

Briefing 1 – Declension of nouns and adjectives

1. Declensions

Latin nouns and adjectives change their endings depending on their use in a sentence. They also change depending on whether they are **singular** (abbreviate to **s** or **sing**) or **plural** (abbreviate to **pl.** or **plur**), e.g lion (**s**) and lions (**pl**).

There are five families of nouns, called **declensions**. The declension of a noun indicates the pattern of noun endings.

There are 6 types of ending, each corresponding to the roles of a noun in a sentence. These are called **cases**, and each has both singular and plural forms, making 12 forms. Sometimes **cases** share endings (see table on next page).

The **Nominative (nom)** case is the one used for the **Subject** of a **verb**.

The **Vocative (voc)** case is reserved for a person or thing to which one is talking in a conversation

The **Accusative (acc)** case is the one used for the **Object** of a verb, and for some other purposes

The **Genitive (gen)** case is used like the English 's as a 'possessive': e.g. 'lion's den', meaning the 'den of the lion'

The **Dative (dat)** case is used in the sense of 'to' or 'for'; e.g. 'I gave a book to the girl' or 'I gave the girl a book'.

In 'I gave the girl a book' 'the girl' here is described as the **Indirect Object**, for which Latin uses the **Dative** case
The **Ablative (abl)** case is used for other implications of a noun, summarised as 'by, with, or from'.

In English, the words 'by', 'with' or 'from' are called **prepositions**; Latin has many **prepositions**, which are often used with the ablative case, but sometimes the **ablative** case of a noun can or must be used without a preposition.

Latin **prepositions** are used with nouns or pronouns in the **accusative** or **ablative** case, and no other. For example:

prope urbem – near the town (**acc**) cum leone – with a lion (**abl**)

Every Latin noun is assigned a **gender**: **masculine (masc or m)**, **feminine (fem or f)** or **neuter (neut or n)**. For nouns of an obvious sex, male or female, this usually corresponds to **masc** or **fem** and there are patterns and general rules, sometimes with exceptions. The word **gender** is a technical term in grammar, loosely related to sex.

Noun endings are placed on an appropriate **stem**. The two main noun **stems** can be seen in the **nom sing & gen sing** cases. The **nom sing** of noun **leō** – a lion – has **leōn-** as the stem for a **gen sing** ending **-is**, giving **gen sing: leōnis**

2. Declension stems and endings

In more detail, Latin nouns and verbs have endings that are attached to one or more **stems**, just as in English. In English, the single **stem** of the word 'boy' is **boy**, which gives three different forms: **boy**, **boy's** (possessive) and **boys** (plural) using the same stem with two endings. Some English words have two stems, for example the **stem 'child'** has possessive **child's** and also plural stem **children** with **children's** as the 'possessive'.

1st Declension Latin nouns all have a **nom sing** ending of '-a' on the noun's single stem and are mostly **feminine** and never **neuter**. They decline **nom voc acc gen dat abl** giving six singular and six plural endings); example:

masc/fem sing: puell-a puell-a puell-am puell-ae puell-ae puell-ā
(puella – girl) plur puell-ae puell-ae puell-ās puell-ārum puell-īs puell-īs

2nd Declension nouns normally have a **nom sing** ending of '-us' (of which almost all are **masc**) or **-um (neut)** that goes on the single **stem**. Some end in **-r**, forming the **stem** without any further ending. 2nd declension nouns decline:

masc/fem **sing:** serv-us serv-e serv-um serv-ī serv-ō serv-ō
 plural serv-ī serv-ī serv-ōs serv-ōrum serv-īs serv-īs

masc in -r go **sing:** puer puer puer-um puer-ī puer-ō puer-ō
 plural puer-ī puer-ī puer-ōs puer-ōrum puer-īs puer-īs

neut in -m **sing** bell-um bell-um bell-um bell-ī bell-ō bell-ō
 plural bell-a bell-a bell-a bell-ōrum bell-īs bell-īs

This form of noun stem is the **nom sing** form after taking off **-us** or **-um**, except when **nom sing** ends in **r** when it is unchanged. Exception: Nouns/adjectives whose **nom/voc sing** ends in **-ter** use a stem that omits the **e** for all other cases.

