

Chapter 7: Third-Declension Nouns

Chapter 7 covers the following: third declension, that is, consonant-stem nouns; patterns in the formation of the nominative singular of third declension; and the agreement between third-declension nouns and first/second-declension adjectives. At the end of the lesson, we'll review the vocabulary which you should memorize in this chapter.

There is only one important rule to remember here: the genitive singular ending in third declension is *-is*.

We've already encountered first- and second-declension nouns. Now we'll address the third. A fair question to ask, and one which some of you may be asking, is why is there a third declension at all? Third declension is Latin's "catch-all" category for nouns. Into it have been put all nouns whose bases end with consonants — *any* consonant! That makes third declension very different from first and second declension. First declension, as you'll remember, is dominated by *a*-stem nouns like *femina* and *cura*. Second declension is dominated by *o*- or *u*-stem nouns like *amicus* or *oculus*. Those vowels give those declensions a certain consistency, but the same is not true of third declension where one form, the nominative singular, is affected by the fact that its ending *-s* runs into the wide variety of consonants found at the ends of the bases of third-declension nouns, and the collision of those consonants causes irregular forms to appear in the nominative singular. That's the bad news.

The good news is that only one case and number is affected by this, the nominative singular. All the other case endings begin with vowels, and consonants-running-into-vowels does not create the same kind of problem that consonants-running-into-consonants does. Thus, after the nominative singular, third-declension forms are regular and predictable. And here they are. Let's recite them together. We'll leave both the nominative and vocative singulars off in our recitation, because the nominative is irregular and the vocative is always the same as the nominative. So, starting with the genitive, let's pronounce these endings: *-is*, *-i*, *-em*, *-e*, and then in the plural, *-es*, *-um*, *-ibus*, *-es*, *-ibus*. Stop this presentation for a second and recite these endings until you can say them quickly and correctly, and do them backwards at least once.

Now let's look at how these endings work when they're attached to a third-declension noun base. And remember that only third-declension nouns can take these endings. Up until now, we haven't learned any third-declension nouns, so we'll have to get one from our new vocabulary. The example we'll use here is *civitas*, *civitatis*, f., meaning "state." Here it is fully declined. Let's say it together: *civitas*, *civitatis*, *civitati*, *civitatem*, *civitate* — we'll leave the vocative off — *civitates*, *civitatum*, *civitatus*, *civitates*, *civitatus*.

While third declension looks very different in form from first and second, its translation is the same: *civitas* "the state" (S), *civitatis* "of the state," *civitati* "to/for the state," which is as much as I am willing to do "for the state" right now. I think you get it. At least, I hope so. Let's move on.

Those are the endings used for the masculine and feminine gender, but third declension includes all three genders, unlike first declension in which most of the nouns are feminine, or second declension in which most of the nouns are masculine or neuter. Also unlike first and second

declension, all three genders in third declension decline in a similar fashion. Only neuter has a slight variation. Here are the neuter third-declension endings. Notice the only difference between these and their masculine and feminine counterparts is in the nominative, accusative and vocative cases. Let's look at the plural first. In place of the *-es* found in the nominative and accusative plural of the masculine and feminine, there is an *-a*. In the singular, the neuter nominative and accusative utilize no ending at all — that was an Indo-European trait inherited by Latin — but that does not mean the raw base simply sits there. Because many of the bases in their raw form were considered unpronounceable by the Romans, these lonely bases often change form. Let's look at an example of that. The neuter third-declension word *tempus* declines as follows: *tempus, temporis, tempori, tempus, tempore*, vocative *tempus*; and then in the plural, *tempora, temporum, temporibus, tempora, temporibus*. Notice that the base *tempor-* when left alone without an ending will change into *tempus* because of the nature of the way Latin is pronounced.

In the end, it's not the endings that are going to cause problems for you in third declension; it's going to be memorizing the gender and the nominative singular form, both unpredictable and often irregular. However, there are some patterns which can help you with memorizing these forms. The patterns I am going to present on the next few slides are meant only to help you with memorizing. If they don't, feel free to ignore them.

