

The Greek Declensions: A Brief Guide by Sean Gabb

English is mostly an “uninflected language” – that is, the relationship between words in a sentence is shown by their position and by the use of prepositions. Nouns only change by adding “s” or “es” or “en” to show plural forms. Verbs mostly change only in the third person singular – eg, “I see,” “you see,” “he **sees**.” In Greek – an “inflected language” – relationship is shown mostly by changes to the *ends* of words. Here is a very brief guide to Greek nouns.

The Nominative

The Ancient Greek nominative, like the Proto-Indo-European nominative, is used for the subject and for things describing the subject (predicate nouns or adjectives):

- Σωκράτης γὰρ σοφὸς ἦν καὶ δίκαιος
- For **Socrates** was **wise** and **just**

The Vocative

The vocative is used when somebody is directly speaking to that object/person:

The vocative is used for addressing people or things. It is frequently the same as the nominative in the singular and always the same in the plural.

- ἀληθῆ λέγεις, ὦ Σώκρατες
- What you say is true, **Socrates**

The Accusative

The accusative is used for the object of a verb, and also after prepositions. After prepositions it is often used for the destination of motion:

- πέμπουσιν ἐς Κρήτην ἀγγέλους
- They send **messengers** to **Crete**

The Genitive

The Ancient Greek genitive can often be translated with the preposition “of” or the English possessive case:

- ἡ τοῦ Καίσαρος γυνή
- The wife **of Caesar**

It is also used after prepositions, especially those which mean “from”:

On the next page, I give the main forms of the three declensions of nouns. I ignore the dual cases, as they are not used very often, and are never used below A2 Level.

Note: Many endings are the same for different cases. The reason for this is that Classical Greek grammar is a snapshot of a language in the process of becoming less inflected – some point between the hyper-inflections of its parent Aryan language and its somewhat less inflected Modern Greek.

- ἀπῆλθεν ἐκ τῆς ἀγορᾶς
- He went away from **the market-place**

The Dative

The Ancient Greek dative corresponds to the Proto-Indo-European dative, instrumental, or locative. When it corresponds to the dative, it expresses the person or thing that is indirectly affected by an action, and can often be translated with the prepositions “to” or “for”:

- λέγει τὴν μαντείαν τῷ Σωκράτει
- He tells the oracle **to Socrates**

When the dative corresponds to the Proto-Indo-European instrumental, it expresses the thing with which something is done, and can often be translated by the preposition “with”:

- ἔβαλλέ με λίθοις
- He was hitting me **with stones**

When the dative corresponds to the Proto-Indo-European locative case (this is often the case when it is used with prepositions), it expresses location (sometimes figuratively) or time, and can often be translated by “in,” “at,” or “on”:

- τρίτῳ ἔτει ὠμολόγησαν Ἀθηναίοις
- **In the third year** they came to an agreement with the Athenians”

The dative is also frequently used after prepositions, such as ἐν “in”:

- ἐν τῇ μάχῃ ἀπέθανεν
- He died **in the battle**”

The Articles – agree with the nouns to which they are attached in **gender** (*masculine, feminine or neuter*), **number** (singular or plural) and **case**.

Learning these will help you recognise nouns of the first and second declensions, and many adjectives.

Case	Singular			Plural		
	M	F	N	M	F	N
Nominative	ὁ	ἡ	τό	οἱ	αἱ	τά
Vocative	ὦ	ὦ	ὦ	ὦ	ὦ	ὦ
Accusative	τόν	τήν	τό	τούς	τάς	τά
Genitive	τοῦ	τῆς	τοῦ	τῶν	τῶν	τῶν
Dative	τῷ	τῇ	τῷ	τοῖς	ταῖς	τοῖς

Feminine nouns of the **First Declension** – three kinds: τιμή (honour), χώρα (country), Μοῦσα (Muse). The Singular cases differ, but the plurals are identical, given a few variations of accent.

