Chapter 7

RULE 1: Third declension nouns have a consonant at the end of the base.

RULE 2: The base of a third-declension noun is determined by dropping *-is* from the genitive singular. Nominative singulars are irregular for the most part.

I. Grammar

A. The Third Declension.

If there was a honeymoon, it's over. After a relatively easy beginning—well, a manageable amount of material, at least—and usually a considerable number of good performances on the first test, third declension will bring high hopes and good intentions crashing to the ground. To students, the two declensions already introduced seemed luxurious; three will seem excessive. So, given your imminent fall from grace in their eyes, you might as well go ahead and tell them that they will meet no fewer than five declensions in all.

It may also help if you explain that the five declensions are grouped according to base-ending: first declension represent bases ending in *-a*, second in *-o*, third in consonants, fourth in *-u* and fifth in *-e*. Those inherited bases which ended in *-i* are represented in Latin as *i*-stems housed inside third declension because of their superficial similarity to consonant-base forms. A careful study of linguistics shows that the same case endings were, in fact, used in each declension but the changes mandated by the phonetic requirements of the noun bases as they collided with the case-endings resulted in very different-looking endings. For instance, the Indo-European accusative singular ending *-m* manifested in Latin as *-am*, *-om* (later, *-um*) and *-em*, depending on what sort of final vowel in the noun base it encountered, in other words, what declension it belonged to.

If there is a catch-all declension in Latin, it's the third declension which includes a motley variety of consonant bases, explaining its many superficial irregularities. The nouns of third declension share little more than the original Indo-European endings which alter dramatically as they encounter different consonants at the ends of bases. Truth be told, each of these should be its own declension, but would we improve or facilitate learning by creating ten or more new declensions? Probably not.

Those different consonants ending noun bases lie at the heart of the problems students most often have with third declension. Different consonants react in different ways when juxtaposed to the case endings. For instance, when a base ending in a dental stop (*-d/t-*) is followed by *-s* (the original Indo-European nominative singular ending), the dental drops, e.g. **virtut-s* becomes *virtu-s*, **ped-s* becomes *pe-s*. But, when the base ends with a guttural stop (*-g/c-*), the guttural does not drop but creates a consonant cluster with the nominative singular *-s* ending, e.g. **reg-s* becomes *rex* (*x* = guttural plus *s*), **pac-s* becomes *pax*. Students will find this maddening. You should point out to them that Latin case endings must be able to accomodate noun bases ending in any vowel or consonant, but don't go too much further with the linguistics, except with those students whom you consider capable of understanding such subtleties. For the most part, it's best to focus on the simple mechanics of generating proper forms in third declension.

Put the basic third-declension endings on the board, as listed by Wheelock on p. 31 (far right column). Hold off discussing the complicated nominative singular forms for a moment. Stress to students that the cases are used to cover the same sentence functions as they have learned before: nominatives are subjects and predicates, genitive show possession or partition, etc. To ease things, you might note that third declension endings resemble English case endings—what few remain!—in the genitive singular: Latin *laboris* vs. English *labor's*, also in the accusative singular (*regem* vs. *him*) and nominative/accusative plural (*paces* vs. *boxes*).

It's very important that students not confuse endings in different declensional systems, e.g.:

	THIRD DECLENSION	FIRST/SECOND DECLENSION
-us	neuter nominative/accusative singular	masculine nominative singular
-i	dative singular	genitive singular and nominative plural (masculine)
-e	ablative singular	vocative singular
-um	genitive plural	nominative singular neuter and accusative singular neuter/masculine
-is*	genitive singular (short i)	dative/ablative plural (long i)
*Technically, the two *-is* endings should not be able to be confused, because the third declension ending has a short *-i-*, whereas the first and second endings have a long *-i-*. Nevertheless, the similarity of the forms can cause confusion and therefore you should point it out to students.		

B. The Nominative Singular in Third Declension

The nominative singular forms in third declension will cause more problems than any other forms. In the nominative singular, consonants collide with *-s*, the only ending which begins with a consonant, and collapse in seemingly arbitrary ways. The following diagram shows how various common consonant bases change when followed by *-s*. Students may find it helpful to sift a few rules from the apparent chaos.

