Gender, Number, and Case: Why do I care?

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Disclaimer: this is meant to be a quick reference, especially for those tripped-up by grammatical terms. It is not a comprehensive explanation. Therefore, if something is not on this sheet, that does *not* mean that you aren't responsible for knowing it.

Q: What entities in a sentence will have gender, number, and case?
A: Nouns and adjectives (and later on "verbal nouns" and "verbal adjectives" – don't worry about them now).

Q: Why do I care?
A: The gender, number, and case of a noun or adjective can tell you exactly how that noun or adjective is functioning in the sentence and how it is interacting with other words. With this information you can translate the sentence correctly (this is a good thing). Precise knowledge of gender, number, and case is particularly important for avoiding confusion in long or difficult sentences. You should be able to answer the question "What is the gender, number, and case?" for every noun or adjective in a sentence.

Note: To deal with the number and case of a specific noun, you must **know** that noun's declension already, as well as its (you know a noun's declension and gender by knowing the noun's full vocab. entry - if you aren't sure how this happens, ask me). This is because a noun's declension (and gender for 2nd and 3rd decl. nouns) tells you which group of endings get stuck onto the noun (i.e. 1st decl. nouns get -*a, -ae, -ae, -am, -ā, -a; -ae, -ārum, -īs, -ās, -īs, -ae* endings; 2nd decl. masc. nouns get -*us, -ī, -ō, ...* endings; 2nd decl. neut. nouns get -*um, -ī, -ō,...* endings, etc.). If you see a noun ending in –*um*, you won't know whether that is nom./acc. singular (e.g. *donum*) or gen. plural (e.g. *regum*) unless you know the declension (and gender) of the noun upon which that ending has been stuck. Knowing by heart each noun's full vocabulary entry is particularly important now, since 3rd declension noun endings diverge so drastically from those of the 1st and 2nd declension.

I. Nouns
   A. Gender
   – There are three possible genders: **masculine**, **feminine**, and **neuter**.
   – Gender is easy: each noun has one and only one gender (there are exceptions, but you won't see them in 101). You must memorize the gender when you memorize the word.
   – Gender is important: a). for second and third declension nouns, knowing gender (as well as declension) tells you what group of endings a noun uses (i.e. 2nd dec. <u>masculine</u> takes -*us, -ī, -ō, - um, ...* but 2nd decl. <u>neuter</u> takes -*um, -ī, -ō, -um, ...*; likewise 3rd decl. masculine or feminine nouns take one set of endings, but 3rd decl. neuter nouns take a slightly different set of endings); b). if an adjective is modifying your noun, that adj. must have the same gender as the noun – obviously, if you don't know the gender of the noun, you can't tell if the gender of the adj. is the same.

B. Number
- There are two possible numbers: **singular** (sing.) and **plural** (pl.).
- The ending of a noun tells you the noun's number. Each group of endings for each declension has two columns, one for sing. and one for pl. Thus one rose is *rosa, rosae, rosae, rosam,…*, but two or more are *rosae, rosārum, rosās, rosās,….*
- Number is important: a). when you are translating, if the Latin word is plural, your English translation had better be plural, and vice versa; same with singular (there are a few exceptions, like *īnsidiae, īnsidiārum, f.* in the plural meaining singular "ambush," which you just have to memorize); b). for the subject of a sentence: if the verb is singular, the subject must also be singular; if the verb is plural, the subject must also be plural; c). for a noun modified by an adjective: "adjectives must agree with the nouns they modify in gender, number, and case.

C. Case
- There are six possible cases: **nominative**, **genitive**, **dative**, **accusative**, **ablative**, and **vocative**.
- The ending on a noun tells you what case the noun is in (but the ending only tells you this **if** you have memorized the noun's declension, as mentioned above – otherwise, e.g., you wouldn't know that *dōna* was nom./acc. pl. from *dōnum, -ī, n.* and not a first declension nominative sing. like *puella*).
- Knowing a noun's case in a given sentence is important because the case will tell you how that noun is functioning in the sentence (!!!!). Briefly, each case does the following (so far): nominative: for the subject of the sentence (or a predicate nominative, like *vir magister est*, the man is a teacher); genitive: "of a/the noun" (*rosa puerī*, the rose *of the boy*; *vir Romae*, the man *of Rome*); dative: "to/for the noun," esp. for indirect objects (*dat rosās puellīs*, he gives roses *to the girls*); accusative: for the direct object (*vidēmus puerōs*, we see the boys) or the object of certain prepositions (*propter īnsidiās*, on account of the ambush); ablative: for the moment we only use abl. with certain prepositions (do you know the rhyme?!?) (*sine dōnō*, without a gift); vocative: for direct address (*O discipule!* O student!).

