

Chapter 8: Third Conjugation

Chapter 8 covers the following: how to form the present, imperfect and future tenses in third conjugation including the infinitive and imperative mood. At the end of the lesson we'll review the vocabulary which you should memorize in this chapter.

Here are two important rules for you to remember: (1) the thematic vowel in third conjugation is a short vowel; it appears as *-i-* or *-u-* in the present and *-e-* in the imperfect; (2) The tense sign for the future in third conjugation is *-e-*; the future tense in third conjugation uses no thematic vowel.

As you can tell from that introduction this is a relatively short chapter which should come as a welcome relief but it's not necessarily an *easy* chapter. Third conjugation has the most number of irregularities of the four conjugations in Latin.

Here is an example of a third-conjugation verb, *scribo*, which means "write," conjugated in the present tense: *scribo, scribis, scribit, scribimus, scribitis, scribunt*. Notice that the formation of the present tense in third conjugation follows a pattern similar to that seen in first and second conjugation. Take a third-conjugation verb base, add a thematic vowel — which will be fairly irregular in this conjugation — and to that append personal endings. Note that the personal endings are the same as those in first and second conjugation. But unlike the *-a-* which dominates first conjugation or the strong *-e-* which dominates second, third uses a short vowel which readily changes form as it encounters different consonants. It will appear as *-i-* in the second person and third person singular and the first and second person plural. In the third person plural it appears as *-u-* and in the first person singular there is no thematic vowel, the same way the *-a-* in first conjugation disappears in forms like *laudo* or *amo*. The translation of third-conjugation verbs differs in no way from verbs in first and second conjugation. So there's no point in rehearsing what you already know. *Scribo*, for instance, would translate as "I write," "I am writing," "I do write." And the other persons and numbers would follow the same pattern.

The imperfect tense in third conjugation poses even fewer problems than the present. Just like in first and second conjugation, it uses *-ba-* as the marker for the imperfect. Thus the imperfect of *scribo* goes: *scribebam, scribebas* and so on. Note that unlike in the present the thematic vowel in the imperfect is *-e-*. The imperfect tense in third conjugation translates the same way it does in first and second; it denotes an incomplete or repeated action in the past. And therefore *scribebam* translates as "I was writing," "I used to write," "I kept on writing." The rest of the translations should be self-evident.

The one real challenge presented by third conjugation is its future tense. Unlike the *-bo, -bis, -bit* business you are used to from first and second conjugation, third conjugation uses *-e-* as its future tense marker — clear proof that we do not live in a perfect world. This *-e-* which is easily confused with the second conjugation thematic vowel will present manifold challenges and only goes to demonstrate how important it is to distinguish between second- and third-conjugation verbs. And to make matters only worse, the *-e-* isn't used universally. In the first person singular, the future tense marker is *-a-* rendering a conjugation that looks like: *scribam* "I will write," *scribes* "you will write," *scribet* "he will write," and so on. And even worse yet, note that this

tense marker eats up the thematic vowel. So there's no thematic vowel at all in third-conjugation future.

But a thematic vowel returns in the imperative mood. The imperative singular in third conjugation uses *-e-*. So for instance, the imperative singular of *scribo* is *scribe* (with a short *ĕ*) meaning "Write!" But just to be perverse as far as I can tell, the plural uses *-i-* plus *-te* the ending you would expect from first and second conjugation, producing *scribite*, "Y'all write!" And as if that weren't enough there are four irregular verbs, two of them third-conjugation, which have irregular imperative singulars, *dico*, *duco*, *fero*, and *facio*, producing four imperative forms which, said one after another, sound like a nursery rhyme: *dic, duc, fac, fer* ... "gently down the stream..."

Finally in comparison with all that, the infinitive will look like an old friend. It uses a *-e-* thematic vowel producing an ending *-ere* as in *scribere* "to write."

Let's end this lesson by looking at the vocabulary in Chapter 8.

The first word is *copia*, *copiae*, f., meaning "abundance" or "supply." It's a first-declension feminine noun. Like *mores* and *animi* the plural of this word provides insight into Roman psychology and society. The plural, which means literally "supplies," meant to the Romans "troops, forces." That shows what they cared about being supplied with an assumption that drips with a militarism that made the Romans the success and the terror they were in the ancient world.

