

Chapter Seven

Accusative Case

In this chapter we need to do a couple of things. The first is to make sure you understand a fundamental distinction of syntax: the difference between subjects and direct objects. The second is to introduce you to the form that Greek nouns take when they serve as direct objects.

Predicate nominatives and direct objects

Direct objects are nouns that typically come after the verb in English sentences, but they are not the only nouns that do that. Predicate nominatives do the same. It might be helpful to introduce direct objects by contrasting them with predicate nominatives.

Predicate Nominatives

The verb *to be* works like an equal sign. Any noun or adjective that completes *is*, *are*, or any form of *to be* will necessarily be an attribute of the subject and must also be set in the nominative. Grammarians identify the function of these nominatives by calling them *predicate nominatives* because they communicate something *predicated* of the subject.

Now let's say much the same thing in less technical language. Imagine a photograph of any *is* or *are* statement: "Socrates *is* a philosopher"; "Socrates *is* short and fat." How many persons or objects (nouns) are in that photograph? Only one: *Socrates*. Not two: *Socrates* and *a philosopher*; or *Socrates* and *short and fat*. *Philosopher* and *short and fat* are, as it were, *the same thing as Socrates*. Therefore, they are in the same case as Socrates, just as you would expect them to be in the phrases *short, fat Socrates* and *Socrates the philosopher*.

So, whether you like the grammatical explanation about predication or the photograph imagery, the point is the same: When verbs like "is" or "are" are followed by nouns or adjectives referring to the nominative subjects, those nouns or adjectives are set in the nominative case and, grammatically, they are called *predicate nominatives*.

Further, you should be clear that *to be* is not the only verb that works in this way—like an equal sign. So do verbs like *to seem*, *to appear*, *to become*. You can quickly recognize verbs that function as equal signs—and are, therefore, completed by predicate nominatives—by imagining a photograph of the scene. If the scene contains no one but the subject, any nouns or adjectives beyond those obviously referring to the subject must be referring less obviously to the subject. So,

for example, “Socrates *looks* sick today” or “Socrates *became* a nuisance.” *Sick* and *nuisance* must both be nominatives because the sentences mean something awfully close to “Socrates = sick” and “Socrates = nuisance.” As you can see, you don’t have to memorize the fact that a verb takes predicate nominatives. You can recognize the fact with your own common sense by contemplating the meaning of the sentence.

Direct Objects

Few verbs, though, predicate equalities, while lots of verbs do something quite different: They show the subject acting on another person or object. Consider the statements, “The boy sees the horse” and “Achilles kills Hector.” These statements mean nothing at all like “The boy = the horse” and “Achilles = Hector.” To the contrary, the two nouns in each statement represent entirely different things. If you were to imagine a photograph of any sentence of this sort, the photograph would contain two characters: the person or thing that was doing whatever the verb says (the *subject* of the verb); and the person or thing that the subject is doing it to (the *direct object* of the verb). For example: the boy (*subject*) who is seeing and the horse (*direct object*) that the boy is seeing; Achilles (*subject*) who is killing, and Hector (*direct object*) whom Achilles is killing.

One of the most basic tasks of the **syntax** (the structural rules or patterns that a language follows to communicate ideas) of any language is to distinguish subjects from direct objects. It simply will not do for a language to throw three notions into an inchoate jumble—*Achilles, Hector, kills*—and leave it to the hearer to decide who kills whom.

In English, subjects are distinguished from direct objects by word order: *Achilles kills Hector* means one thing; *Hector kills Achilles* would be quite a different story.

Greek does not distinguish subject from direct object by word order. In Greek the direct object can be the first word in the sentence. The Greek sentence can look for all the world to say *Hector kills Achilles*, and yet the person who has learned Greek will know immediately that it means *Achilles kills Hector*. How? How does Greek identify direct objects if not by word order?