Nominative Singulars in Third Declension

End of Base	+	-s	=	Nom. Sing. Ending	Example
-g/c-	+	*-s*	=	*-x*	*rex, lex, vox, pax, dux, lux*
-(n)t/d-	+	*-s*	=	*-(n)s,*	*virtus, salus, civitas, potens, laus* [This includes the large group of nouns ending: *-tû(t)s* and *-tâ(t)s*.]
-on-/-in- (m/f)	+	*-s*	=	*-o*	*ratio, Cicero, homo, virgo, multitudo* [This includes the large group of nouns ending, *-tûdo-* and *-tio-*.]
-in- (neut)	+	*-s*	=	*-en*	*nomen, certamen, flamen*
-r-	+	*-s*	=	*-er*	*pater, mater, frater*

End of Base	+	-s	=	Nom. Sing. Ending	Example
-ar-	+	*-s*	=	*-ar*	*Caesar, exemplar*
-or- (m/f)	+	*-s*	=	*-or*	*labor, amor, soror* (exception: monosyllables which retain final *-s*, e.g. *mos, flos, ros*) [This includes the large group of nouns ending: *-or* and *-tor*.]
-or/er- (neut)	+	*-s*	=	*-us*	*tempus, corpus, genus, opus, scelus*
-it-	+	*-s*	=	*-es/ut*	*miles, caput*
-ul/ol-	+	*-s*	=	*-ul/ol*	*sol, consul*

You may not want to introduce all these contractions in one lesson, especially those not involved in vocabulary to be memorized in this chapter (i.e. *-r-*, *-ar- -it-* and *-ul/ol-* above). If you do not introduce these contractions now, make a note to yourself to mention them when vocabulary belonging to the category of contractions is introduced later, e.g. *Caesar* in Chapter 12, *pater* in Chapter 15, *sol* in Chapter 27 and *miles* in Chapter 29.

C. The History of Third Declension.

The Indo-European endings for the consonant declension were:

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
NOMINATIVE	*-s* (neuter = zero)	*-es*
GENITIVE	*-es, -os, -s*	*-ôm*
DATIVE	*-ei, -ai*	*-bhos, -mos*
ACCUSATIVE	*-m* (neuter = zero)	*-ns*
ABLATIVE	*-es, -os, -s*	*-bhos, -mos*
VOCATIVE	zero	*-es*
INSTRUMENTAL	*-bhi, -mi*	*-bhis, -mis*
LOCATIVE	*-i* or zero	*-su*

Nominative. For contraction in the nominative singular, see above. The vowel in the plural was lengthened by analogy to *-ês* in *e*-stems (fifth declension).

Genitive. Old Latin attests the forms *Apolones*, *Veneres*, but in the third century BCE *-e-* before *-s* or *-t* became *-i-*. The rival form *-os* (later, *-us*), cf. Greek gen. sing. *phulakos*, persisted until the classical period in provincial texts, e.g.

nominus, *regus*, *Diovos*. In accordance with the general tendency in Latin to shorten long vowels in final, unaccented syllables, the genitive plural *-ôm* became *-om*, then *-um*.

Dative. In the singular, the only change is the contraction of the diphthong (*-ei/ai* > *-i*). In the plural, *-bhos* was originally added directly to the base, e.g. **regbus*, **pedbus* (a type attested in Sanskrit), but on the analogy of *i*-stem forms, an *-i-* was later included.

Accusative. Liquids (*l* and *r*) and nasals (*m* and *n*) tend to carry vowel sounds with them. The Indo-European accusative singular ending was a combination of *a* and *m*. In Latin, the third-declension ending *-m* stuck (with *e* replacing *a*), whereas in Greek the *a* lost its nasal companion and became the sole ending, e.g. *patera*, *phulaka*. The *-n-* in the Latin plural disappeared following a general pattern of loss of *n* before *s*, cf. *co(n)sul*, *totie(n)s*.

Ablative. The *-e* probably derives from the Indo-European locative ending, *-i* (Latin final *-i* regularly becomes *-e*, e.g. **anti* > *ante*, **mari* > *mare*.) In early Latin the ablative ending *-id* is also found, borrowing the distinctive *-d* ablative marker from second declension attested in older Latin . For the plural, see the dative plural, above.

Neuters. The nominative/accusative singular forms are the bare base without ending. The nominative/accusative plural ending is borrowed from second declension.

D. The Gender of Third-Declension Nouns

One of the greater challenges in learning third declension is memorizing the gender of nouns, which is much less readily apparent in the majority of third-declension forms than in first and second. Wheelock includes some important information in footnote 2 on page 32, well-worth calling to the students' attention. The categories he lists will be very helpful to some students in memorizing the genders of many third-declension nouns and can reduce their stress by supplying patterns for memorization. Nevertheless, the gender of some words just has to be memorized. There are mnemonic devices which may help, such as "Mos, Moris, Masculine" (i.e. three M's), or phrases which students may already know, such as "Pax Romana" (see Wheelock, page 32, note 3). One other thing that may facilitate this memorization process is to have students form lists of third-declension nouns grouped by gender so that the mere visual association of feminine, masculine or neuter nouns helps them recall a noun's gender.

