Ancient Languages First Aid
NOUNS

SECTION 3. PROPERTIES OF NOUNS

Nouns, like pronouns, adjectives, and articles, have three properties: number, gender, and case. In English, the word order in a phrase, clause, or sentence dictates the meaning. Meaning in phrases, clauses, and sentences in ancient languages is conveyed by the endings of words. Therefore, the endings of a noun are more important in ancient languages than in English. Each property of a noun helps to define how the noun relates to other words in the sentence. How words interact in a phrase, clause, or sentence is called 'syntax'.

SECTION 3.0.1. NUMBER

A noun has a number. In English, it can be singular (one) or plural (more than one). In ancient languages the singular and plural forms are most common, but the 'dual' form also exists in some ancient languages. This dual form is most often used for nouns which are commonly found in pairs, e.g. pair of *glasses*, pair of *pants*, pair of *wheels*, but can also be used for emphasis.

The endings of nouns may change form from singular to dual to plural, depending on the original singular form. This change is called '*inflection*', and a set of inflected forms is called the '*morphology*' of a word. Just as in English, ancient languages have forms which seem regular and others which seem irregular, and it is important to learn which singular forms inflect to make which plural forms. Your dictionary will always indicate the correct expression of a plural form and also a dual if the noun possesses such a form.

Examples:

SINGULAR	DUAL	PLURAL
plan	(a pair of) plans	plans
man	(a pair of) men	men
money	(a pair of) moneys	moneys
lady	(a pair of) ladies	ladies
knife	(a pair of) knives	knives
roof	(a pair of) roofs	roofs
merino	(a pair of) merinos	merinos
tomato	(a pair of) tomatoes	tomatoes
house	(a pair of) houses	houses
mouse	(a pair of) mice	mice
child	(a pair of) children	children
sheep	(a pair of) sheep	sheep

Number helps to classify which nouns 'agree' with which verbs and adjectives.

Nouns have gender. They can be masculine, feminine, or neuter (neutral), or they can be common (that is, either masculine or feminine depending on who the subject is).

English examples:

MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTER	COMMON
man	woman	house	child

The gender a noun takes in an ancient language may not necessarily reflect your expectations. On the above table, the noun 'house' in Latin and Greek is feminine. Gender helps define which nouns and pronouns 'agree' with their subsequent adjectives.

SECTION 3.0.3. CASE
All nouns, pronouns, adjectives and articles have cases. In English, the cases of nouns are most often defined by *'prepositions'*, words like '*in, on, at*' which add meaning to the noun. In ancient languages, the word endings indicate the case. There are many different functions and meanings a noun can take on, each of which was originally expressed by using the noun in a particular case; these cases are listed in the following table. As time passed and language evolved, some of these cases became absorbed into others, thus causing some cases to have multiple functions and translations. These functions can be pinpointed by the use of certain prepositions which indicate a particular function.

CASE	FUNCTION	MEANING/EXAMPLE
Nominative	Subject of a verb	*The man* walks
Vocative	Case of a noun addressed	Oh *Socrates*!
Accusative	Direct Object of a verb	She loved *the centurion* They walked *to the city**
Genitive	Possessive case	This is the head *of a wolf*
Dative	Indirect Object of a verb	I bought the food *for the child*
Ablative	Expressing removal of the Subject or Direct Object *away from* or *from out of* an Object	He ran *away from/from out of the building*
Locative	Location of either the Subject, Direct or Indirect object *at* or among an Object or Objects	The senate was *at Rome*. The man bought a cloak for his son *at Memphis*.
Instrumental	The Subject carrying out the action of a verb *by means of* an Object	The soldier was killed *by means of/ by/ with* a spear

*Accusative + verbs of motion are translated 'to ~'. This is not the same 'to ~' as the dative.
The accusative, genitive, dative, ablative, locative and instrumental are referred to as the 'oblique cases'. Each ancient language will use cases differently and the amount of cases used in an ancient language will vary between each language. For example, ancient Greek uses nominative, vocative, accusative, genitive, and dative, with the functions of the ablative, locative, and instrumental absorbed into the dative (and some into the genitive). However, Latin has nominative, vocative, accusative, genitive, dative, and ablative, with the locative and instrumental absorbed into the ablative. Sanskrit expresses all 8 cases.

SECTION 3.1. TYPES OF NOUNS

SECTION 3.1.1. DEFINITION OF A NOUN

A noun is a word representing a person, place or thing.

Examples:

pharaoh   *chariots*   *Zeus*   *Rome*   *senate*

SECTION 3.1.2. COMMON NOUNS

A common noun is a word representing any common thing you can see and touch.

Examples:

helmet   *centurion*   *statue*   *grapes*   *cups*

SECTION 3.1.3. PROPER NOUNS

A proper noun is the unique name of a person, place or thing. Proper nouns always start with capital letters.

Examples:

Cleopatra   *Moses*   *Caesar*   *Socrates*   *Seti*

SECTION 3.1.4. COLLECTIVE NOUNS

Collective nouns are words representing a group/s of people or things.

Examples:

legion of soldiers   *class of scribes*   *armada of ships*   *chorus of angels*

SECTION 3.1.5. ABSTRACT NOUNS

An abstract noun is the name of a concept or idea which exists although it cannot be seen or touched.

Examples:

We are *in love* - *Hope* keeps us strong - Her *beauty* was legendary - We win *by force*

SECTION 3.2. DECLENSION OF NOUNS

When words inflect, the resulting pattern of changes is called 'morphology'. When a noun inflects they are said to '*decline*,' and the pattern of changes is also called its '*declension*'. Similar nouns often, but not always, decline in the same manner, and are therefore grouped into '*declensions*'. The number of declensions in an ancient language varies between each language. Declensions are an important tool in helping you learn how nouns inflect: you can learn groups of similar nouns in blocks and maximise your study. At first, some declensions may not make sense, but rest assured there is an explanation. An example from Latin is the nouns '*dominus*,' which belongs to the second declension, and '*domus*,' which belongs to the fourth declension. Although they look similar in their nominative form, they are in different declensions: this is because they decline differently, as in the following table:

Singular	Second Declension	Fourth Declension
Nominative	dominus	domus
Vocative	domine	domus
Accusative	dominum	domum
Genitive	domini	domus, domi
Dative	domino	domui, domo
Ablative	domino	domo
Plural		
Nominative	domini	domus
Vocative	domini	domus
Accusative	dominos	domus, domos
Genitive	dominorum	domorum, domuum
Dative	dominis	domibus
Ablative	dominis	domibus

As you can see by the entry of two possible forms often given in the declension of domus, the Romans themselves often got confused with which form to use when declining a noun. You should not feel worried if you get confused: always make use of course material and feel free to ask questions of your lecturer. They will be more than willing to help!