Greek distinguishes subjects from direct objects by giving them different **case endings**. Direct objects are never marked with nominative case ending. Instead, they are marked with what grammarians call accusative case endings. *The subject takes a nominative case ending. The direct object takes an accusative case ending.* It’s as simple as that. Because Greek uses morphology rather than word order to distinguish subjects from direct objects, word order can be used for stylistic purposes such as emphasis and variation.

Accusative case: Concept

In Greek, any noun or adjective **base** can be marked with an **accusative** (singular or plural) **ending**. The accusative marker immediately notifies the listener that this word is *not* the subject of the indicative verb, but is doing something else in the sentence. The **accusative marker** also notifies the listener that this word does not carry an *of* sense. (The **genitive marker** adds the *of* notion.)

The Radical (= root) Sense of the Accusative Case

The radical sense of the accusative case is something like *moving towards* or *looking towards*. The accusative is, therefore, a natural marker for nouns answering prepositions that involve *moving towards*, for the direct object *towards which* the action performed by the subject is directed, and for the god *towards whom* one directs his oath. The notion of *movement towards* (or through) also explains why the accusative felt to the Greeks like the right case ending to mark durative time phrases.

Specific uses of the accusative case

- 1) To identify a noun as a **direct object**.
- 2) To **answer prepositions** (especially those that express motion towards or along something). Learn the following prepositions, which are answered by a noun with an **accusative case ending**.

πρός towards

εἰς into

διὰ because of, on account of

ὑπό (to) under*

ὑπέρ (to) over*

ὑπό and ὑπέρ mean *under* and *over* with a sense of motion: The cat ran from a place not under the table *to somewhere under* the table; the bird flew from the ground *to a place above* the house. When answered by the accusative these prepositions do not mean *sitting under* or *sitting over*: The rug (sitting, not moving) under the table; the tree hanging over the house.

- 3) In **oaths**. The particle νή + an accusative introduces a positive oath. The particle μά + an accusative introduces a negative oath. So, a person might say νή τοὺς θεοὺς φημί (“By the gods I do assert [it].”) or μὰ τοὺς θεοὺς οὐ φημί (“By the gods I deny it.”)

- 4) To indicate **extent of time**. Time nouns can signify either *time at which* (“He slept on Thursday”) or *duration / extent of time* (He slept <all day> Thursday.) An accusative noun indicating time communicates the latter—*duration / extent of time*. (You will learn how to indicate *time at which* in a later chapter.)

- 5) To indicate an **appositive** of a noun in the accusative case. **Appositives** are nouns that merely rename another noun: Pericles, the *leader* of Golden Age Athens. Since *leader* merely renames Pericles (Pericles = leader), *leader* occurs *in the same case as Pericles*. If Pericles is a direct object or is for any other reason an accusative, leader will also be an accusative. *Appositives always take the same case as the noun they are renaming.*

Forming accusatives: Principles

Principle #1: Accusative Singulars

- For **all non-neuter** nouns and adjectives the accusative singular marker is **N**.
- For **all neuter** nouns and adjectives *the accusative singular is identical to the nominative singular* (2nd declension: **v**. 3rd declension: **ø**). So, you already know the accusative singulars of all neuters.

Principle #2: Accusative Plurals

- For **all non-neuter** nouns and adjectives the accusative plural marker is **Nς**.
 - For **all neuter** nouns and adjectives *the accusative plural is identical to the nominative plural* (**α** for all neuter nouns and adjectives). So, you already know the accusative plurals of all neuters.
- Take five minutes and commit these rules to memory.

Forming accusatives: Details

Accusative Singulars

Non-Neuters: add **N**

N—Sonant **N**, as you will recall from 3rd-plural verb endings—is a double sound: α and v. In practice only one of these sounds survives: Sonant **N** always resolved into either an α sound or a v sound in any given Greek word.

N following a vowel is resolved as **v**

1st-Declension Nouns (-α/): Rows 1-4

The ancient **N** was always heard as **v** after the α of the base. The only thing you will have to worry about is whether or not the α lengthens to η. If it is a long α, it does lengthen. If it is a short α, it does not. That is, if lengthening occurs in the nominative singular, it also occurs in the accusative singular: πωλήν [Aθήνᾱ/**N**^v], Row 1; but, ἄμαξαν [ἄμαξᾱ/**N**^v], Row 3.