3rd Declension nouns can be **masc fem or neu**, and normally have a distinct second stem that is derived from the **nom sing** form. These nouns with this second usually follow one of a large number of patterns. As an example, the noun **miles soldier** has genitive **militis** – the second stem is **milit-**:

masc/fem: **sing:** miles miles milit-em milit-is milit-ī -e
 plural milit-ēs milit-ēs milit-ēs milit-um milit-ibus milit-ibus

neut: **sing** caput caput caput capit-is capit-ī capit-e
 plural capit-a capit-a capit-a capit-um capit-ibus capit-ibus

Some genitive plurals and **-a** neuter plurals use **-ia** instead of **-a**.

4th Declension nouns have a **nom sing** ending of **-us (masc or fem)** on the noun **stem**, or ending **-u** for **neut** nouns.

masc/fem sing: grad-us grad-us grad-um grad-ūs grad-uī grad-ū plur grad-ūs grad-ūs grad-ūs
grad-uum grad-ibus grad-ibus
neut. sing gen-ū gen-ū gen-ū gen-ūs gen-ū gen-ū plur gen-ua gen-ua gen-ua gen-uum
gen-ibus gen-ibus

The grad/gen stem is the **nom sing** form after taking off **-us or -ū**, and the ♦ the **gen sing** form after taking off **-ūs**.

5th Declension nouns are normally feminine, except the common **diēs** – a day and none are neuter. They decline:

masc/fem sing: di-ēs di-ēs di-em di-ēi di-ēi di-ē plural di-ēs di-ēs di-ēs di-ērum di-ēbus di-ēbus

The **di** stem is the **nom sing** form after taking off **-ēs**.

3. Adjectives have endings like those of nouns

Adjectives decline like nouns, but are simpler, with only two forms

- **1st/2nd Declension** adjectives use **2nd declension** endings for **masc/neut** and **1st declension** endings for **fem**.
- **3rd Declension** adjectives use endings as for **3rd declension** nouns, **masc, fem, neut**, except that **abl sing** endings are usually **-ī** **not -e**.

Adjectives always use the same **case, number (sing or plur)** and **gender** of the noun(s) that they describe.

4. Here are the normal endings for nouns (and adjectives) (there are exceptions).

Decl.	I.	II.	III.				IV.	V.
			consonant		-i			
Stem.	-a	-ō					-u	-ē
			SINGULAR					
	<i>f.</i>	<i>m.</i> <i>n.</i>	<i>m.</i> <i>f.</i> <i>n.</i>	<i>f.</i> <i>m.</i> <i>n.</i>	<i>m.</i> <i>n.</i>	<i>f.</i>		
Nom.	a	us(er) um	various	is, ēs e, l, r	us ū	ēs		
Voc.	a	e(er) um	various	is, ēs e, l, r	us ū	ēs		
Acc.	am	um um	em var.	em, im e, l, r	um ū	em		
Gen.	ae	ī	is	is	us	eī		
Dat.	ae	ō	ī	ī	ui u	eī		
Abl.	ā	ō	e	ī or e	u	ē		
			PLURAL					
Nom.	ae	ī a	ēs a	ēs ia	ūs ua	ēs		
Voc.	ae	ī a	ēs a	ēs ia	ūs ua	ēs		
Acc.	ās	ōs a	ēs a	ēs, is ia	ūs ua	ēs		
Gen.	ārum	ōrum	um	ium	uum	ērum		
Dat.	īs	īs	ibus	ibus	ibus	ēbus		
Abl.	īs	īs	ibus	ibus	ibus	ēbus		

3rd declension i-stem nouns have endings shown in the second column of **III**. They are mostly identifiable by the nominative singular forms as above. Also nouns/adjectives with two consonants at the end of the nominative stem (e.g. **amāns**) are usually i-stem nouns. They all use endings **-ia** for **nom/voc/acc neut plur** and **-ium** for **gen plur**.

