

Chapter 34: Deponent Verbs

Chapter 34 covers the following: the formation and expectation of deponent verbs. And....that's it. At the end of the lesson we'll review the vocabulary which you should memorize in this chapter.

There are four important rules to remember in this chapter: (1) Deponent verbs are passive in form but active in meaning and expectation, with two important exceptions: first, present and future participles are active in both form and meaning; and, second, the future passive participle (the gerundive) is passive in both form and meaning. (2) The imperatives of deponent verbs end *-re* (singular) and *-mini* (plural). (3) Semi-deponents have regular present-tense forms, but in the perfect tenses they're deponent. They never act as true passives. (4) *Utor*, *fruor*, *fungor*, *potior* and *vescor* are deponent verbs which expect the ablative case.

The term "deponent" means "put down or aside." It refers to verbs which have "dropped" or "put aside" their active endings. That is, they don't have them, no active endings, only passive ones. "Deponent" is not a very good name for this type of verb. For starters, it's wrong. Many deponents, as far as we can tell, never had any active endings so there weren't any to "put aside." What deponents really are are verbs that have only passive endings, but grammatically they act like actives. That is, they don't have a passive sense. So even though you're going to see a passive ending, you're not going to translate it with some form of "be." You're going to translate it as if it's active. Thus, a more accurate name for deponents would be something like "passives pretending to be actives." "Pseudo-actives"? Okay, I don't know a better name for these verbs than deponents, but "deponent" isn't right.

When I think about deponents, which I try not to do, three words come to mind: Easy, pointless, and why? Easy, because passive equals active is all there is to it, active in both meaning and expectation, of course, but that's what "active" means. That's to be expected. And when there are only passive forms, then there's nothing new to learn in terms of formation. Well, almost. You still have to learn two new forms here (the imperatives), but that's it. And think about it: only one voice means half the number of verb forms. Deponents have half the forms of regular verbs. Suddenly, I'm strangely attracted to them, or I would be, if they weren't pointless. Seriously, what's the point in having deponent verbs? Why do they exist? How did these half-their-conjugation-hating, avoid-the-active-light-of-day voice vampires end up in Latin?

Easy. Let's go back there. The entirety of this chapter can be summed up in eight words: "passive in form, active in meaning and expectation." The verb will look passive but will translate and act like an active form. If you're totally confident in your giant brain's ability to apply this simple principle to the complexity of real Latin, you can stop this presentation now and start memorizing the vocabulary. But I wouldn't if I were you. Your happy simple-present might turn out tragically contrary-to-fact. So you're going to see *-tur* endings that read like *-t* endings, for instance, *loquitur* which comes from a deponent verb we'll soon encounter in the vocabulary (*loquor*, "speak"). *Loquitur* looks like "he is said," but it's not. It's "he says." That's easy, and it's even easier than that. With only passive forms, deponents are missing the whole left side of a synopsis. It's like government without one whole political party, no left at all. The Republicans among you have got to love that. And it just keeps getting easier. Deponents are

their own self-contained sub-group of Latin verbs. “Deponenting” is not something you can do to a verb. A verb is deponent, or it’s not. So it’s not like we’re adding a new mood or something, something that can be done to all the verbs we’ve studied so far. Being deponent is not like being subjunctive. Any verb can be subjunctive, including deponents, but “deponitude” is a phenomenon restricted to, I don’t know, maybe a hundred verbs total in commonly used Latin vocabulary — fifteen that you need to know. Come on, that is not the worst news you’ve gotten in this class.

When it comes down to “putting down” your endings, that’s it! What’s up with this then? Why are there deponents? Why don’t all Latin verbs just behave actively when they’re active and passively when they’re passive? What’s the point of having deponents? There isn’t a point. Being deponent doesn’t convey any information that other grammatical forms can’t relate. Deponicity is just a freaky idiom. Some verbs are, some aren’t. Don’t believe me? Ask an ancient Roman. That’s right. Hold a séance, call some Romans up from the dead and say “Hey, you Romans! What’s up with those deponents?” They’ll tell you the reason there are deponents is because ... “That’s the way our grandmother talked and we’re Romans so we love our *maiores*.” Now give their spirits a little ghost juice, loosen them up a bit and I’ll bet they’ll tell you deponents were just as annoying to them as they’re about to be to you. Then ask them what happened to their deponents. They’ll tell you, when they saw the barbarians storming Rome, they quickly gathered up their most precious possessions and fled. Deponents somehow didn’t make it on that wagon. Who knows what happened? Some Vandal burned them up? Probably. And no one wept. Not over that.