Non-Neuter 2nd-Declension Nouns (-ο/): Rows 5-6

The ancient **N** was always heard as **v** after the ο of the base. No complications occur: ἄνθρωπον [ἄνθρωπο/**N**^v].

Non-Neuter 3rd-Declension Nouns with bases in -ι/ and -υ/ (or-υ^ε/): Rows 15-16

Again, the **N** was heard as **v** after these vowels. The *shape-shifting v* does not shift to ε in the accusative singular: βάσιν [βάσι/**N**^v], πέλεκυν [πέλεκυ^ε/**N**^v].

N following a consonant is resolved as **α**

Non-Neuter 3rd-Declension Nouns with consonant bases (except σ/ and ϕ/): Rows 8, 10-14

Nothing odd happens. The original **N** simply appears as **α**: παῖδα [παῖδ/**N**^α], ῥήτορα [ῥήτορ/**N**^α].

Non-Neuter Nouns with bases in ɸ/: Row 17

The ɸ after the w-sound (ɸ) was heard as α. Then the intervocalic digamma disappeared from most literary dialects of Greek. The result is accusative singulars ending in -ηα or -οα: νῆα [νήɸ/ɸ^α]; βόα [βόɸ/ɸ^α].

Non-Neuter Nouns with bases in σ/: Row 18

The σ after the -σ was heard as α. Then the intervocalic sigma disappeared. The result is accusative singulars ending in -εα: Σωκράτεα [Σώκρατεσ/σ^α].

Neuter accusative singulars: identical to their nominative singulars?!

Yes, this does mean that you will need to use context to decide whether a neuter is a subject or a direct object, though (on the good side) it means that you have no new forms to learn.

2nd-Declension Neuters (ο/): Row 7

The accusative singular ending is identical to the nominative singular ending: ν (not ɸ—just plain ν). So, τὸ πρόσωπον [πρόσωπο/ν] is both the nominative and accusative singular form of “face.”

3rd-Declension Neuters: Rows 9, 12, 16, and 18

The accusative ending is ο, just as in the nominative.

Accusative Plurals

Non-Neuters: add ɸς

ɸς added to a vowel is resolved as νς

When ɸς resolves as νς, complications necessarily arise because (as you know) the sound combination νς is untenable in Greek during the period when our texts were written.

1st-Declension Nouns (-α/): Rows 1-4

The sound α/ɸς becomes α/νς, which in turn becomes ᾱς (α/νς): τὰς καλὰς πυλάς.

Non-Neuter 2nd-Declension Nouns (-ο/): Rows 5-6

The sound ο/ɸς becomes ο/νς, which in turn becomes ους (ο/νς): τοὺς καλοὺς θεοὺς. (You learned that ονσ becomes ουσ when you learned the 3rd-plural thematic verb ending ονσι [οἸσι → οἰνσι]).

ɸς added to a consonant is resolved as ας

In all 3rd-declension non-neuters (both vowel and consonant bases) ɸς resolves as ας.

Non-Neuter 3rd-Declension vowel bases: -ι/ and -υ/ (or-υ^ε/): Rows 15-16

In the plural forms third-declension vowel bases violate the principle that ɸ resolves to ν after vowels: ɸς resolves as ας in 3rd-declension vowel bases. The shape-shifting upsilon shifts to ε except in the nominative and accusative singular. So, here we get πελέκεας [πελέκευ^ε/ɸς].

3rd-Declension Non-Neuter consonant bases: Rows 8, 10-18

In most forms nothing odd happens: παῖδας [παῖδ/ɸς], ῥήτορας [ῥήτορ/ɸς]. Where complications arise, they are the same complications you have seen in the nominative plurals:

Bases in *Ϝ*/: Row 17

Intervocalic digamma disappears (of course): βασιλῆας [*βασιλῆ*_Ϝ/*ῆ*^a*ς*], βόας [*βό*_Ϝ/*ῶ*^a*ς*].