Let's start with memorizing gender. The most important pattern that will help you with memorizing the gender of third-declension nouns is to remember the rule that abstract nouns are very often feminine in gender. "Abstract" means that, while a noun still represents a thing, that thing does not have tangible substance. You can't touch it. Instead, it denotes a principle or quality such as "goodness," "truth," "beauty" or "certainty."

There are four patterns of third-declension feminine-gender abstract nouns worth knowing.

- The first is a class of noun which ends its nominative singular *-tas* and its genitive singular *-tatis*. This is comparable to English "-ty" as in "liberty" or "piety." Here are two examples of that type of noun: *veritas, veritatis*, meaning "truth," and *libertas, libertatis*, meaning "freedom." Notice that the base which ends *-tat-*, when added to the nominative singular third-declension ending *-s*, produces *-tas*.
- The next type of abstract noun which fits this category is very similar. All these nouns end in their nominative singular *-tus*, and their genitive singular *-tutis*, for example, *virtus, virtutis*, meaning "courage," and *senectus, senectutis*, meaning "old age." Here the base, *-tut-* combines with the nominative singular ending *-s*, producing a nominative singular, *-tus*.
- The next pattern is *-tudo, -tudinis*. Many English words ending in "-tude" such as "attitude" are borrowed from Latin words which have this suffix. Here are two examples of that category: *altitudo, altitudinis*, meaning "height," and *valetudo, valetudinis*, meaning "health." Here the base *-tudin-* is added to the nominative singular *-s* and suffers considerable contraction down to *-tudo*.

- The final pattern — and perhaps the most important one — is *-tio, -tionis* which gives English its many Latin derivatives ending in “-tion” such as “action.” Here are two examples of that category: *natio, nationis*, meaning “nation,” and *ratio, rationis*, meaning “reason.” Here the base *-tion-*, when added to the nominative singular *-s*, produces *-tio* in the nominative singular. All four types of abstract noun here are third-declension and feminine in gender.

But not all noun suffixes in third declension are feminine. Some are masculine. Here are two examples.

- The suffix *-or, -oris*, from which we get English words like “valor” and Latin produces words like *labor, laboris*, “work” and *amor, amoris*, meaning “love,” always generates masculine-gender nouns. Note the nominative singular as well. Here the base *-or-* and the nominative singular *-s* combine to create a nominative singular *-or*.
- Another, very closely related example is *-tor, -toris* from which we get words like “victor.” Latin words like *actor, actoris*, meaning “actor” and *orator, oratoris*, meaning “speaker,” are invariably masculine in gender. And note that the nominative singular *-tor* operates much like its close kindred *-or*, dropping the *-s* to produce a nominative singular *-tor*.

Neuter, unfortunately, offers no such helpful patterns, other than nouns which end in their nominative singular *-e, -al* or *-ar* — such as *mare, maris*, meaning “sea”; *animal, animalis*, meaning “animal”; and *exemplar, exemplaris*, meaning “example” — tend to be neuter. We’ll examine these words more fully in later chapters.

Now let’s look at some patterns that are useful in helping you memorize irregular third-declension nominative singular forms.

- If a base ends in *-g-* or *-c-*, when it’s combined with a nominative singular ending *-s*, normally the nominative singular ending will appear as *-x*, such as *rex, regis*, meaning “king” or *lex, legis*, meaning “law,” *pax, pacis*, meaning “peace,” *vox, vocis*, meaning “voice,” *dux, ducis*, meaning “leader,” and *lux, lucis*, meaning “light.”
- If the base ends in *-t-, -nt-,* or *-d-* and runs into the *-s*, most often what will happen is the nominative singular will end in *-s*, sometimes *-ns*, such as *virtus, virtutis*, meaning “courage,” *civitas, civitatis*, meaning “state,” *salus, salutis*, meaning “health,” and *laus, laudis*, meaning “praise.”
- If the base ends in *-on-* or *-in-* and runs into the *-s*, it will contract down all the way to the letter *-o* such as: *homo, hominis*, meaning “human,” *virgo, virginis*, meaning “girl,” or the name *Cicero, Ciceronis*, meaning “Cicero,” the great Roman orator.
- If the base ends in *-r-*, when *-s* is added, the nominative singular will be *-er*, as in *pater, patris*, meaning “father,” *mater, matris*, meaning “mother,” and *frater, fratris*, meaning “brother.”

