



Animalia Latina (Nouns and Adjectives)

Latin nouns are divided into five groups, called declensions; you should try to learn at least one noun for each of the five groups off by heart, then, any time you meet a noun, in your head link it back to one of the five groups. Your ‘base’ noun – the one you learnt off – will then tell you how your new noun works.

Below are the five groups: focus on the main noun in each (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), and then aim to learn a few extra words, and to be aware of small variations within each group (2a, etc.) . If you need to, revise the different cases and the jobs they do.

Before we start, a few more things. You’ll see the nouns given in the nominative singular form and the genitive singular form, as in a dictionary. This genitive form gives you the stem, the root of the word, onto which you’ll attach the different endings. You’ll also see an m, f, or n to tell you that the noun is masculine, feminine, or neuter. Remember too that Latin has no words for ‘the’ or ‘a’, so you’re free to decide to put these words in or leave them out.

A Latin word with two syllables is always stressed on the first (Róma): if the word has more than two syllables, an accent mark will tell you where to stress, as in this (English) example: habitátion.

Now you’re ready to go with nouns.

Group 1

Nouns in the first declension normally end in -a. They are generally feminine, with some important exceptions (like *agrícola*, below).

merula, merulae f. ('blackbird' - with the accent on the first syllable: *mérula*)

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	Some words like <i>merula</i> :
Nom.	<i>mérul-a</i>	<i>mérul-ae</i>	
Gen.	<i>mérul-ae</i>	<i>merul-árum</i>	<i>rana, ranae f.</i> frog
Dat.	<i>mérul-ae</i>	<i>mérul-is</i>	<i>vacca, vaccae f.</i> cow
Acc.	<i>mérul-am</i>	<i>mérul-as</i>	<i>gallína, gallínae f.</i> hen
Voc.	<i>mérul-a</i>	<i>mérul-ae</i>	<i>colúmba, colúmbae f.</i> dove
Abl.	<i>mérul-ā*</i>	<i>mérul-is</i>	<i>agrícola, agricolae m.</i> farmer

*the bar above this 'a' tells you it is long, as opposed to the short 'a' in the nominative singular. This will become relevant only if and when you read some classical Latin poetry.

Group 2

Nouns in the second declension are often masculine, ending in -us or (occasionally -r, as in 2a); there is a small group that are neuter and end in -um (2b).

nidus, nidi m. ('nest')

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	Some words like <i>nidus</i> :
Nom.	<i>nid-us</i>	<i>nid-i</i>	
Gen.	<i>nid-i</i>	<i>nid-órum</i>	<i>cabállus, cabállí m.</i> horse
Dat.	<i>nid-o</i>	<i>nid-is</i>	<i>agnus, agnus m.</i> lamb
Acc.	<i>nid-um</i>	<i>nid-os</i>	<i>cervus, cervi m.</i> stag
Voc.	<i>nid-e</i>	<i>nid-i</i>	<i>gallus, galli m.</i> cockerel
Abl.	<i>nid-o</i>	<i>nid-is</i>	<i>porcus, porci m.</i> pig

2a ager, agri ('field' - these words are v. similar to *nidus*, above, but the nom. ends in *r*, not *us*)

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	Some words like <i>ager</i> :
Nom.	<i>ager</i>	<i>agr-i</i>	
Gen.	<i>agr-i</i>	<i>agr-órum</i>	<i>puer, púeri m.</i> boy
Dat.	<i>agr-o</i>	<i>agr-is</i>	
Acc.	<i>agr-um</i>	<i>agr-os</i>	
Voc.	<i>ager</i>	<i>agr-i</i>	
Abl.	<i>agr-o</i>	<i>agr-is</i>	

2b ovum, ovi n. ('egg')

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
Nom.	ov-um	ov-a
Gen.	ov-i	ov-órum
Dat.	ov-o	ov-is
Acc.	ov-um	ov-a
Voc.	ov-e	ov-a
Abl.	ov-o	ov-is

Some words like ovum:

stagnum, stagni n. pond

solum, soli n. ground

Now try some sentences:

merula ova in nido ponit.