5. General declension rules

Nominative, vocative and accusative - neuter	All neuter noun have the same ending for nominative, vocative and accusative, in both singular and plural
Nominative, vocative and accusative plurals - neuter	All neuter nom voc and acc plural end with -a (short a), in all relevant declensions For 3 rd declension nouns with an i-stem (see above), the ending is -ia

Accusative singulars – masc/fem	For all masculine and feminine nouns, the accusative singular always ends in –m -am (1 st), -um (2 nd and 4 th), -em (3 rd and 5 th)
Accusative plurals – masc/fem	For all masculine and feminine nouns, the accusative plural always ends in –s -ās (1 st), -ōs (2 nd), -ēs (3 rd and 5 th), -ūs (4 th)
Genitive plurals	All genitive plurals in all declensions and all genders end with -um -ārum (1 st), -ōrum (2 nd), -um or -ium (3 rd), -uum (4 th) -ērum (5 th) 3 rd declension -ium occurs with i-stem nouns.
Ablative plurals	All ablative plurals in all declensions and all genders end with -s -īs (1 ^s and 2 nd), -ibus (3 rd and 4 th), -ēbus (5 th)
Vocatives	The vocative case is identical to the nominative case EXCEPT FOR 2 nd declension nouns/adjectives that end in –us for the nominative. Exception: 2nd Declension nouns ending with -ius use -ī instead of -ie.
Exceptions	There are some other rare exceptions to the declension rules, which we will deal with when we come to them

6. Examples of nouns

The examples will show dictionary-style forms of each noun (which are chosen if possible from CLC Stage 9 and later), and also the full declension in **nom, voc, acc, gen, dat, abl** both singular and plural.

1st declension nouns – mostly feminine (genders decline the same)

fēmin-a -ae f, woman or female

sing: fēmina fēmina fēminam fēminae fēminae fēminā
plur: fēminae fēminae fēminās fēminārum fēminīs fēminīs

athlēt-a -ae m athlete

sing: athlēta athlēta athlētam athlētāe athlētāe athlētā
plur: athlētāe athlētāe athlētās athlētārum athlētīs athlētīs

2nd declension nouns ending in -us are mostly masculine, those in -um are all neuter

domin-us -ī m master, lord

sing: dominus domine dominum dominī domino dominō
plur: dominī dominī dominōs dominōrum dominīs dominīs

2nd declension nouns ending in -ius use -ī for the vocative, but are otherwise the same. For example:

fil-ius -(i)ī m son

sing: filius fili filium filiī filiō filiō
plur: filiī filiī filiōs filiōrum filiīs filiīs

2nd declension nouns ending in -r are masculine. Some nouns lose the vowel before the -r for the gen sing stem

pu-er -erī m boy

sing: puer puer puerum puerī puerō puerō
plur: puerī puerī puerōs puerōrum puerīs puerīs

magis-ter -trī m master

sing: magister magister magistrum magistrī magistrō magistrō
plur: magistrī magistrī magistrōs magistrōrum magistrīs magistrīs

dōn-um -ī n gift, present

sing: dōnum dōnum dōnum dōnī dōnō dōnō
plur: dōna dōna dōna dōnōrum dōnīs dōnīs

3rd declension nouns have many stems and can be masculine, feminine or neuter

The derivation of cases is always like the patterns below, based on **nom sing, gen sing** and gender.

cīv-is -is mf citizen [can be male or female] – retains the stem, which is taken as an **i-stem** with **gen plur in -ium**

sing: cīvis cīvis cīvem cīvis cīvī cīve
plur: cīvēs cīvēs cīvēs cīvium cīvibus cīvibus

pāx pācis f peace

sing: pāx pāx pācem pācis pācī pāce
plur: pācēs pācēs pācēs pācum pācibus pācibus

temp-us temp-oris *n time*

sing: tempus tempus tempus temporis temporī tempore
plur: tempora tempora tempora temporum temporibus temporibus

4th declension nouns

4th declension nouns in **-us** are normally masculine

grad-us -ūs *m step*

sing: gradus gradus gradum gradūs graduī gradū
plur: gradūs gradūs gradūs graduum gradibus gradibus

gen-ū -ūs *m knee*

sing: genū genū genū genus genū genū
plur: genūa genūa genūa genuum genibus genibus