Next, go ask a linguist about deponents. They’ll cite lots of facts and forms and Hittite bases, but you’ll get no real answer. “A fossil of some Indo-European structure,” says one. Paleontological metaphors are never a good sign. Why can’t anyone explain them? They don’t make sense. For instance, there’s nothing all deponents share: not meaning, not conjugation, not sounds in their bases. No single thing characterizes all deponents except that they’re deponent. But there is a likely culprit, a form called the middle voice, something Proto-Indo-European had between active and passive. We know about this middle voice because many Indo-European languages exhibit a fully functional one — ancient Greek and Sanskrit, for instance — or sometimes just the remnant of it, like Latin. That’s what deponents most likely are, the archaic echo of a third voice that wasn’t active like “I found a friend,” or passive like “A friend was found by me” but somewhere in between, something like “I found me a friend.” While many people don’t consider that proper English — though they should, there’s nothing wrong with it — the sense is as close as English comes to a middle voice. It shows the subject’s interest or involvement in the action of the verb. “I didn’t find your friend, or someone who was friendly to just anyone, but someone who was friendly to me.”

Remember how, since almost day one, we’ve been adding “his” or “her” or “our” to direct objects in order to make natural-sounding English. Literal Latin (“he has book”) just sounds so Russian. “He has his book” is much more natural English. The “his” shows his deep interest in the ownership of the book. The middle voice does the same thing. And that’s what deponents most likely are, the “fossil” imprint of a whole separate voice that showed self-interest but which by Roman times was no more than an inexplicable oddity, headed for the dumpsite of

grammatical anachronisms, the land of lost forms, but not dead yet, indeed still alive enough in classical times to make us have to learn them, just as angry little Romans did.

So, *Romuli*, know this. There are six things you have to be aware of or do when facing the deponent dragon: First, memorization! You just have to learn which verbs are deponent and which aren't. Second, formation. You need to know how to form deponents but, trust me, it's not hard. Third, expectation. Do they take agents or objects? I'll let you think on that for a while. Fourth, participles. Latin is missing several participle forms. So, what do you think the Romans did about that? Fifth, imperatives. Passive imperatives? How often have you heard "Be loved, my child!" Not often, I'm going to guess. So, you'll have to learn two new forms here. And finally principal parts. If there's no active, how can there be a third principal part, the perfect active? So let's go back and examine carefully these six things you need to know about deponents one by one, starting with ...

Memorization. Some verbs are deponent; some aren't. There's no way to predict. You just have to memorize them. The dictionary tells you a verb is deponent by citing its first principal part in the passive. In other words, it'll end *-or* instead of *-o*. But watch the second principal part, too, the present infinitive. It still indicates which conjugation the verb belongs to. Yes, conjugations still apply to deponents. Everything about deponents is normal — mood, tense, person, number — everything except their voice. So, you see *hortor*, *hortari*? That's deponent — the first principal part ends *-or* — and first conjugation: *-ari* is the passive counterpart of *-are*. If the second principal part ends *-eri*, the verb's second-conjugation deponent; *-i*, it's third or third-*io*; *-iri*, fourth. Wheelock lays this all out on page 161.

Formation. Except for two forms — and we'll talk about them in a second — there's nothing new to learn here. Outside of voice, deponents act the way regular verbs act when they conjugate according to their conjugations. And take note: all the conjugations include at least a few deponents. Now don't have a stroke, but I really don't see a need to chart this all out. It would just amount to a big passive review, which is what it is for two full pages in Wheelock, from halfway down page 161 to halfway down 163. Why did he include all these forms? I don't get it. Review the passive if you need to. Otherwise, skip those pages. The one form you need to know, the only new form in this chapter, is on page 163: the imperatives. As I said, we'll talk about those in a moment. But let's first address a much more important topic, ...

Expectation. Though passive in form, deponents are functionally active, so what should they expect after them? If a verb means "I speak," what should follow it? What has to follow it? A direct object, of course. You can't say "I speak by you"! That makes no sense. So here's what you'll see: accusative direct objects attached to verbs with passive endings, like *-tur* with an accusative after it, for instance, *veritatem loquitur*, "he is speaking the truth." And I am! It's crazy but it's also that simple. Okay, it's not that simple. Not all deponents take accusative direct objects. A few — a very few, and only one you need to know — have ablatives after them. The one you need to know is *utor*, but let's tackle that when we get to it in the vocabulary! This is much more important to remember, please: the Romans treated the majority, the vast majority of deponents, like regular transitive verbs which take accusative direct objects. *Satis loquitur*.