E. Homework

I strongly advise you to drill students on third-declension endings. Securing a solid grasp of this declension now is essential to reading Latin correctly and easily later on. Therefore, after introducing third declension, I give students a special homework assignment, to decline a series of third-declension nouns with first/second-declension adjectives attached, such as *bonus mos*, *libera civitas* and *multum tempus*. In this way I reinforce both new and old material, calling particular attention to the difference between first/second- and third-declension forms. That students in the past have groused loudly about the difficulty of this simple assignment has convinced me of its importance.

F. Handout

Click here for a worksheet on third-declension nouns.

II. Vocabulary

[Be sure to stress the declension to which each word belongs. A good way to test whether students are following you is to ask them for the correct form of the word in another case, e.g. "What would *pax* be in the genitive plural?" Also, call each word's gender to the students' attention.]

- ***homo:*** Means "human being," with neither gender implied (cf. *humanity*), cf. *vir*, "a male."
- ***littera:*** Means a "letter" of the alphabet—in other words, a unit of alphabet soup—not a mailed "letter." A mailed letter in Latin is an *epistula* (a word borrowed from Greek) or *litterae* (a collection of alphabetic letters, as in a bowl of alphabet soup). "Letters," in the sense "literature," is still preserved in English phrases like "Arts and Letters"

and "a man of letters." That the plural of this word betokens "(a mailed) letter" or "literature" hints at the general illiteracy of the Roman populace many of whom were literally "unlettered." Thus, when confronted with things like correspondence or other written works, they could surely tell little more than that the writing on them was "letters," granted a fair description but hardly specific. Indeed, Euripides in his *Theseus* illustrates the situation beautifully: an illiterate man describes on stage—and perhaps even "acts out"—letters of the (Greek) alphabet in order to identify a crucial character who is absent but has written down his name. Thus, Greek tragedy and Roman "letters" hint at the breadth of illiteracy in the ancient world.

- ***mos:*** A *mos* is fundamentally "a habit," something a person does regularly, like brush his teeth, comb his hair or walk his dog. To the Romans, the plural of this word, literally "(the sum of) one's habits," adds up to and illustrates one's "character," which suggests that the Romans measured the whole of a man by the summation of the the little things he did, or in modern lingo, his "little ways." It is certainly true that, if you regularly kick your dog, yell at your spouse and hide money in jars under the house, it says something about your general character.
- ***pax:*** The English word "peace" derives from Latin *pax* but only after it passed through French, which explains the dramatic change in spelling and pronunciation. [The word originally comes from the same stem as the verb *pango*, "fix (a stake in the ground)." Presumably, the connection comes from the Roman *mos* of settling boundary disputes by fixing a stake in the ground to mark an equitable division of land.]
- ***virtus:*** Literally, "the quality of being (*-tus*) a man (*vir-*)," i.e. "manliness"; cf. Greek *arete*.
- ***post:*** This preposition takes an **accusative** object.
- ***audeo:*** This verb takes a complementary infinitive, "dare to . . ." Stress the difference between the stem *audac-*, seen in English *audacious*, and *audi-*, seen in *audience* and *auditorium*.
- ***amor:*** The abstract noun derived from *amo*. Backwards, it's *Roma*, which is why Hadrian built back-to-back temples of *Amor* and *Roma* in Rome. That would not have worked so well in Greece, where *eros* backwards is "sore."
- ***sub:*** This preposition takes both an **accusative** and an **ablative** object. With an ablative object, it shows "position at" or "motion from" ("The snake was *under* the rock but now it's coming out *from under* the rock."). With an accusative object, it shows "motion toward" ("And now the snake is crawling back *under* the rock!").

III. Sentences

Practice and Review

1. As if the *mores Romanorum* always were? Catiline, Caligula, Nero, Elagabalus, . . .?
2. Remind students that no *-ne* is required for a question which begins with a question word, such as *ubi*.

1. Does Wheelock mean "peace of mind" (*otium*) or "peace, as in the absence of war" (*pax*)? Do either follow naturally from good character?

1. Be careful to stress that the genitive ending for "sons" will be different from that for "virtues."