The blackbird lays eggs in a nest (pónere 'to put')

ranae in stagno cantant.

Frogs are singing in the pond (cantáre 'to sing')

colúmba nidum facit.

A dove makes its nest (fácere 'to do' 'to make')

cabállus per viam ámbulat.

The horse walks along the road (ámbulo 'to walk')

Group 3

The third declension is the biggest group of nouns and, unlike groups 1 and 2, there is no one nominative ending or gender that is prevalent; the good news is that groups 1, 2, 3 account for the vast majority of Latin nouns, so you're making tracks. This group is split into two subgroups – 3 and 3a – for each of which you'll learn a masculine or feminine noun and a neuter noun. The first of these groups are called 'consonant stems' and the second 'i stems'. The differences between the two are so minimal – in many cases only one letter in the genitive plural – that you should focus on learning *leo* and *corpus*, then think of *mus* and *áñimal* as very slight variations.

leo, leónis m. ('lion')

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	
Nom.	leo	león-es	Some words like leo:
Gen.	león-is	león-um	áries, ariétis m. ram
Dat.	león-i	león-ibus	cornix, córnícis f. raven
Acc.	león-em	león-es	canis, canis m. dog
Voc.	leo	león-es	hirúndo, hirúndinis f. swallow
Abl.	león-e	leó-ibus	vespertílio, vespertiliónis m. bat

corpus, corpóris n. ('body')

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	
Nom.	corpus	córp-or-a	Some words like corpus:
Gen.	córp-or-is	córp-or-um	onus, óneris n. burden
Dat.	córp-or-i	córp-or-ibus	opus, óperis n. work
Acc.	corpus	córp-or-es	nomen, nominis n. name
Voc.	corpus	córp-or-es	mel, mellis n. honey
Abl.	córp-or-e	córp-or-ibus	

3a mus, muris f. ('mouse' – with differences to 3 in bold)

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	
Nom.	mus	mur-es	Some words like mus:
Gen.	mur-is	mur- ium	vulpes, vulpis m. fox
Dat.	mur-i	múr-ibus	apis, apis f. bee
Acc.	mur-em	mur-es**	piscis, piscis m. fish
Voc.	mus	mur-es	feles, felis f. cat
Abl.	mur-e*	múr-ibus	

*sometimes -i

** sometimes -is

ánimal, **animá**lis n. ('animal' – with differences to 3 in bold)

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	Some words like animal:
Nom.	á n imal	animá l-ia	
Gen.	animá l-is	animá l-ium	mare, maris n. sea
Dat.	animá l-i	animá l-ibus	
Acc.	á n imal	animá l-ia	
Voc.	á n imal	animá l-ia	
Abl.	animá l-i	animá l-ibus	

Now try some sentences:

apes agrícolae mel amant.

The farmer's bees love honey ('amáre' to love)

vespertiliónes nocte volant.

Bats fly at night ('vespertílio' bat; 'voláre' to fly)

pisces in mari vivunt.

Fish live in the sea ('vívere' to live)

vulpes ova ex nido capit.

A fox takes eggs from the nest ('cápere' to take)

Group 4

The fourth declension is small, with maybe ten words that appear frequently in ‘classical’ Latin texts. They are normally masculine. The important thing is not to confuse this group with group 2 (they share the -us ending), and to remember that a -us ending in this group is shared between many cases. It can be either short or long, and a macron (a bar above the letter) will tell you if it’s long. Lastly, words like cornu (4a) are rare, and can be left aside depending on your goals.

balátus, balátus m. (‘bleating’)