Participles. Here's another thing to remember: Latin doesn't have all the participles it could have, and that complicates the deponent situation. What do you do with deponents when the present passive participle is missing, when the only present participle is active, like *amans*, "loving"? If deponents by definition don't have active forms, they shouldn't have present participles at all, or future active participles. In other words, no *-ns*'s or *-ntis*'s! No *-urus*, *-a*, *-um*'s! That's ... not good. A whole class of verbs that can't say "ing" -ing? No futures in indirect statement? You need the future active participle for that. Sorry, that just won't work. Who cares about the niceties of grammar and inherited forms? Generals need to know who's "speaking, who is that over there ...*loquens*? Who's going to *locuturus*? When need meets tradition on the field of battle, need nearly always wins. Say "*Salvete!*" to *loquens* and *locuturus*.

But what about the perfect passive participle, the fourth principal part? It's passive in form. Shouldn't it be active in meaning, like all deponents ought to be? No reason for it not to, huh? So go for it: *locutus*, "having said": passive in form, active in meaning and expectation. A regular deponent, if that's not a contradiction in terms. And note that this is the only way in Latin of saying "having whatever-ed"! Other non-deponent verbs can't say "having done this." Having a form that can do that is not inconvenient. Roman authors who longed for more participles, like Vergil, had this one escape into perfect activity, and believe me, they took it. Deponent perfect "passive" participles are indeed quite popular in Latin literature. Put them on your watch-list.

So, what about the future passive participle, the gerundive, that form used in passive periphrastics, the one that means "must be"? Does it go active too? No, it can't. It's too deeply connected to "must be" to be just "must." *-nd-*, "must be," they go hand in hand. So *loquendum est*? It must be "it must be said." Or to put it another way, the passive periphrastic rule overrides the deponent rule. So, it's passive in form, passive in meaning, the only way to have a passive sense with a deponent verb. Whew, participles! That was complicated. Let's go back over all that again.

Some deponent participles are active in both form and meaning, the present participle, for instance, *sequens* — which comes from another deponent verb, *sequor*, "follow" — *sequens* means "following," and it takes an accusative direct object. Its future counterpart *secuturus* means "about to follow," which is followed by a direct object too. Only one participle is a true deponent, the perfect passive participle: "having followed," *secutus*, for instance, and it's also followed by a direct object. The last participle is passive in both form and meaning, the gerundive, in this case, *sequendus*, "must be followed." And naturally it must be followed by a dative of agent because that's what's used with all passive periphrastics. Period. Note no deponent ever expects an ablative agent. No *ab* ("by") with this whole class of verbs. Okay, so far we can say: "voice weird, formation easy." Here's the one exception ...

The imperative. Again it comes down to Roman generals who had to have a way of saying "Follow! Do it!" So how are deponents going to form imperatives? [Remember there are two: singular and plural.] Think about it. If regular Latin verbs create active imperatives by dropping the final *-s* off the second-person indicative form, like *ama!*, "love!" (vs. *amas*, "you love, you are loving"), and in the plural, *amate* (vs. *amatis*) — remember Latin doesn't like a short *i* at the end of a word; it'll change it to *-ē* — how will that drop-the-*s* rule work with deponents?

If, for instance, the second-person singular indicative is *sequeris* (“you follow”), what’s the logical Roman way to make it imperative? Drop the -s! *Sequere!* meaning “(hey you there), follow!” Oh, there’s a nasty trap there, huh? With deponents the ending -re means “do it!,” not “to do it” (the infinitive) the way -re does with non-deponent verbs. So, because *amo*’s regular, *amare* means “to love.” But *hortor*’s deponent, so *hortare* means “urge!, encourage!” Imperative! Un-encouraging is what that is. So is the imperative plural that insidious too? Wait, the second-person plural passive ending is that strange -mini form, like *sequimini*, “you (pl.) follow, you are following.” There’s no -s to drop at the end. So no problem! *Sequimini!* “Y’all, follow!” That’s easy enough, which means only the singular imperative of deponents will cause you any trouble. And here’s the last thing to know about deponents...

