

Chapter Ten

Vocative Case

I wouldn't be surprised if you are contemplating mutiny. You may think this forced march has gone on inhumanly long, and your mental blisters may simply hurt too much. Just hang tough a little longer. This is the last case, and the easiest. Then we'll devote one chapter to consolidating your understanding of nouns and adjectives. We're almost there. Reading lies over the next hill.

Vocative case: Concept

The Radical (=root) Sense of the Vocative Case

A vocative ending attached to a noun adds a notion of, "Hey, you." So, for example,

ναῦτα/<vocative plural> means something like "Hey, sailors!"

(Often, of course, we prefer to omit "hey": *Sailors, cast anchor!* works just fine without "hey.")

Vocative case: Principles

Uses of the vocative case

Direct address.

The only use of the vocative case is as direct address—that is, to call to someone. Usually it is a name or a title: *Socrates, Father, Sir, Soldiers*. There is, of course, nothing to prevent you from using more inventive addresses: *You lazy fool; All ye stars in the sky*. Direct address plays no role in the main sentence: It isn't subject, direct object, indirect object, or object of preposition.

Citizens, you must choose wisely.

We need help, *King Oedipus*.

Come, *Bowser!*

ὦ

Often (though not always), the vocative is accompanied by the particle ὦ, which is something like a polite version of *Hey* as in the phrase, *Hey, Friend, I am happy to see you*. Our ancestors used *O* (as in *The queen has arrived, O my king*), but *O* sounds awfully archaic even to my aged ears.

Why adjectives take vocative endings

Vocative **nominal adjectives** (just as any other noun) indicate direct address.

good/<**vocative masculine plural**> = **Hey**, good people.

Attributive and predicative adjectives are put into the vocative only to show that they modify vocative nouns. The case ending has *no effect on the translation* of the adjective.

good/<**vocative masculine plural**> ναῦτα/<**vocative masculine plural**> = **Hey**, good sailors.

Forming vocatives: Principles

Principle #1: Vocative Singulars

- **2nd-declension non-neuters** take the vocative singular ending **ε**.
- For **all other nouns and adjectives** vocative singulars are *identical either to the nominative singular or to the base*.

Principle #2: Vocative Plurals

Vocative plurals are *always identical in form to nominative plurals*.

Context will make obvious whether an ambiguous form is nominative or vocative.

Forming vocatives: Details

Vocative Singulars

1st-declension feminine nouns: Rows 1-3

The vocative is the same as the nominative: ὦ Ἀθήνη (Ἀθήνᾱ/ο) = “**Hey**, Athena”; ὦ Μοῦσα (Μούσᾱ/ο) = “**Hey**, Muse.”

1st-declension masculine nouns: Row 4

The vocative is the unlengthened base: ναῦτα (ναύτᾱ/ο) = “**Hey**, Sailor.”

2nd-declension non-neuter nouns and adjectives: Rows 5-6

The **ο** of the base is lost and the case ending **ε** is added: θεέ (θεός/ε) = “**Hey**, God.”

2nd-declension neuter nouns and adjectives: Row 7

The vocative is identical to the nominative: ὦ πρόσωπον (πρόσωπο/ν) μητρός = “**Hey**, face of my mother”—in case you should ever want to say that.

3rd-declension non-neuter nouns and adjectives

- Usually the vocative is the *same as the nominative*: ὦ κύκλωψ (κύκλωπ/ς) = “**Hey**, Cyclops.”
- In some words the vocative is the *same as the base*: μήτερ (μήτερ/ο) = “**Hey**, Mom.”

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If the vocative takes the form of the base and the base ends in a dental, the final dental will (of course) be lost: παῖ (παῖδ/ο) = “<Hey,> Boy.”

You cannot accurately predict whether a specific 3rd-declension noun will use its nominative singular or its base as its vocative. The Greeks themselves were not always certain which of the two options to use.

3rd-declension neuter nouns and adjectives

The vocative is *identical to the nominative*: ὦ ἄστυ (ἄστυ^ε/ο) = “Hey, city.”

Vocative Plurals

All nouns (and adjectives)

The vocative plurals of all nouns and adjectives are *identical to their nominative plurals*.

Vocative forms of practice nouns

Carefully study the vocative forms of the practice nouns, and review the charts from the previous four cases to refresh your memory.

Greek Before Christmas

Row 1	Ἀθήνα/	κεφαλά/	μάχα/
1 st -Declension Feminine (Long α bases)			
= <i>nom. sing.</i>	Ἀθήνη	κεφαλή	μάχη
= <i>nom. pl.</i>	Ἀθῆναι	κεφαλαί	μάχαι
Row 2	κιθάρα/	θύρα/	ἀδικία/
1 st -Declension Feminine (Long α bases)			
= <i>nom. sing.</i>	κιθάρη	θύρη	ἀδικίη
= <i>nom. pl.</i>	κιθάραι	θύραι	ἀδικίαι
Row 3	ἄμαξα/	τράπεζα/	μούσα/
1 st -Declension Feminine (Short α bases)			
= <i>nom. sing.</i>	ἄμαξα	τράπεζα	μούσα
= <i>nom. pl.</i>	ἄμαξαι	τράπεζαι	μοῦσαι

