

A question expecting a no answer: the question will start with the word “Num”  
Marcus isn’t walking to the villa, is he?  
Num Marcus ambulat ad villam?

A question expecting a more detailed answer: the question will start with a word that asks a question  
Why is Marcus walking to the villa?  
Cur Marcus ambulat ad villam?

You should now understand this Latin sentence:

**Antonia is well-known in the town and soon will be famous throughout Italy. Marcus, do you know Antonia?  
Antonia est nota in oppido et mox erit clara per Italiam. Marce, scisne Antoniam?**