8. First Declension

Lesson in a Nutshell

First declension nouns are usually feminine and end in an α or η

Every Greek noun will give us three pieces of information about itself:

1. Its case tells us the role it plays in the sentence.
2. Its number tells us whether it is singular or plural.
3. Its gender tells us whether it is masculine, feminine, or neuter.

Case	Number	Gender
Nominative **G**enitive **D**ative **A**ccusative	**S**ingular **P**lural	**M**asculine **F**eminine **N**euter

But how will a given noun give us this information?

by inflection

"Inflection" is just a fancy word for "change." The words will change form ("morph") to give us the information. English words inflect a little bit. But Greek words inflect like crazy!

These inflections give us grammatical information about the word. It is nearly impossible to understand Greek without understanding grammar. But this is a good thing! Because once you know Greek, you will be a grammar whiz.

Greek nouns follow three patterns of inflection (change). These three patterns are called "declensions."

When you hear the word "declension"

think

***"the pattern of change a noun follows
to show me its case, number and gender."***

On the second page of the Master Chart, locate the Noun Endings Chart.

Noun Endings									
		Masculine (2nd declension)		**F**eminine (1st declension)		**N**euter (2nd declension)		**M**asc / **F**em (3rd declension)		**N**euter (3rd declension)	
Singular	Nominative subject	ος	λογος word	α or η	αρχη beginning	ον	εργον work	ς	σαρξ flesh	—	φως light
	Genitive possession	ου	λογου of a word	ας or ης	αρχης of a beginning	ου	εργου of work	ος	σαρκος of flesh	ος	φωτος of light
	Dative in, with, to, by	ῳ	λογῳ to a word	α or η	αρχῃ to a beginning	ῳ	εργῳ to work	ι	σαρκι to flesh	ι	φωτι to light
	Accusative object	ον	λογον word	αν or ην	αρχην beginning	ον	εργον work	α	σαρκα flesh	—	φως light
Plural	Nominative subject	οι	λογοι words	αι	αρχαι beginnings	α	εργα works	ες	σαρκες fleshes	α	φωτα lights
	Genitive possession	ων	λογων of words	ων	αρχων of beginnings	ων	εργων of works	ων	σαρκων of fleshes	ων	φωτων of lights
	Dative in, with, to, by	οις	λογοις to words	αις	αρχαις to beginnings	οις	εργοις to works	σιν	σαρξιν to fleshes	σιν	φωσιν to lights
	Accusative object	ους	λογους words	ας	αρχας beginnings	α	εργα works	ας	σαρκας fleshes	α	φωτα lights

Notice that there are three declensions.

<u>First declension nouns</u>
(in blue)

are usually feminine

and their stem

usually ends in an α or an η.

<u>Second declension nouns</u>
(in blue)

are usually masculine or neuter

and their stem

usually ends in an ο.

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Noun Endings

		Masculine (2nd declension)		Feminine (1st declension)		Neuter (2nd declension)		Masc / Fem (3rd declension)		Neuter (3rd declension)	
Singular	Nominative subject	ος	λογος word	α or η	αρχη beginning	ον	εργον work	ς	σαρξ flesh	–	φως light
	Genitive possession	ου	λογου of a word	ας or ης	αρχης of a beginning	ου	εργου of work	ος	σαρκος of flesh	ος	φωτος of light
	Dative in, with, to, by	ῳ	λογῳ to a word	ᾳ or ῃ	αρχῃ to a beginning	ῳ	εργῳ to work	ι	σαρκι to flesh	ι	φωτι to light
	Accusative object	ον	λογον word	αν or ην	αρχην beginning	ον	εργον work	α	σαρκα flesh	–	φως light
Plural	Nominative subject	οι	λογοι words	αι	αρχαι beginnings	α	εργα works	ες	σαρκες fleshes	α	φωτα lights
	Genitive possession	ων	λογων of words	ων	αρχων of beginnings	ων	εργων of works	ων	σαρκων of fleshes	ων	φωτων of lights
	Dative in, with, to, by	οις	λογοις to words	αις	αρχαις to beginnings	οις	εργοις to works	σιν	σαρξιν to fleshes	σιν	φωσιν to lights
	Accusative object	ους	λογους words	ας	αρχας beginnings	α	εργα works	ας	σαρκας fleshes	α	φωτα lights

Third declension nouns
(in yellow)

may be masculine, feminine, or neuter

and their stem

ends in a consonant.

This will become clearer as we go, so if you are a bit confused at this point do not worry!