- If the base ends in *-ar-* with *-s* added, it will remain as *-ar*, as in *Caesar, Caesaris*, meaning “Caesar” the Roman general, or *exemplar, exemplaris*, meaning “example.”
- If the base ends *-or* and is a masculine or feminine noun, with *-s* added it stays as *-or*, as in *labor, laboris*, meaning “work,” *amor, amoris*, meaning “love,” and *soror, sororis*, meaning “sister.”
- If the word is *-or* or *-er* and is neuter, with *-s* added it will change to *-us* — remember there’s no ending being added here so it’s actually a different contraction from *amor* or *labor* — such as *tempus, temporis*, meaning “time,” *corpus, corporis*, meaning “body,” *opus, operis*, meaning “work,” and *genus, generis*, meaning “sort” or “kind.”
- If the base ends in *-it-* and *-s-* is added, the result will be either *-es* or *-ut*, as in *miles, militis*, meaning “soldier,” or *caput, capitis*, meaning “head.”
- If the base ends *-ul* or *-ol* and *-s* is added, the result is either *-ul* or *-ol* in the nominative singular, such as *sol, solis*, meaning “sun,” or *consul, consulis*, meaning “consul,” a high executive officer in Roman government.

This should drive home the point that third declension is a “catch-all” category and, if all these irregularities make third declension seem overly complicated, remember that these irregularities involve only the nominative singular. If these patterns do not help you in memorizing, please feel free to ignore them. But however you decide to do it, these forms must be memorized.

Learning third declension involves one more important challenge, which is the agreement between first/second-declension adjectives and third-declension nouns. When words come from different declensional systems, they can have the same case, number and gender but their endings may not look at all alike. In fact, they almost never do!

Here’s the third-declension noun *amor*, meaning “love,” declined in full — minus the vocative, of course. If we were to add the first/second-declension adjective *verus*, meaning “true,” creating the noun-adjective cluster “true love,” this is what that noun-adjective cluster would look like in Latin: *amor verus, amoris veri, amori vero, amorem verum, amore vero*; in the plural: *amores veri, amorum verorum, amoribus veris, amores veros, amoribus veris*. Note that, though the endings do not look alike, these two words do, in fact, agree in number, gender, and case, but their endings look different because they belong to different declensional systems. In fact, be careful, sometimes the endings do look alike, as in the case of *amorum verorum* but, in fact, they are not alike because the base of the noun is *amor-* and its ending is *-um*. The base of the adjective is *ver-* and its ending is *-orum*. Can you translate these forms? *Amor verus* would be “true love” in the nominative. *Amoris veri* would be “of true love.” Can you finish the translation of this declension?

Here’s a third-declension feminine noun with an adjective attached to it: *civitas libera*. Do these different-looking endings on the noun and adjective make sense to you, and can you translate this noun-adjective cluster?

Finally, here's a third-declension neuter noun with a first/second-declension adjective attached to it: *tempus multum*, meaning "much time." Do the endings here make sense to you and can you translate this noun-adjective cluster?

For the next class meeting, you'll do a worksheet on which you'll practice declining third-declension nouns and creating the proper form of a first/second-declension adjective which agrees with each third-declension noun in its particular case and number.

Now let's turn to the vocabulary for Chapter 7.

The first word is *civitas, civitatis*, f., meaning "state" or "citizenship." It's a third-declension feminine noun. Note that its base is *civitat-*. You get that by dropping the *-is* from the genitive singular. Remember, that's the proper process by which to get the base of a third-declension noun. Also remember that all third-declension nouns whose nominative and genitive end *-tas, -tatis* are abstract nouns and feminine in gender, like *veritas, veritatis*, or *libertas, libertatis*. What would be the accusative plural of this word? That's right: *civitates*.