Principal Parts. If deponents don’t have active forms, how can they have third principal parts? The perfect active? There’s no active with deponents. So? There’s no third principal part. No (*venio, venire*), *vēni*, or *vidi*, or *vici* with deponents. Just *sequor, sequi, secutus*: “I follow, to follow, having followed.” Now, some dictionaries and Latin word lists make the third vocabulary entry for deponents a true third principal part by adding *sum* — for example, *secutus sum*, “I have followed” — but you don’t need the *sum* to know all you need to know about the verb. So I agree with those who leave it off and treat the third vocabulary entry like a fourth principal part. In sum, why type out letters you don’t need? And those are the six things you need to know about deponents.

I lied. There’s one more thing you need to know, but it doesn’t apply to all deponents. In fact, there are very few verbs that do this. So I only half-lied. As the Romans were clearing out deponents, some verbs retained half their deponent forms when the other half had already been regularized, that is, had been made non-deponent. At the moment we catch them during the Classical Age, these verbs are half-deponent — “semi-deponent” is the technical term — that is, their present is regular (active endings with active meanings), but their perfect is deponent (passive equals active), for instance, *audeo, audere, ausus (sum)*, meaning “dare.” And note, too, that, although the creation of a true active in the present opens the possibility of a true passive, that doesn’t happen. Roman authors never put semi-deponent verbs like *audeo* in the passive in any tense, even in the present system where they could have. When they needed to say someone’s being dared, they found another verb. So, now do you dare — *audesne ... dicere haec difficillima esse*? No! Deponents are easy and pointless, and why they exist, you know as much as anyone does.

Nunc sequimini, O discipuli cari, ad verba nova, the vocabulary for Chapter 34, the first word of which is *aqua, aquae*, f., meaning “water.” It’s a first-declension feminine noun, and an odd word. The only known Indo-European cognate is found in Gothic: *ahwa*, “river.” What happened to **wod-*, the usual base for “water” in Indo-European, what you see in the English “water,” what the Greeks transmuted into *hydōr*, which is seen in our Greek derivative of *hydōr*, “hydrogen,” meaning literally “creating water”? It’s the “H” in H₂O. **Wod-* even shows up in Russian as “vodka”? [You have question?] Actually Latin does exhibit the **wod-* base, just not in their word for “water.” It underlies *unda*, the Romans’ word for “wave,” whence we get our word “undulate” (“move like a wave”). What a weird way for “water” to have washed up in Latin!

Next word, *arbitror, arbitrari, arbitratus (sum)* —remember: the *sum* is optional! — meaning “think, judge.” It’s a first-conjugation deponent verb. “D” is the abbreviation we’ll use in the vocabulary for “deponent.”

Next is another verb, *audeo, audere, ausus (sum)*, meaning “dare.” It’s second-conjugation, semi-deponent. The abbreviation for that is “SD.” Don’t forget: “semi-deponent” means the present-system forms are regular (i.e. non-deponent) and the perfect forms are deponent. But, as we noted above, *audeo* never has a passive sense, in any of its finite forms at least. Also, be careful not to confuse this verb with *audio* (“hear”), O audacious auditor!

Next is another deponent verb, a very important and widely used one, *loquor, loqui, locutus (sum)*, meaning “speak, tell.” It’s a third-conjugation deponent, built on an Indo-European base **tlok^w-*, meaning “speak,” from which Latin dropped the initial *t-*, just like it did with **tlatus*, the original perfect passive participle of *tollo* which was **tlater* transferred to *fero*. But English retained the *t-* in **tlok^w-* and moved the vowel to the other side of the *-l-* to make the word pronounceable, producing ...? That’s right: “talk.” But folks later deemed the *-l-* unpronounceable, and that’s why there’s a silent *//* in “talk.”

And after silence comes death, of course: *morior, mori, mortuus (sum)*, meaning “die,” a third-*io* deponent verb.

And after death comes “birth” — if you’re a Hindu, that is — *nascor, nasci, natus (sum)*, meaning “be born.” It’s 3D, another third-conjugation deponent. Originally, the word started **gn-*, as in its Greek-based counterparts “genetics, genesis,” a *g-* that in English changed into *k-* — Grimm’s Law again! — producing “kin, kind (as in humankind),” the people we’re “born with, born like.”

And what are talking, dying and bearing kin but suffering: *patior, pati, passus (sum)*, meaning “suffer, endure, permit,” another third-*io* deponent verb. From its “suffer” sense we get words like “patience, patient, and passion,” originally “the suffering one suffers in love,” only later, the romantic feelings associated therewith. In its “permit” sense, *patior* expects an accusative noun and an infinitive verb: “to permit someone (acc.) to do something.” How would Latin say “We allowed all (people) to speak.”? [And use the imperfect for “allowed.” Now, don’t forget how deponents work! Passive in ... what? But active in ... what and what?] There you go!