The next word, *ratio*, *rationis*, f., is a third-declension feminine noun meaning "calculation," "reason," "judgment," "consideration," "system," "manner," and "method," an impressive array of definitions which become comprehensible when you look at the etymological meaning of the word: *ra-* means "reckoning" and *-tio* means "the process of." So the word means "the process of making any kind of reckoning," in particular, a calculation which of course involves reason. If it's ethical then "judgment" which entails careful consideration and a systematic manner and method of proceeding. To the Romans it really was a very simple word; it meant "what you do in your mind when you add up 1 and 1 and get 2." Let's practice a little *rationem*. What would be the genitive plural of this word? Remember, it's third declension. That's better: *rationum*.

The next two words are prepositions.

The first one, *ad*, means "to," "toward," "up to" or "near to." And its object is always in the accusative case. So if you wanted to say, for instance, "toward the fatherland," as in, "I looked toward the fatherland," you would say *ad patriam*.

The second preposition, *e* or *ex*, means the opposite, "out of," "from," and also, "by reason of," "on account of." It takes an ablative object. The forms *e* and *ex* are interchangeable. So a Roman could say *e patriā* or *ex patriā* and in either case mean, "from the fatherland." "From" is the literal meaning of *ex* but *ex* also has a figurative meaning, "by reason of," or "on account of," a sense it shares with our preposition "out of," as in, "They did it out of fear," meaning "on account of fear." For this preposition to have this sense the object must be an abstract noun. So

no one will be running “from the house,” meaning “on account of the house” unless we’re in some sort of Latin horror movie.

Next word: *dum*, not “dumb,” unless you forget that it means “while” in which case it is “dumb.” *Dum* is a conjunction that introduces a clause. A clause is a little sub-sentence within a larger sentence. We’ll talk about clauses more later -- a *lot* more later. *Dum* is a conjunction signaling that two things are happening at once.

The next word is *ago*, *agere*, a verb. It means “do,” “drive,” “lead,” “act,” “pass” or “spend.” It’s a third-conjugation verb. Note the *-ĕ-* in the infinitive, *agĕre*, versus the *-ē-* we find in the infinitive of a second-conjugation verb like *monĕre*. The reason this word has so many meanings is because it is one of the most widely used verbs in Latin. It is really equivalent, if anything is in Latin, to the English verb “do.” This means it is very hard to figure out what *agere* means unless you’re in a context and almost always what determines that meaning is its direct object. The same is true of English “do.” Think about all the different meanings “do” can have such as: “do breakfast,” “do a meeting,” or “do your hair.” The same is true in Latin. The idiom *vitam agere*, “to do life” literally, means “to live life” or “to lead life.” Another example is *gratias agere*, “to do/drive thanks,” meaning “to give thanks” or simply “to thank.” But the translation “thank” brings with it a complication you should be aware of: the Latin idiom “to do/drive” that is, “give thanks,” expects an indirect object -- you “give thanks” to someone. Thus in Latin that object will be in the dative case. Conversely the English verb “thank” takes a direct object which might lead you to put an accusative object with *agere gratias* in Latin and that would be a dire, fatal error. You have been warned.

The last three entries in this vocabulary list are all verbs.

The first is *doceo*, *docĕre* meaning “show” or “teach.” It’s a second-conjugation verb.

The next is *duco*, *ducere*, meaning “lead,” “consider” or “regard.” It’s a third-conjugation verb. Look at the difference in the principal parts of these two verbs: *doceo* has *-eo* at the end of its first principal part and a *-ē-* in its infinitive. That shows that it’s second conjugation. *Duco* has no *-e-* before the *-o* and a *-ĕ-* in its infinitive. That shows that it’s third. And another thing to note about this verb is that it has a mental sense: “to lead with the mind” was to the Romans “to consider.”

Finally the last item vocabulary item in this chapter is *scribo*, *scribere* meaning “write” or “compose.” It’s a third-conjugation verb. Because of its sense, *scribo* can take both an accusative direct object and a dative indirect object, that is, you can “write something,” accusative direct object, “to someone,” dative indirect object.

Do the rules that were cited at the beginning of this chapter now make sense to you? If not, please review this presentation. If so, please proceed to the next slide.

For the next class exercise, print out a copy of the two-page worksheet for Chapter 8, please. Here is a link to that worksheet.

And that's it. That's the end of the presentation for Chapter 8.

Vitas bonas agite, O discipuli!