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Row 4	ναύτα/	στρατιώτα/	νεανία/
1 st -Declension Masculine			
= base	ναύτα	στρατιώτα	νεανία
= nom. pl.	ναῦται	στρατιῶται	νεανίαι
Row 5	θεό/	ἄνθρωπο/	δούλο/
2 nd -Declension Masculine			
-ε [ο/ε]	θεέ	ἄνθρωπε	δοῦλε
= nom. pl.	θεοί	ἄνθρωποι	δούλοι
Row 6	θεό/	ὁδό/	ἔσοδο/
2 nd -Declension Feminine			
-ε [ο/ε]	θεέ	ὁδέ	ἔσοδε
= nom. pl.	θεοί	ὁδοί	ἔσοδοι

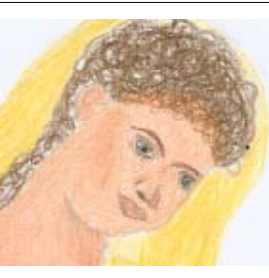
Greek Before Christmas

Row 7	δώρο/	στάδιο/	πρόσωπο/
2 nd -Declension Neuter			
= <i>nom.</i>	δῶρον	στάδιον	πρόσωπον
= <i>nom. pl.</i>	δώρα	στάδια	πρόσωπα
Row 8	ἔρωτ/	παῖδ/	ὄρνιθ/
3 rd -Declension Dentals (-δ/, -τ/, -θ/) Non-neuter			
= <i>nom. or base</i>	ἔρως [ἔρωτ/ς]	παῖ [παῖδ/ο]	ὄρνι [ὄρνιθ/ο]
= <i>nom. pl.</i>	ἔρωτες	παῖδες	ὄρνιθες
Row 9	σώματ/	γράμματ/	ἄγαλματ/
3 rd -Declension Dentals (-ματ/) Neuter			
= <i>nom.</i>	σῶμα	γράμμα	ἄγαλμα
= <i>nom. pl.</i>	σώματα	γράμματα	ἀγάλματα

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Row 10	κύλικ/	σφίγγ/	θριχ/
3 rd -Declension Palatals (-κ/, -γ/, -χ/)			
= <i>nom. sing.</i>	κύλιξ	σφίγξ	θρίξ
= <i>nom. pl.</i>	κύλικες	σφίγγες	τριχές
Row 11	κύκλωπ/	γύπ/	χέρνιβ/
3 rd -Declension Labials (-π/, -β/, -φ/)			
= <i>nom. sing.</i>	κύκλωψ	γύψ	χέρνιψ
= <i>nom. pl.</i>	κύκλωπες	γῦπες	χέρνιβες
Row 12	ῥήτορ/	μήτερ/	πῦρ/
3 rd -Declension -ρ/			
= <i>base</i>	ῥήτορ	μήτερ	πῦρ
= <i>nom. pl.</i>	ῥήτορες	μήτερες	πυρά

Greek Before Christmas

Row 13	Ἀμαζόν/	λιμέν/	ρίν/
3 rd -Declension -ν/			
= nom. or base	Ἀμαζόν	λιμέν	ρίς
= nom. pl.	Ἀμαζόνες	λιμένες	ρίνες
Row 14	γέροντ/	ἐλέφαντ/	πρέποντ/
3 rd -Declension -ντ/			
base [οντ,αντ/ο]	γέρον	ἐλέφαν	πρέπον
= nom. pl.	γέροντες	ἐλέφαντες	πρέποντα
Row 15	ἀκρόπολι/	βάσι/	ὄψι/
3 rd -Declension -ι/			
= base	ἀκρόπολι	βάσι	ὄψι
= nom. pl.	ἀκροπόλιες	βάσιες	ὄψιες

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Row 16	νέκυ/	πέλεκυε/	ἄστυε/
3 rd -Declension -υ/, -υ ^ε /			
= base [υ/ο, -υ ^ε /ο]	νέκυ	πέλεκυ	ἄστυ
= nom. pl.	νέκυες	πελέκεες	ἄστεα
Row 17	βασιλῆς/	νής/	βός/
3 rd -Declension Digamma -ς/			
= base [-η,ος ^v /ο]	βασιλῆϋ	νηϋ	βοϋ
= nom. pl.	βασιλῆες	νῆες	βοές
Row 18	Σώκρατες/	τριήρες/	ξίφος/
3 rd -Declension -ες/			
= base or nom.	Σώκρατες	τριήρες	ξίφος
= nom. pl.	Σωκράτεες	τριήρεες	ξίφεα

What now?

Don't bother to memorize the vocative case endings—except for the 2nd-declension non-neuter vocative singular ending **ε** (e.g., ἄνθρωπε). For the rest, know that vocative plurals and nominative plurals always take the same form and that nominative singulars are usually either identical to nominative singulars or to the base.

Make sure that you understand what vocative nouns *mean*. You'll be encountering them in your readings very soon.