II. Adjectives
- Adjectives are words that modify nouns. When an adjective modifies a noun, **it must agree with that noun in gender, number and case (!).** This means that if an adjective is modifying a nominative plural masculine noun, the adjective **must** likewise be nominative, plural, and masculine.
- The ending on a specific adjective will tell you its gender, number and case. Since an adjective must be able to be match the number, gender, and case of any noun performing any function in any sentence, there is an array of possible endings for each adjective. Think of the adjective stem (eg. magn-) as having a

wardrobe of endings (ok, this is a little corny). The wardrobe of first and second declension adjectives (the only kind you know so far) is *–us (or for some nouns -er), -ī, -ō, -um, -ō, -e; -ī, -ōrum, -īs, -ōs, -īs, -ī; -a, -ae, -ae, -am, -ā, -a; -ae, -ārum, -īs, -ās, -īs, -ae; -um, -ī, -ō, -um, -ō, -um; -a, -ōrum, -īs, -a, -īs, -a.* Each of these endings indicates a specific gender, number, and case, with occasional overlap (e.g. *-us* indicates masculine singular nominative, *-a* indicates feminine singular nominative or neuter plural nominative or neuter plural accusative). When an adjective must stand with a noun, it can therfore pick from this wardrobe (and only from this wardrobe! *magn-* could never use a third declension-type ending such as *-em*) the "outfit" (i.e. ending) that will give the adjective the same gender, number, and case as the noun it is modifying.

- So far you have only learned adjectives that take endings that look like the endings of 1st and 2nd declension nouns. Therefore these adjectives are called "1st and 2nd declension adjectives." Later you will learn adjectives that take endings that look like 3rd declension endings. Note that these names refer to the endings of the adjective itself, and have **nothing whatsoever** to do with the declension of the noun being modified (remember, adjectives must agree with the noun modified in num., gen., and case – there is nothing about matching declension endings). For example, *video regem magnum*, "I see the great king."

- <u>Gender</u>: when modifying a feminine noun (of any declension), a first/second declension adjective (like *magnus, magna, magnum*) uses *-a, -ae, -ae, -am,...* endings. When modifying a masculine noun (of any declension), it uses *-us, -ī, -ō, -um,...* endings. When modifying a neuter noun (of any declension), it uses *-um, -ī, -ō, -um,...* endings. So, e.g., the big gate is *magna porta*, *magnae portae, magnae portae,...*; the big sailor is *magnus nauta, magnī nautae,...*; and the big gift is *magnum dōnum, magnī dōnī,....*

- <u>Number and case</u>: the aforementioned endings show the case and number of the adjective in the same way the endings did for nouns. Thus within each gender there is an ending to show singular nominative and one to show plural nominative (*-us* or *-ī* in the masculine, *-a* or *-ae* in the feminine, *-um* or *-a* in the neuter), singlular genitive or plural genitive (*-ī* or *-ōrum* in the masculine, *-ae* or *-ārum* in the feminine, *-ī* or *-ōrum* in the neuter), etc. The case and number of the adjective is determined by the case and number of the noun it modifies.

- Sometimes an adjective is used as a substantive, i.e., it does not modify a noun but instead is used as a noun itself ("*the meek* shall inherit…"). In this instance, the adjective behaves (not surprisingly) just like a noun (i.e., if it's the subject it should be nominative, if it's the direct object it should be accusative, etc.). E.g. *bonus puellīs rosas dant,* the good (man) gives roses to the girls. Or, to be a bit extreme, *bonus bonīs bona dat,* the good (man) gives good (things - *bona*) to good (men/women/things - *bonīs*). Gender is determined by what noun is implied with the adjective. An adjective indicating a man-type person will use masculine endings; one indicating a woman-type person will use feminine endings; one indicating "things" will use neuter endings.