

Grammar 6—Abbreviated Case Charts

The case tables in textbooks often make it look like nouns are declined in about ten different ways. Happily this appearance is deceptive. There are really only three main ways of declining nouns with only slight variations to account for hard and soft vowels and for the question of whether a noun is animate or not. Here are case tables in which we attempt to make this clear.

Nouns in the Singular

Case	First Declension (Masculine or Neuter)	Second Declension (Generally Feminine)	Third Declension (Always Feminine)
Nominative	do nothing	do nothing	do nothing
Accusative	do nothing for inanimate, genitive rule for animate	append -y	do nothing
Genitive	append -a	append -ы	append -ы which becomes -и
Prepositional	append -e	append -е	
Dative	append -y	append -е	
Instrumental	append -ом	append -ой	append -ю (-ь not absorbed)

Nouns in the Plural

Case	First Declension Not Ending in -ь	Second Declension	Third Declension and First Ending in -ь
Nominative	append -ы		
Accusative	append -ы for inanimate, genitive rule for animate		
Genitive	append -ов	lop off -a	append -ой (becomes -ей)
Prepositional	append -ах		
Dative	append -ам		
Instrumental	append -ами		

Adjectives

	Singular			Plural
Case	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	
Nominative	-ый	-ое	-ая	-ые
Accusative	-ой		-ую	
Genitive	-ого		-ой	-ых
Prepositional	-ом			
Dative	-ому			-ым
Instrumental	-ими			-ими

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Construction of Soft Vowels

To achieve the same results as with a 'full' declension table, you must understand that each soft vowel is the equivalent of a corresponding hard vowel but with softness added in front of it. These tables illustrate the principle:

Vowels in Hard and Soft Form	
Hard Vowel	Soft Vowel
а	я
э	е
ы	и
у	ю
о	ё

Components of a Soft Vowel		
Soft Vowel	Short For	Or For
я	йа	ьа
е	йэ	ьэ
и	йы	ьы
ю	йу	ьу
ё	йо	ьо

Rule 1: When a declension rule requires you to add a hard vowel to the end of a word which ends in -й or -ь, you should combine the vowel with the -й or -ь to make a single soft vowel. For example:

словарь + а = словаря
But: театр + а = театра

Rule 2: If a declension rule requires you to add a hard vowel to the end of a word which ends in a soft vowel, the existing vowel disappears, but its softness stays behind to make the new vowel soft. For example:

море + а = моря

Rule 3: Where a conjugation rule requires you to remove a final vowel (such as а or я) and that vowel is soft, you should remove only the hard part leaving a -й or -ь to represent the soft part. Leave -й after a vowel and -ь after a consonant. For example:

копия - а = копий
конюшня - а = конюшнь
кастрюля - а = кастрюль
баня - а = бань
But: газета - а = газет

Exception: After г, к, х, ш, щ, ж, ч write и never ы, no matter what the above rules would otherwise require. For example:

водка + ы = водки