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	
Nom.	balát-us	balat-ūs	Some words like balatus:
Gen.	balát-us	balátuum	fructus, fructūs m. fruit
Dat.	balát-ui	balát-ibus	manus, manūs f. hand
Acc.	balát-um	balát-ūs	spíritus, spíritūs m. spirit
Voc.	balát-us	balát-us	gradus, gradūs m. step
Abl.	balát-u	balát-ibus	vultus, vultūs m. face

4a cornu, cornus (‘horn’)

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	
Nom.	corn-u	córn-ua	Some words like cornu:
Gen.	corn-ūs	córn-uum	genu, genūs m. knee
Dat.	corn-u	córn-ibus	
Acc.	corn-u	córn-ua	
Voc.	corn-u	córn-ua	
Abl.	corn-u	córn-ibus	

Group 5

The smallest declension, but with some common words. They tend to be feminine.

dies, diei m. (‘day’)

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	
Nom.	di-es	di-es	Some words like dies
Gen.	di-éi	di-érum	spes, spei f. hope
Dat.	di-éi	di-ébus	res, rei f. a thing, a matter
Acc.	di-em	di-es	fides, fidéi f. trust
Voc.	di-es	di-es	fácies, faciéi f. face
Abl.	di-e	di-ébus	spécies, speciéi f. sight

Now try some sentences:

agrícola balátum agnórum audit.	The farmer hears the lambs' bleating ('audíre' to hear).
cervi cum córnibus pugnant.	Stags fight with their horns ('pugnáre' to fight).
gallus diem salútat.	The cockerel greets the day ('salutáre' to greet).
córnua capris ex árbore fructus quatit.	The goat's horns shake fruits from the tree ('quíatere' to shake).

Bonus: examples from real Latin

tectáque, non silvas célebrant lucémque perósae
nocte volunt seróque tenent a véspere nomen. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

It's roofs they like, not woods: weary of the day they fly by night, and take their name from the late evening (the Latin for evening is 'vesper', a bat is a 'vespertilio').

et véterem in limo ranae cecinére queréllam Virgil, *Georgics*
And in the mud the frogs sang out their old complaint.

tamquam cabállus in clivo Petronius, *Satyricon*
Like a horse on a hill ...

tam fácale quam pirum vulpes comest Plautus, *The Haunted House*
As easily as a fox eats a pear ...

tuti sub mátribus agni | balátum exércent Virgil, *Aeneid*
Safe with their mothers, the lambs practice their bleating

Adjectives

Adjectives in Latin come in two main groups: as with nouns, you should aim to learn the base forms as fully as possible, while being aware of some slight variations.

Group 1

This group of adjectives has three sets of endings per word, for masculine, feminine, and neuter, respectively. The good news is that you know these forms already, because they follow exactly the forms of *nidus*, *merula*, and *ovum*. Remember that adjectives will always agree with the noun they go with, and that adjectives tend to follow rather than precede their noun (although this is not a rule): a *nidus cálidus* 'a warm nest', but a *mérula parva* 'a little blackbird' and an *ovum durum* 'a hard egg'.

1. parvus, parva, parvum ('small')

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
Nom.	parvus	parvi	parva	parvae	parvum	parva
Gen.	parvi	parvórum	parvae	parvárum	parvi	parvórum
Dat.	parvo	parvis	parvae	parvis	parvo	parvis
Acc.	parvo	parvos	parvam	parvas	parvum	parva
Voc.	parve	parvi	parva	parvae	parvum	parva
Abl.	parvo	parvis	parva	parvis	parvo	parvis

1a. liber, líbera, líberum ('free'); pulcher, pulchra, pulcrum ('beautiful')

These words follow the noun *ager*: in the masculine they differ from *nidus* only in the -r ending.