Let's start by looking at a first declension noun: ἀρχή

1st Declension Endings

		Feminine (1st declension)	
Singular	Nominative subject	α or η	αρχη beginning
	Genitive possession	ας or ης	αρχης of a beginning
	Dative in, with, to, by	ᾳ or ῃ	αρχῃ to a beginning
	Accusative object	αν or ην	αρχην beginning
Plural	Nominative subject	αι	αρχαι beginnings
	Genitive possession	ων	αρχων of beginnings
	Dative in, with, to, by	αις	αρχαις to beginnings
	Accusative object	ας	αρχας beginnings

Look carefully at the table above. Notice how the endings change to tell us their case, number and gender.

There are eight forms of every noun. This makes sense.

four cases x two numbers = 8 forms

In the chart above, notice that in English translations there are only two forms of the word: "beginning" and "beginnings." This is because English does not inflect (change form) to tell us its case. It only changes to tell us if it singular or plural. English compensates for this by using word order and little helping words. English is not nearly as elegant as Greek!

Here are three more examples of first declension nouns: ὥρα, γραφή and δόξα. Notice how the endings are "tacked on" to the nouns. Also, notice how consistent the endings are.

You might notice that in the case of δόξα there is a shift between α and η. This is called an alpha-eta shift. Don't let it bother you. Just realize that in the first declension singular, the endings may be made with alphas or etas.

	1st Declension Endings		
			Feminine (1st declension)
Singular	**Nominative** subject	α.η	ὥρα hour
Singular	**Genitive** possession	ας.ης	ὥρας of an hour
Singular	**Dative** in, with, to, by	ᾳ.η	ὥρᾳ to an hour
Singular	**Accusative** object	αν.ην	ὥραν hour
Plural	**Nominative** subject	αι	ὧραι hours
Plural	**Genitive** possession	ων	ὡρῶν of hours
Plural	**Dative** in, with, to, by	αις	ὥραις to hours
Plural	**Accusative** object	ας	ὥρας hours

	1st Declension Endings		
			Feminine (1st declension)
Singular	**Nominative** subject	α.η	γραφή book
Singular	**Genitive** possession	ας.ης	γραφῆς of a book
Singular	**Dative** in, with, to, by	ᾳ.η	γραφῇ to a book
Singular	**Accusative** object	αν.ην	γραφήν book
Plural	**Nominative** subject	αι	γραφαί books
Plural	**Genitive** possession	ων	γραφῶν of books
Plural	**Dative** in, with, to, by	αις	γραφαῖς to books
Plural	**Accusative** object	ας	γραφάς books

	1st Declension Endings		
			Feminine (1st declension)
Singular	**Nominative** subject	α.η	δόξα glory
Singular	**Genitive** possession	ας.ης	δόξης of a glory
Singular	**Dative** in, with, to, by	ᾳ.η	δόξῃ to a glory
Singular	**Accusative** object	αν.ην	δόξαν glory
Plural	**Nominative** subject	αι	δόξαι glories
Plural	**Genitive** possession	ων	δόξῶν of glories
Plural	**Dative** in, with, to, by	αις	δόξαις to glories
Plural	**Accusative** object	ας	δόξας glories

Here is an example of how the endings are used in a Greek sentence.

ἡ ζωή τὶς ἀλήθειας δίδωσιν δόξαν τη ψυχῇ

The   life   *   of truth   gives   glory   to the   soul

word	ending	case	function in sentence
ζωή	ή	nominative	subject
ἀλήθειας	ας	genitive	possession
δόξαν	αν	accusative	object
ψυχῇ	ῇ	dative	indirect object

Here is another example in which the words are more mixed up (to us).

ζωὴν τῇ καρδίᾳ δίδωσιν ἡ ἀγάπη τῶν γραφῶν.
life   to the   heart   gives   the   love   *   of books.

word	ending	case	function in sentence
ζωὴν	ὴν	accusative	object
καρδίᾳ	ᾳ	dative	indirect object
ἀγάπη	η	nominative	subject
γραφῶν	ῶν	genitive	possession

I put this one out of normal English word order on purpose. Can you figure out how it would be translated?

The word "love" is in the nominative case, so it is the subject of the sentence.
The word "books" is in the genitive case so it indicates possession.
The word "life" is in the accusative case so it is the object of the verb.
The word ""heart" is in the dative case so it is the indirect object.

To translate this sentence into English we have to do two things:

1. We have to rearrange the words since English relies on word order to tell us what role each word plays in the sentence (case).

2. We have to add helping words ("of," "to").

So here it is:

The love of books gives life to the heart.

If you understand why this sentence is translated this way, you are well on your way to understanding how case works!

Use the "Take a Hike" Workbook to practice understanding Greek case.

Have fun!!