Case	Sing	Sing	Sing	All Plural
N	τιμή	χώρα	Μοῦσα	-αι eg χώραι
V	τιμή	χώρα	Μοῦσα	-αι eg χώραι
A	τιμήν	χώραν	Μοῦσαν	-ας eg χώρας
G	τιμῆς	χώρας	Μούσης.	-ων eg χωρῶν
D	τιμῇ	χώρᾳ	Μούσῃ	-αις eg χώραις

Masculine nouns of the **First Declension** – two kinds: νιανίας (youth), Κριτής (judge) The Singular cases differ, but the plurals are identical, given a few variations of accent. **Notice** how the endings do not always indicate gender.

Case	Sing	Plural	Sing	Plural
N	νιανίας	νιανίαι	Κριτής	Κριταί
V	νιανία	νιανίαι	Κριτά	Κριταί
A	νιανίαν	νιανίας	Κριτήν	Κριτάς
G	νιανίου	νιανίων	Κριτοῦ	Κριτῶν
D	νιανίᾳ	νιανίαις	Κριτῇ	Κριταῖς

Masculine and feminine noun endings of the **Second Declension** are *almost* identical with the masculine articles. Neuter noun endings are almost identical with the neuter articles. ὁ λόγος (word, m), ἡ νῆσος (island, f), τό ζυγόν (yoke, n)

Case	Sing	Plural	Sing	Plural	Sing	Plural
N	ὁ λόγος	λόγοι	ἡ νῆσος	νῆσοι	τό ζυγόν	ζυγά
V	λόγε	λόγοι	νῆσοε	νῆσοι	ζυγόν	ζυγά
A	λόγον	λόγους	νῆσον	νῆσους	ζυγόν	ζυγά
G	λόγους	λόγων	νῆσου	νῆσων	ζυγόθ	ζυγῶν
D	λόγῳ	λόγοις	νῆσῳ	νῆσοις	Ζυγῷ	ζυγοῖς

Notice how gender is shown by giving the relevant article before the nominative singular

The **Third Declension** is very large. It includes nouns of all three genders, and these are often irregular. However, you get through this by considering that the nominative singulars are diverse, but the genitive singulars end in -ος.

Case	Sing	Plural	Sing	Plural
N	ὁ φύλαξ	φύλακες	τό σῶμα	σώματα
V	φύλαξ	φύλακες	σῶμα	σώματα
A	φύλακα	φύλακας	σῶμα	σώματα
G	φύλακος	φυλάκων	σώματος	σαμάτων
D	φύλακι	φύλαξι(ν)	σώματι	σώμασι(ν)

Most adjectives (not all) are declined in masculine and neutral like nouns of the second declension, and in the feminine like feminine nouns of the second declension.

As with articles, adjectives agree with the nouns to which they are attached in **gender** (*masculine, feminine or neuter*), **number** (singular or plural) and **case**.

	σοφός, wise			φίλιος, friendly			
	Sing	M	F	N	M	F	N
N	σοφός	σοφή	σοφόν	φίλιος	φιλία	φίλιον	
V	σοφε	σοφή	σοφόν	φιλε	φιλία	φίλιον	
A	σοφόν	σοφήν	σοφόν	φίλιον	φιλίαν	φίλιον	
G	σοφοῦ	σοφῆς	σοφοῦ	φιλίου	φιλίας	φιλίου	
D	σοφῷ	σοφῇ	φιλίῳ	φιλίῳ	φιλία	φιλίῳ	
Plural							
N	σοφοί	σοφαί	σοφά	φίλιοι	φιλίαι	φίλια	
V	σοφοί	σοφαί	σοφά	φίλιοι	φιλίαι	φίλια	
A	σοφοῦς	σοφάς	σοφά	φίλιους	φιλίας	φίλια	
G	σοφῶν	σοφῶν	σοφῶν	φιλίων	φιλίων	φιλίων	
D	σοφοῖς	σοφαῖς	σοφοῖς	φιλίοις	φιλίαις	φιλίοις	