Non-Neuter Bases in *εσ*/: Row 18

Intervocalic sigma disappears (of course): τριήρεας [*τριήρε*_σ/*ε*^a*ς*].

Neuters: same as nominative plural

Rows 7, 10, 18, & ᾄστυ in Row 15: all neuter nouns

The accusative plural endings are identical to the nominative plural endings.

Accusative forms of practice nouns

The charts that follow show the accusative singular and plural forms of all the paradigm nouns. Make sure that you learn to recognize the two parts of each noun form: **base** and **accusative** (singular or plural) **case ending**.

You will also need to thoroughly learn the accusative forms of the definite article and demonstrative adjectives.

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Row 1	Ἀθήνα/	κεφαλά/	μάχα/
1 st -Declension Feminine (Long α bases)			
s: -ην [ᾱ/Ἠ ^ν]	ταύτην τὴν Ἀθήνην	ἐκείνην τὴν κεφαλὴν	τὴν μάχην
p: -ας [ᾱ/Ἠ ^ς]	ταύτας τὰς Ἀθήνας	ἐκείνας τὰς κεφαλὰς	τὰς μάχας
Row 2	κιθάρα/	θύρα/	ἀδικία/
1 st -Declension Feminine (Long α bases)			
s: -ην [ᾱ/Ἠ ^ν]	ἐκείνην τὴν κιθάρην	τὴν θύρην	ταύτην τὴν ἀδικίην
p: -ας [ᾱ/Ἠ ^ς]	ἐκείνας τὰς κιθάρας	τὰς θύρας	ταύτας τὰς ἀδικίας
Row 3	ἄμαξα/	τράπεζα/	μούσα/
1 st -Declension Feminine (Short α bases)			
s: -αν [ᾱ/Ἠ ^ν]	ταύτην τὴν ἄμαξαν	τὴν τράπεζαν	ἐκείνην τὴν μουσάν
p: -ας [ᾱ/Ἠ ^ς]	ταύτας τὰς ἀμάξας	τὰς τραπέζας	ἐκείνας τὰς μουσας

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Row 4	ναύτα/	στρατιώτα/	νεανία/
1 st -Declension Masculine			
S: -ην [ã/Ŋ ^v]	τοῦτον τὸν ναύτην	τὸν στρατιώτην	ἐκεῖνον τὸν νεανίην
P: -ας [ã/Ŋ ^v ς]	τούτους τοὺς ναύτας	τοὺς στρατιώτας	ἐκείνους τοὺς νεανίας
Row 5	θεό/	ἄνθρωπο/	δούλο/
2 nd -Declension Masculine			
S: -ον [o/Ŋ ^v]	ἐκεῖνον τὸν θεόν	τὸν ἄνθρωπον	τοῦτον τὸν δοῦλον
P: -ους [o/Ŋ ^v ς]	ἐκείνους τοὺς θεοὺς	τοὺς ἀνθρώπους	τούτους τοὺς δούλους
Row 6	θεό/	ὁδό/	ἔσοδο/
2 nd -Declension Feminine			
S: -ον [o/Ŋ ^v]	ἐκείνην τὴν θεόν	ταύτην τὴν ὁδόν	τὴν ἔσοδον
P: -ους [o/Ŋ ^v ς]	ἐκεῖνας τὰς θεοὺς	ταύτας τὰς ὁδοὺς	τὰς ἐσόδους