The next word is *homo, hominis*, m., meaning "human-being" or "man" in the sense of "person." Though grammatically masculine in gender, this third-declension noun does not denote maleness. What's the base of this noun? That's right: drop the *-is* from the genitive singular and you can see that the base is *homin-*. Our word "hominid", meaning "an early form of human" is derived from this base. What would be the genitive plural of this word? That's right: *hominum*.

The next word is *labor, laboris*, m., meaning "work," "labor" or "toil." It's a third-declension masculine noun. Remember that all third-declension nouns whose nominative and genitive singular end *-or, -oris* are masculine. This includes words like *amor, amoris* "love," and *pudor, pudoris*, "shame." What would be the ablative plural of this word? That's right: *laboribus*. And what would be the dative singular? Good: *labori*.

The next word is *littera, litterae*, f., meaning "a letter," that is, "a letter of the alphabet." It's a first-declension feminine noun and it's a fascinating word. In its plural form, *litterae, litterarum*, this word means "a letter" *singular* in our sense of a letter written to someone, a written message. But you can see from the fact that *litterae* is plural that it literally means "letters of the alphabet." This plural form can also mean "literature," "written narrative." This sense is still seen in academia as in "Colleges of Arts and Letters," meaning "literature," or in French *belles lettres*, meaning "fine literature." That the same word can mean all these different things hints at an important aspect of ancient life.

The sad truth is that the vast majority of people in antiquity were illiterate. As far as we can tell — with the data we have it's impossible to do good demographics in antiquity — the illiteracy rate hovered around 90% at best. That meant that, when the majority of people saw a written document, they saw only letters. They couldn't tell what the content was. So when asked what this thing was, they said, "letters," and that's how the plural of this word came to mean any type of written document.

And here's another thing worth noting about this fascinating word. Notice how the classical form of *littera* has two *t*'s in it. That's why our derivative "letter" has two *t*'s, but we have other derivatives from this word with only one *t* like "literate" or "literature." The reason for these two different spellings is that the one-*t* variant became popular in later antiquity, the third and fourth centuries of the modern era. That one-*t* variant was then passed on to the Romance languages, Italian and French in particular, and that one-*t* variant leaked into English via derivatives drawn from those Romance Languages. So English ended up getting this word two different ways: directly from classical Latin with the two-*t* spelling, and from the later Romance languages with the one-*t* spelling.

Another word that gives insight into the nature of Roman psychology is *mos, moris, m.*, meaning "habit," "custom," or "manner." It's a third-declension masculine noun. What a *mos* is at heart is something that a person does regularly, in other words, a habit. To a Roman, if you added up a person's habits, you got his character. The Romans are not alone in believing this. The great philosopher Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do." And we today buy into this concept when we talk about people's "little ways," meaning that the small things a person does hint at larger personality traits. And that's why the plural of *mos* — *mores, morum* — means "character."

The next word is very interesting too. I'm sorry, but this vocabulary list is just a treasure trove of historical linguistics shedding light on ancient culture. However, if you find all this linguistics tedious, please feel free to ignore it with my apologies. You are not required to know any of this information but I find this sort of historical investigation of words enlightening about the past and helpful in memorizing this vocabulary. So I'm going to keep doing it which is why the gods have endowed your right hand with the magic of a fast-forward button. Use it wisely, my children. And now that we're done with that brief commercial message from the Center for Historical Linguistics, we return to our regularly scheduled vocabulary.

Pax, pacis, f., means "peace." It's a third-declension feminine noun. This is the word "peace" as in "war and peace," not "peace and quiet." We've already learned that word: *otium, otii, n.*, second declension. The word *pax* appears to come from a base that means "to drive a stake into the ground" — a wooden stake, not a beef steak — because stakes and rocks and other such notable features were used to establish land boundaries in antiquity. The word *pax* probably comes originally from judgments made between conflicting parties over who had the right to a certain strip of land. So in fact, the word is not a military term originally but a legal term. The distinction, however, is probably technical. As everyone knows, law courts are battlefields.