Patiebamur omnes loqui.

Next up is a verb containing several interesting linguistic features: *proficiscor, proficisci, profectus (sum)*, meaning “set out, start.” It’s a third-conjugation deponent verb. The first element in this verb is the prefix *pro-*, “forth.” The second is the base of the verb, *-fic-*, a vowel-graduated variant of *fac-* (“make”). We’ve seen that base in *facio*. Attached to that is *-isc-*, the inchoative affix which means “begin to.” Note that it’s omitted in the perfect (*profectus*) where the “begin” sense makes no sense. And last is the first-person singular present indicative ending *-or*, the deponent counterpart of the usual *-o*. Thus, *pro/fic/isc/or* means (going backwards) “I / begin to / make / forth,” which is one way to say “I set out, start.”

Following that is the Latin word for “follow”: *sequor, sequi, secutus (sum)*, yet another third-conjugation deponent, and a very common and widely used word. Commit *sequor* to memory as soon as you can, and good things will “follow.” *Sequor* is built on a base seen also in the English verb “see,” which originally meant “follow (with the eyes).” Those of you who know German will recognize the same base in *sehen*, the German word for “see.” How would Latin say “they will follow”? [The ending has to be passive in form but active in meaning, right? What conjugation? Third? Future in third? Yes, -e-. So?] *Sequentur*.

Here’s another important third-conjugation deponent: *utor, uti, usus (sum)*, meaning “use, enjoy, experience.” *Utor* expects an ablative(!) noun in place of an accusative object. That is, if you “use something” in Latin, the “something” will be in the ablative case. It’s actually not an object. It’s a vestige of an ablative of means because the original sense of *utor* was “make use, create utility (by means of ... whatever).” However, for the sake of convenience we’re going to call it an object, “the ablative object of *utor*,” which gives us a new grammar question but one that applies only to this one verb. True, four other verbs in Latin take ablative “objects” — *fruor* (“enjoy”), *fungor* (“perform [a task]”), *potior* (“acquire”), and *vescor* (“eat”) — but you don’t need to know those four in this class. Only *utor*, which in the first-person singular future, with an object, as in “I will use it,” would be ... what? [What conjugation? Third, again. Future? -e-, right? No, wait! This is first-person! It’s not -e- in the first person. It’s -a (-am). No, wait! *Utor*’s deponent. No active endings. What’s the passive counterpart of -am? -ar! So “I will use ... it?” What case will “it” be? Ablative. And let’s use *is, ea, id*. So the Latin is ...] *eo utar*. So much grammar and just six letters.

Here’s six more letters, way easier ones: *insula, insulae, f.*, meaning “island.” It’s a first-declension feminine noun. The Latin word for “almost” is *paene*. Put *p(a)eni-* on the front of *insula*, and you get *p(a)eninsula*, “peninsula,” literally “an almost island.”

Next is another deponent, this one first-conjugation, *conor, conari, conatus (sum)*, meaning “try, attempt.” Its sense demands a complementary infinitive: “try, attempt (to ...).”

And the last word on this vocabulary list is yet another deponent verb — that makes ten total! — *egredior, egredi, egressus (sum)*, meaning “go out.” It’s third-io. The base of this verb is -*gred-*, a vowel-gradated form of *grad-* (“step”). We get words like “grade, (vowel) gradation” from this base. Your grades are, after all, “step-by-step” measurements of your success. The *e-* on the front of *egredior* is a prefix (“out”), so *egredior* means literally “I step out.” The Romans used this -*gred-* base a lot, often changing the prefix to indicate different ways of stepping: back, for instance, *regredior*, meaning “retreat” or *progreior*, “step forward,” that is, “advance” *ingredior*, “step in,” in other words “enter” *degredior*, “step down, descend, dismount” *digredior*, “step apart, separate, deviate” and *circumgredior*, “step around, surround.”

Do the rules that were cited at the beginning of this chapter now make sense to you? If not, please review this presentation. If so, please proceed to the next slide.

For the next class meeting, please bring in a copy of the worksheet and P&R sentences for Chapter 34 (on pp. 165-166). Here’s a link to the worksheet.

Deponents are passive in what? Active in what? And what? *Hoc semper loquimini! Egredior!*
Avete!