

# An Introduction to 'Endings' for Latin Nouns – Cases

One of the things that can make Latin a challenge for beginners is that it is a highly **inflected** language. This means that the forms or endings of words change depending on how they are used in a sentence. English has some inflections but not many – for example, adding 'ed' to make a verb past tense, or adding 's' to the end of a noun to make it plural.

As well as different endings for singular and plural, Latin also has different endings depending on what the noun is doing in the sentence. These are called 'cases' and we don't really have them in English, so they can be a challenge when you first start learning Latin.

**There are six cases.** If you look up the different forms of a Latin noun, you will often see them written in a table, like this:

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative		
Accusative		
Genitive		
Dative		
Ablative		
Vocative		

**NB:** Depending on the source you use, the cases are not always listed in the same order!

The endings for each case depend on whether the noun is masculine or feminine and which declension (group) it is in. We're just going to look at how one noun changes depending on the case. **Meet Mus the mouse!**

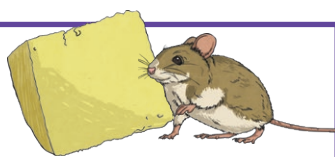


## 1. The Nominative Case

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	mus	mures

This is the case we use for the subject of the sentence – the person or thing that the sentence is about, or the person or thing doing the verb.

**Mus caseum cenat.**



**Mures caseum cenant.**



In this sentence, the mouse is doing the action – eating – so we use the nominative case form. If there is only one mouse, we use 'mus'. For more than one mouse, we use the plural form 'mures'.

## 2. The Accusative Case

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	mus	mures
<b>Accusative</b>	<b>murem</b>	<b>mures</b>

This is the case we use for the object of the sentence – the person or thing that the verb is being done to.

**Puella murem habet.**



**Puella mures habet.**



In this sentence, the girl is holding the mouse, so it is the object of the sentence. This means we use the accusative case form of the noun.

### Have a Go 1:

Using what you have just learnt, can you complete the sentences with the correct Latin form of 'mouse'?



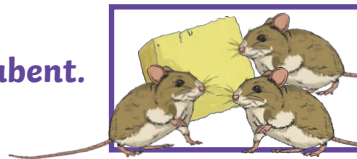
\_\_\_\_\_ caseum habet.



Puer \_\_\_\_\_ habet.



Puer et puella \_\_\_\_\_ habent.



\_\_\_\_\_ caseum cenant.

## 3. The Genitive Case

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	mus	mures
Accusative	murem	mures
<b>Genitive</b>	<b>muris</b>	<b>murum</b>

There are no apostrophes in Latin so we use the genitive case to show belonging or possession (and a few other things but belonging and possession are the simplest and most common).

**Caseum muris magnum est.**



This sentence is describing the mouse's cheese (it helps to think of this as the cheese 'of the mouse') so we use the genitive form of 'mouse'.

**Technical note:** In the sentence above, the cheese is the subject. If we changed the sentence so that the mouse's cheese became the object, we would change the case of 'cheese' but use the same genitive form for 'of the mouse'. This is because the cheese would still belong to the mouse.

## 4. The Dative Case

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	mus	mures
Accusative	murem	mures
Genitive	muris	murum
<b>Dative</b>	<b>muri</b>	<b>muribus</b>

We use the dative case to show that the noun is the indirect object of the sentence (and some other more complicated things too). The easiest way to understand this is with an example in English:

**The boy gives the cheese to the mouse.**

The **subject** is the boy, because he's doing the action.

The **direct object** is the cheese, because it's being given – the action is happening to it.

The **indirect object** is the mouse, because it's receiving the cheese.

Just like we can think of the genitive case as 'of the mouse', we can think of the dative as '**to the mouse**'.

So we can translate our English sentence as:

**Puer muri caseum dat.**



**Technical note:** We are using the accusative form of 'cheese' in this sentence because it's the direct object. However, the nominative and accusative forms of 'cheese' are helpfully the same!

**Have a Go 2:** Use what you've learnt to match up the Latin sentences with their English translations.

Puella caseum muris habet.

Puella muribus caseum dat.

Puella caseum murum habet.

Puella muri caseum dat.

The girl has the mice's cheese.

The girl gives the cheese to the mouse.

The girl gives the cheese to the mice.

The girl has the mouse's cheese.

**Challenge:** Can you underline all the nouns in each sentence and work out what case each one must be in?

## 5. The Ablative Case

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	mus	mures
Accusative	murem	mures
Genitive	muris	murum
Dative	muri	muribus
<b>Ablative</b>	<b>mure</b>	<b>muribus</b>

The ablative case is difficult to pin down. It's generally used alongside (some) prepositions and adverbs to say where, when or how something is happening.

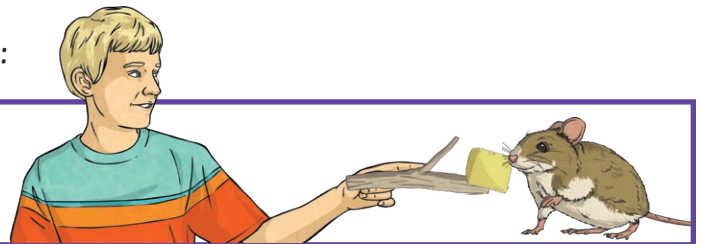
**Caseum sub mure est.**



This sentence is describing where the cheese is – under the mouse – so we use the ablative case.

If we use the noun 'baculum' (stick), we can say:

**Puer muri caseum baculo dat.**



This sentence is describing **how** the boy is giving the mouse the cheese - with a stick - so we use the ablative case for 'stick'. Note how we don't need a word for 'with' like we do in English – the case is doing all the work for us.

## 6. The Vocative Case

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	mus	mures
Accusative	murem	mures
Genitive	muris	murum
Dative	muri	muribus
Ablative	mure	muribus
<b>Vocative</b>	<b>mus</b>	<b>mures</b>

The word 'vocative' comes from the same root as 'vocal' so this case is used for 'calling'. It doesn't really have an equivalent in English except for people's names. You might use it to say, "Mouse! Eat the cheese!"

**"Mus! Caseum cena!"**



**Technical note:** The vocative form is almost always the same as the nominative form, except for some nouns in the second declension.

# An Introduction to 'Endings' for Latin Nouns – Cases **Answers**

## Have a Go 1:

Using what you have just learnt, can you complete the sentences with the correct Latin form of 'mouse'?



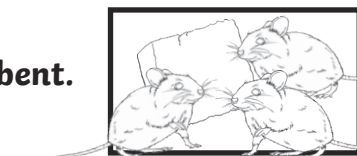
**Mus** caseum habet.



Puer **murem** habet.



Puer et puella **mures** habent.



**Mures** caseum cenant.

## Have a Go 2:

Use what you've learnt to match up the Latin sentences with their English translations.

Puella caseum muris habet.

The girl has the mice's cheese.

Puella muribus caseum dat.

The girl gives the cheese to the mouse.

Puella caseum murum habet.

The girl gives the cheese to the mice.

Puella muri caseum dat.

The girl has the mouse's cheese.

## Challenge:

Can you underline all the nouns in each sentence and work out what case each one must be in?

<u>Puella</u> nominative	<u>caseum</u> accusative	<u>muris</u> genitive	habet.
<u>Puella</u> nominative	<u>caseum</u> accusative	<u>murum</u> genitive (plural)	habet.
<u>Puella</u> nominative	<u>muri</u> dative	<u>caseum</u> accusative	dat.
<u>Puella</u> nominative	<u>muribus</u> dative (plural)	<u>caseum</u> accusative	dat.