The next word is *terra, terrae, f.*, meaning "land," "country," "ground" or "earth." Be careful, this noun is first-declension, not third.

The next word is *tempus, temporis, n.*, meaning "time," "occasion" or "opportunity." It's a third-declension neuter noun. What's its base? That's right: you can't look at the nominative. You have to look at the genitive, drop the *-is* genitive singular ending and you can see that the base is *tempor-*. English derivatives like "temporal" and "contemporary" should help you remember this base. Another question: what's the accusative plural of this word? Remember, it's neuter. That's right: *tempora*. So, what's the accusative singular of *tempus*? Trick question: it's *tempus*. Don't forget, neuter nominatives and accusatives are always the same. And there's another important

thing to remember here: several third-declension neuter nouns — and very important ones at that — end in *-us* in their nominative singular, words like *corpus, corporis*, meaning “body,” or *opus, operis*, meaning “work,” or *genus, generis*, meaning “kind” or “sort.” Do not confuse these third-declension *-us* neuter nouns with second-declension *-us* masculine nouns like *amicus* and *oculus*. The genitive singular of each noun will show which declension it belongs to.

The next word is *virtus, virtutis*, f., meaning “manliness,” “courage,” “excellence,” “character,” “worth” or “virtue.” It’s a third-declension feminine(!) noun. Literally, it means “manliness.” *Vir* means “man” and *-tus* means “the quality of,” so it may seem a bit odd to you that the word for “manliness” is feminine in gender, but remember all third-declension nouns which have a nominative in *-tus* and a genitive in *-tutis* are abstract nouns, the vast majority of which are feminine in gender. What greater proof do you need that grammatical gender and natural gender do not always coincide?

The next word *post* is a preposition meaning “behind” or “after.” It takes an accusative object. So for instance, you might say *post tempus bonum*, “after a good time,” and if the word *tempus* in that phrase were underlined and I asked you what case it is and why, you would answer, “It’s accusative because it’s the object of the preposition *post*.”

The next word, *amor, amoris*, m., means “love.” It’s a third-declension masculine noun. As we noted above, nouns that end *-or, -oris* in their nominative and genitive singular are almost always masculine.

The next word, *audeo, audēre*, is a verb that means “dare.” It’s second-conjugation. You should note that this verb expects a complementary infinitive because you dare to do something, for instance, *audebit laudare*, “he will dare to praise” — his teacher, no doubt. English has a number of derivatives from this word including “audacious” and “audacity,” but not words like “auditorium” or “audition.” Those come from a different Latin verb that means “to hear.”

The next word is *virgo, virginis*, f., meaning “maiden,” “girl” or “virgin.” It’s a third-declension feminine noun. Let’s see how well you’ve been listening to this presentation. What’s the base of this word? Good: *virgin-*, which you get by dropping the *-is* from the genitive singular. I can hear the snickering from here. Obviously, it’s from this Latin word that we get our word “virgin.” In Roman society, very young people were presumed to be innocent sexually. Thus, the word *virgo* which meant “young girl” naturally had the sense of not yet having participated in sex. End of discussion.

And finally to end this vocabulary list, let’s go under: *sub*, a preposition which can take an object in either the ablative or accusative case. With an ablative object, *sub* means “in a position under,” and if so, is most often used with verbs that show rest like “be,” “sit,” “stay” — for example, *sub caelo* meaning “under the sky,” the form you would use if you were standing “under the open sky.” If, however, *sub* takes an accusative object, it means “to a position under” and is most often used with verbs that show motion like “go,” “run,” “flee” — for example, *sub terram*, “under the earth,” showing that you’re moving to a position under the earth. And after a lesson as complicated as this, burial does seem like the right note to end on.

So, little corpses, does the rule that was cited at the beginning of this chapter now make sense to you? If not, please go back and review this presentation — at your mortal peril. If it does make sense, sing hallelujah and proceed to the next slide.

For the next class exercise please print out a copy of the worksheet for Chapter 7. Here's a link to that worksheet.

And that's it. That's the end of the presentation for Chapter 7.

Denique finis, discipuli!