5th declension nouns are normally feminine,

But **dies** (*day*) is normally masculine

di-ēs -ēī *m day*

sing: diēs diēs diem diēī diēī diē
plur: diēs diēs diēs diērum diēbus diēbus

7. Adjectives

The declension of adjectives is similar to nouns. To summarise:

1st/2nd declension adjectives

Many adjectives, like **bonus/bona/bonum**, - *good*, decline like **2nd declension** nouns when they agree with a masculine or neuter person or noun. They have a **masc voc** in **-e** if the adjective has a **masc nom sing** ending in **-us**. They decline like **1st declension** nouns when they agree with one or more feminine persons or nouns

3rd declension adjectives

As with nouns, these come in different forms. As with nouns, some have i-stems, like **trīstis** (*sad*). The i-stem gives a **nom/voc/acc plur** neuter ending of **-ia** and **gen plur** (for all genders) of **-ium**

8. Agreement

Adjectives agree with the noun or nouns that they describe in **case**, **number** and **gender**.

An adjective can agree with a group of several different nouns (which must be using the same case), and this makes the **number plural**.

If at least one of the nouns is **masculine**, the **masculine** gender is used for the adjective.

9. Comparison of adjectives

Adjectives are compared in three degrees:

1. **Positive** (the ordinary form), e.g. **dūrus** (*hard*)
2. **Comparative**, e.g. **dūrior** (*harder* or *rather hard*)
3. **Superlative**, e.g. **dūrissimus** (*hardest* or *very hard*)

The comparative form, usually attaches suffix **-ior** to the positive stem, and then declines like an ordinary 3rd declension noun, but with a **nom sing neut** ending in **-ius**. Also the **abl sing** ending is **-e** not **-ī**.

The superlative is regular and behaves like an ordinary 2nd/1st declension adjective like **bonus**. The **-issimus** suffix is the usual way of forming superlatives, but stems ending in **l** or **r** may double that consonant instead of using **-ss**, for example from **celer** (*swift*) we have **celerrimus**; from **facilis** (*easy*) we have **facillimus**.

Some common adjectives have irregular comparatives and superlatives:

bonus/bona/bonum (*good*) → **melior** (*better*) → **optimus** (*best*)
malus/mala/malum (*bad*) → **peior** (*worse*) → **pessimus** (*worst*)
parvus/parva/parvum (*small*) → **minor** (*smaller*) → **minimus** (*smallest*)
multus/multa/multum (*much/many*) → **plūs** (*more* – see below) → **plūrimus** (*most*)
magnus/magna/magnum (*big*) → **maior** (*bigger*) → **maximus** (*biggest*)
senex (*old*) → **senior** (*old, not young*)
iuvenis iuvenis iuvene (*young*) → **iunior** (*young, not old*)

Some prepositions create comparatives and superlatives, for example
intrā (*within*) → **interior** (*more inside*) → **intimus** (*right inside*)
extra (*outside*) → **exterior** (*more outside*) → **extrēmus** (*right outside*)

10. plus – a very irregular declension

The comparative **plus** behaves in an unusual manner.

In the singular, it is a neuter noun

Nom/Voc/Acc	plūs
Genitive	plūris
Dative	(none)
Ablative	plūre

But in the plural it is a 3rd decl adjective, declining as below.

	Masc/Fem	plural	Neuter
Nom/Voc/Acc	plūrēs		plūra
Genitive		plūrium	
Dative		plūribus	
Ablative		plūribus	

11. Formation of adverbs (e.g. quick → quickly)

2nd/1st declension adjectives usually form an adverb with the suffix **-ē**

3rd declension adjectives usually form an adverb with the suffix **-iter** or **-ter** or just **-er** on the genitive **stem**.

Adverbs can sometimes be formed from the **neuter** form. This is the case with comparative adjectives; **-ior** → **-ius**

Some adjective are quite irregular in conversion to adverbs; for example:

bonus (*good*) → **bene** (*well*) → **melius** (*better*) → **optimē** (*best*)
malus (*bad*) → **male** (*badly*) → **peius** (*worse*) → **pessimē** (*worst*)
parvus (*small*) → **paulum** (*a little*) → **minus** (*less*) → **minimē** (*hardly at all*)
multus (*many*) → **multum** (*much*) → **plūs** (*more*) → **plūrium** (*mostly*)

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