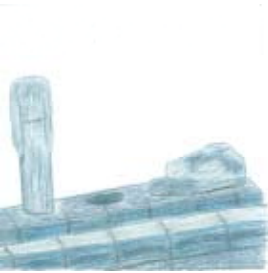
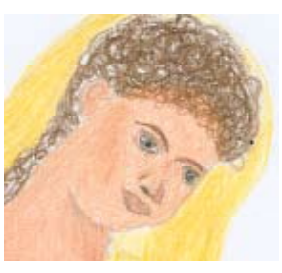
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Row 7	δῶρο/	στάδιο/	πρόσωπο/
2 nd -Declension Neuter			
S: -ον [ο/ν]	τοῦτο τὸ δῶρον	ἐκεῖνο τὸ στάδιον	τὸ πρόσωπον
P: -α [ο/α]	ταῦτα τὰ δῶρα	ἐκεῖνα τὰ στάδια	τὰ πρόσωπα
Row 8	ἔρωτ/	παίδ/	ὄρνιθ/
3 rd -Declension Dentals (-δ/, -τ/, -θ/) Non-neuter			
S: - δ,τ,θ/Ν ^α	τὸν ἔρωτα	τοῦτον τὸν παῖδα	ἐκείνην τὴν ὄρνιθα
P: - δ,τ,θ/Ν ^{ας}	τοὺς ἔρωτας	τούτους τοὺς παῖδας	ἐκείνας τὰς ὄρνιθας
Row 9	σῶματ/	γράμματ/	ἄγαλματ/
3 rd -Declension Dentals (-ματ/) Neuter			
S: -μα [ματ/ο]	τοῦτο τὸ σῶμα	ἐκεῖνο τὸ γράμμα	τὸ ἄγαλμα
P: -ματ/α	ταῦτα τὰ σώματα	ἐκεῖνα τὰ γράμματα	τὰ ἀγάλματα

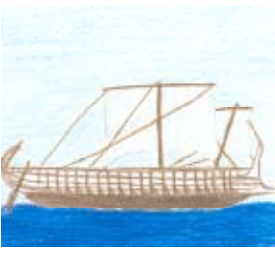
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Row 10	κύλικ/	σφίγγ/	θρίχ/
3 rd -Declension Palatals (-κ/, -γ/, -χ/)			
S: -κ,γ,χ/Ν ^α	ταύτην τὴν κύλικα	ἐκείνην τὴν σφίγγα	τὴν τρίχα
P: -κ,γ,χ/Ν ^{ας}	ταύτας τὰς κύλικας	ἐκείνας τὰς σφίγγας	τὰς τρίχας
Row 11	κύκλωπ/	γύπ/	χέρνιβ/
3 rd -Declension Labials (-π/, -β/, -φ/)			
S: -π,β,φ/Ν ^α	ἐκεῖνον τὸν κύκλωπα	τοῦτον τὸν γῦπα	ταύτην τὴν χέρνιβα
P: -π,β,φ/Ν ^{ας}	ἐκείνους τοὺς κύκλωπας	τούτους τοὺς γῦπας	ταύτας τὰς χέρνιβας
Row 12	ῥήτορ/	μήτερ/	πῦρ/
3 rd -Declension -ρ/			
S: -ρ/Ν ^α , ρ/ο	τοῦτον τὸν ῥήτορα	ταύτην τὴν μητέρα	τοῦτο τὸ πῦρ
P: -ρ/Ν ^{ας} , ρ/α	τούτους τοὺς ῥήτορας	ταύτας τὰς μητέρας	ταῦτα τὰ πυρὰ

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Row 13	Ἀμαζόν/	λιμέν/	ρίν/
3 rd -Declension -v/			
S: -να [v/N ^a]	τὴν Ἀμαζόνα	τοῦτον τὸν λιμένα	ἐκεῖνον τὸν ρίνα
P: -νας [v/N ^a ς]	τὰς Ἀμαζόνας	τούτους τοὺς λιμένας	ἐκείνους τοὺς ρίνας
Row 14	γέροντ/	ἐλέφαντ/	πρέποντ/
3 rd -Declension -vτ/			
S: -vτ/N ^a , vτ/∅	ἐκεῖνον τὸν γέροντα	τὸν ἐλέφанта	τὸ πρέπον
P: -vτ/N ^a ς, vτ/α	ἐκείνους τοὺς γέροντας	τοὺς ἐλέφαντας	τὰ πρέποντα
Row 15	ἀκρόπολι/	βάσι/	ὄψι/
3 rd -Declension -ι/			
S: -ιν [ι/N ^v]	τὴν ἀκρόπολιν	ταύτην τὴν βάσιν	ἐκείνην τὴν ὄψιν
P: -ιας [ι/N ^a ς]	τὰς ἀκροπόλιας	ταύτας τὰς βάσιας	ἐκείνας τὰς ὄψιας