Some words like *parvus-a-um*:

magnus, magna, magnum, 'big'

cálidus, cálida, cálidum, 'warm'

frígídis, frígida, frígídum, 'cold'

durus, dura, durum, 'hard'

clarus, clara, clarum, 'bright'

Group 2

The second group of adjectives follow the noun *canis* 'dog' closely, with two exceptions: look out for the ablative singular in -i, not -e, and the genitive plural in -ium, not -um. These adjectives have the same endings for masculine and feminine, and a second set for neuter (which follow the noun *mare*, 'sea').

dulcis, dulcis, dulce ('sweet')

	Masculine and Feminine		Neuter	
	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
Nom.	dulc-is	dulc-es	dulc-e	dúlc-ia
Gen.	dulc-is	dúlc- ium	dulc-is	dúlc-ium
Dat.	dulc-i	dúlc-ibus	dulc-i	dúlc-ibus
Acc.	dulc-em	dulc-es	dulc-e	dúlc-ia
Voc.	dulc-is	dulc-es	dulc-e	dúlc-ia
Abl.	dulc- i	dúlc-ibus	dulc-i	dúlc-ibus

2a celer, céleris, célere ('swift')

These adjectives are formed identically to *dulcis*, with one exception: there is an extra form for feminine nominative singular, *celeris*. So 'a swift lion' is a *leo celer*, but 'a swift lioness' is a *leána céleris*.

2b ingens, ingens, ingens ('huge')

These adjectives are the same for m, f, and n in the nominative singular but, like *dulcis*, they actually have two sets of endings, one for masculine and feminine, another for neuter. Present participles in Latin have endings that follow *ingens*, so this one is worth noting.

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
Nom.	ingens	ingént-es	ingens	ingént-ia
Gen.	ingéntis	ingént- ium	ingént-is	ingént-ium
Dat.	ingént-i	ingént-ibus	ingént-i	ingént-ibus
Acc.	ingént-em	ingént-es	ingens	ingént-ia
Voc.	ingens	ingént-es	ingens	ingént-ia
Abl.	ingént- i	ingént-ibus	ingént-i	ingént-ibus

Some words like *dulcis*:

mollis, mollis, molle, 'soft'

fortis, fortis, forte, 'strong'

fácilis, fácilis, fácilis, 'easy'

diffícilis, diffícilis, diffícile, 'difficult'

omnis, omnis, omne, 'each', 'every'

Now try some sentences:

símiae omnes fructus dulces amant.

All monkeys love sweet fruits.

mérula nidum cálidum et mollem facit.

The blackbird makes a soft and warm nest.

leáena céleris trans campum currit.

The swift lioness runs across the plain.

elephántus ingens murem parvum timet.

A huge elephant is afraid of a little mouse.

via per silvam obscúram diffícilis est.

The path through the dark wood is difficult.

Bonus: examples from real Latin

heia! hoc est melle dulci dulcius ...

Plautus, *Truculentus*

Ah! This is sweeter than sweet honey ...

mea Ampelisca, ut dulcis es ...

Plautus, *The Rope*

My Ampelisca, how sweet you are ...

lucrum ingens facio ...

Plautus, *The Merchant*

I'm making a huge profit ...

sunt nobis mitia poma, | castanae molles

Virgil, *Eclogues*

We have ripe apples and soft chestnuts ...

... volucrique simillima somno ...

Virgil, *Aeneid*

[A ghost that is] most alike to winged sleep

And finally ...

You may have noticed that learning nouns and animals in Latin gives you the names of many of the star signs. Here are the Latin words behind all twelve (can you tell which declensions they're in?):

áries, ariétis m. 'ram'

libra, librae f. 'scales'

taurus, tauri m. 'bull'

scórpio, scorpiónis m. 'scorpion'

gémini, geminórum m. pl. 'twins'

sagittárius, sagittárii m. 'arrow-bearer' > ságitta, 'arrow'

cancer, cancri m. 'crab'

capricórnus, capricórni m. 'horned goat' > caper, 'goat'

leo, leónis m. 'lion'

aquíarius, aquíarii m. 'water-bearer' > aqua, 'water'

virgo, vírginis f. 'young girl'

piscis, piscis m. 'fish'