

# The Fifteen Finnish Noun Cases

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## Introduction

Finnish is famous for its complex and confusing grammar, such as its fifteen different noun cases or forty-five different verb types. But fear not! There are some very simple rules you can follow. Indeed, modifying a noun or an adjective to fit your sentence is as easy as one two three!\* So, if you are planning to say a Finnish adjective or noun, just follow this simple seven-step guide and hope that no exceptions apply :)

\* Four five six seven!

## 1. Choose the correct case

To find the correct case, first ask yourself: Is there a **trigger**? Here are some examples, but there are many others!

preceeding a **postposition**?

↳ genitiivi  
"koiran kanssa"

expressing **'to have'**?

↳ adessiivi  
"lapsella on"

following a **number** ≠ ±1?

↳ partitiivi  
"kaksi kukkaa"

triggered by **verb**?

↳ genitiivi, partitiivi, illatiivi, essiivi, ...  
"työskentelen kokina"  
*depends on verb!*

If there is no trigger, how is the word used in the sentence?

## 2. Choose your case ending

## 3. What is the word type?

Word ends in a, ä, o, ö, u, y, or i? → **word type A**

Word ends in e or a consonant? → **word type B**

	Case	Ending	English preposition	Example	Translation	Question word
Grammatical Subject	Nominatiivi	-	- (subject)	talo	house	mikä / kuka
	Genitiivi	-n	's, - (object, whole)	talon	a house's, the (whole) house	minkä / kenen
	Akkusatiivi	-t	- (object, only personal pronoun)	minut	me	— / kenet
Object	Partitiivi	-a, -ta, -tta	- (object, incomplete)	taloa	(part of) a house	mitä / ketä
	Illatiivi	-an, -en, ...	into (location)	taloon	into a house	mihin / keneen
	Inessiivi	-ssa	in	talossa	in a house	missä / kenessä
Locative Internal	Elatiivi	-sta	out of	talosta	out of a house	mistä / kenestä
	Allatiivi	-lle	to	talolle	to a house	mille / kenelle
	Adessiivi	-lla	at, on	talolla	at a house	millä / kenellä
Locative External	Ablatiivi	-lta	from	talolta	from a house	miltä / keneltä
	Essiivi	-na	as	talona	as a house	—
	Translatiivi	-ksi	into (transformation)	taloksi	into a house	—
Other Marginal State	Instruktiivi	-n	with (the aid of)	taloin	with a house	—
	Abessiivi	-tta	without	talotta	without a house	—
	Komitatiivi	-ne-	(together) with	taloine	with a house	—

## 4. Which word stem do you need?

WT A	WT B
strong	weak
weak	strong
weak	strong
strong	weak
strong	strong
weak	strong
weak	strong
weak	strong
weak	strong
strong	strong
weak	strong
weak	strong
weak	strong
strong	strong

## 5. Apply word stem modification

If the word stem strength changes according to 4., apply these rules: \*

### word type A

strong      weak

new → -i-  
old → -e-  
old with -si → -de-

others: unchanged

*What does old/new mean?  
The line is drawn at ~3000 years old. So ask yourself:  
Is this word needed for living in an ancient Finnish forest?  
This requires not only knowledge of bronze-age  
technology and life-style, but also  
local flora and fauna.*

### word type B

weak      strong

-e → -ee-  
-nen → -se-  
-in → -ime-  
-nut → -nee-  
-tar → -ttare-  
-ton → -ttoma-  
-el, -en, -er → -ele-, -ene-, -ere-  
-ut → -ue-  
-es, -os → -ekse-, okse-  
foreign → -i-  
-as → -aa-  
most → -akse-  
some → -ii-  
old → -ikse-  
new → -ude-  
from adj. → -ukse-  
from verb

\*partitiivi exceptions apply

*Note vowel harmony!  
similar modifications apply to endings  
with light vowels. -> see 7.*

## 6. Apply KPT modification

If word stem strength changes, modify consonants at the end of the word stem, using the following rules:

weak      strong

-, v ↔ k  
v ↔ p  
d ↔ t  
k ↔ kk  
p ↔ pp  
t ↔ tt  
ng ↔ nk  
nn ↔ nt  
mm ↔ mp  
ll ↔ lt  
rr ↔ rt

## 7. Apply vowel harmony changes

If necessary, edit changes from 2. and 5. to match the vowel harmony of the base word:

Base word contains only ä, e, i, ö, y?

yes / no

light      dark

ä ↔ a  
ö ↔ o  
y ↔ u

## Examples

*Asked to express a Finnish noun?  
Honestly, I would decline.*

**Example:** "(I take the glass) from the table." ('pöytä')

- No trigger, locative external movement away -> ablatiivi
  - Add ablatiivi ending -lta: **pöydältä**
  - Base word ends in ä -> **word type A**
  - Ablatiivi word type A means **weak stem**
  - ä ending has no special modifications
  - KPT modification to weak stem t->d: **pöydältä**
  - Light vowel harmony:** **pöydältä**
- > **"Otan lasin pöydältä."**

**Example:** "(It is next to) the tyre." ('rengas')

- Trigger: express 'next to' using postposition 'vieressä' -> genitiivi
  - Add genitiivi ending -n: **rengasn**
  - Base word ends in s -> **word type B**
  - Genitiivi word type B means **strong stem**
  - as ending changes to -aa-: **rengaan**
  - KPT modification to strong stem ng -> nk: **renkaan**
  - Dark vowel harmony:** no change
- > **"Se on renkaan vieressä."**