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Row 16	νέκυ/	πέλεκυ ^ε /	ἄστυ ^ε /
3 rd -Declension -υ/, -υ ^ε /			
S: υ/Ν ^ν , υ/ϑ	τοῦτον τὸν νέκυν	τοῦτον τὸν πέλεκυν	τοῦτο τὸ ἄστυ
P: υ/Ν ^α ς, υ ^ε /Ν ^α ς, υ ^ε /α	τούτους τοὺς νέκυας	τούτους τοὺς πελέκεας	ταῦτα τὰ ἄστεα
Row 17	βασιλήϝ/	νήϝ/	βόϝ/
3 rd -Declension Digamma -ϝ/			
S: -ηϝ, οϝ/Ν ^α	ἐκεῖνον τὸν βασιλῆα	ἐκείνην τὴν νῆα	τοῦτον τὸν βόα
P: -ηϝ, οϝ/Ν ^α ς	ἐκεῖνους τοὺς βασιλῆας	ἐκείνας τὰς νῆας	τούτους τοὺς βόας
Row 18	Σώκράτεσ/	τριήρεσ/	ξίφεσ/
3 rd -Declension -εσ/			
S: -εσ/Ν ^α , ε ^ο σ/ϑ	τὸν Σωκράτεα	ταύτην τὴν τριῆρεα	ἐκεῖνο τὸ ξίφος
P: -εσ/Ν ^α ς, εσ/α	τοὺς Σωκράτεας	ταύτας τὰς τριῆρεας	ἐκεῖνα τὰ ξίφεα

Accusative forms of adjectives

The very same principles that govern the formation of nouns also govern the formation of the five categories of adjectives you have learned.

All Non-neuters: the accusative singular ending is **N** and the accusative plural ending is **Nς**. *The **N** and **Nς** resolve in adjectives exactly as they do in noun bases of the same declension and gender.*

All Neuters: Just as in nouns, the accusative singular forms of adjectives are identical to their nominative singular forms, and the accusative plural forms are identical to their nominative plural forms.

You will observe a few oddities in the formation of the words for *the*, *this*, and *that* in the practice phrases. You should think of these oddities as features of these specific words rather than as a more general feature of Greek morphology.

What now?

I suspect that when we first began to analyze nominative forms, the process may have seemed hard to grasp. The patterns may not have taken shape in your mind. When we moved on to genitives, you may have experienced only more piling on of data. And now, as the data continues to accumulate, you may feel overwhelmed by a sense of geometrically expanding data.

This is a good time for you to take a half hour and look back at the three cases you have learned. Paradoxically, the additional data should make the process of analysis clearer for you because analysis involves *seeing patterns*, and it's tough to see patterns until you assemble adequate data. If the goal is to understand what a forest looks like, it's tough to reach that goal if you're looking at only ten trees. Adding another hundred trees may make the forest more visible.

So, take a piece of paper, pick a sample noun—ή θύρη, for example—and chart all six of its forms: Nominative, genitive, and accusative singular and plural. Make sure you can see how all six of those forms come from adding the proper **case ending** to the single base **θύρα/**. Then move on through the rest of the 1st-declension nouns, observing the same pattern in operation.

After you've worked your way through the 1st declension, do the same with the 2nd and 3^d. Notice differences between neuters and non-neuters. Train yourself to see and remember the patterns that determine the six forms of Greek nouns and adjectives that you have learned.

At some point, I think it will dawn on you that with the exception of the nominative singulars (which are bedeviled by the difficult **ς** ending) the process of adding case endings to bases is quite easy and produces relatively few (and those readily comprehensible and memorable) complications.