Dictionary Listings of Nouns

When we look up a noun in a dictionary or word listing, it usually appears with four pieces of information given, as in:

puer, pueri, m - boy

1) The first form of the noun is the **Nominative** form.

2) The second form is the **Genitive**.

3) The third thing is a letter, which indicates the **Gender** of the noun. Abbreviations used are: *m* for *masculine*, *f* for *feminine*, or *n* for *neuter*. Once in a while you may also see *c*, meaning *common*. This can be used when something, e.g. a human being, can be masculine or feminine.

4) The fourth thing to appear is the **meaning of the noun in English.**

Declensions of Nouns

There are five declensions of nouns in Latin. The word *declension* just refers to a group of nouns which follow a similar pattern of endings.

In order to know what declension a noun comes from, you should look at the Genitive endings, not the Nominative. The table below may help:

	1st declension	2nd declension	3rd declension	4th declension	5th declension
Nominative Singular	familia	Hadrianus Afer	pater uxor	manus genu	res dies
Genitive Singular	familiae	Hadriani Afri	patris uxoris	manus genus	rei diei

Rules to help:

- ➤ All 1st declension nouns have a genitive singular ending in *-ae.*
- ➤ All 2nd declension nouns have a genitive singular ending in *-i.*
- ➤ All 3rd declension nouns have a genitive singular ending in *-is.*
- ➤ All 4th declension nouns have a genitive singular ending in *-us.*
- ➤ All 5th declension nouns have a genitive singular ending in *-ei.*

Gender of Nouns

Nouns in Latin fall into three genders. The first of these (after all, Rome was male-dominated) is masculine. Second comes feminine. Third comes neuter. Generally speaking, you should always learn the gender when you learn the noun. There is another set of nouns called common, shown as the letter c, as for example, *homo, hominis, c*. Here, as *homo* means a human being, the word can be either masculine or feminine.

The gender of a noun is not determined by its declension, though there are patterns you can see in the gender-declension relationship.

The following summary may be helpful:

➤ Most first declension nouns are feminine, such as *familia* and *casa*. However, there are some masculine nouns too, such as *poeta*, *agricola* and *nauta*.

➤ Second declension nouns are usually masculine, such as *asinus* or *puer*. However, there are also lots of neuter nouns, such as *bellum*.

➤ Third declension nouns can be masculine, feminine or neuter. There is no single dominant gender here. Masculine and feminine noun endings are usually of the same pattern, for example in nouns such as *rex* (masculine) or *uxor* (feminine).

➤ Fourth declension nouns can be masculine (*gradus*), feminine (*manus*) or neuter (*cornu*). Masculine and feminine noun endings are usually of the same pattern.

➤ Some fifth declension nouns are masculine (*dies*) but most are feminine (*res*, *spes*). Both genders have similar patterns of endings.

Number of Nouns

In Latin, all nouns can be made singular or plural, or at least, most of them can. The correct word for this is *Number*. So, whereas *asinus* means *donkey*, *asini* means *donkeys*. Study these sentences:

asinus est in agro.   The donkey is in the field.
asini sunt in agris.   The donkeys are in the fields.