

The Fifteen Finnish Noun Cases

AN INSTRUCTIONAL POSTER BY MATTHEW HERBST

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!

preceding a **postposition**?

genitiivi
"koiran kanssa"

following a **number** ≠ ±1?

partitiivi
"kaksi kukkaa"

expressing '**to have**'?

adessiivi
"lapsella on"

triggered by **verb**?

genitiivi, partitiivi,
illatiivi, essiivi, ...
"työskentelen kokina"

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**

4. Which word stem do you need?

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

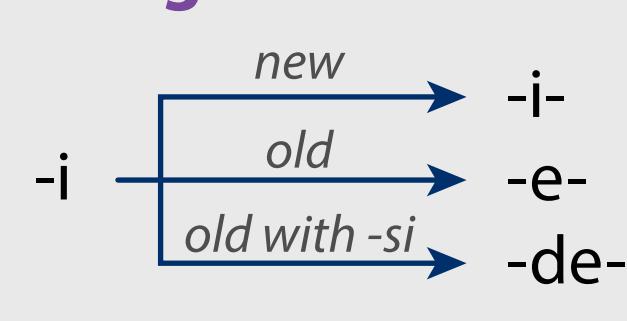
Case	Ending	English preposition	Example	Translation	Question word
Nominatiivi	-	- (subject)	talo	house	mikä / kuka
Genitiivi	-n	's, - (object, whole)	talon	a house's, the (whole) house	minkä / kenan
Akkusatiivi	-t	- (object, only personal pronoun)	minut	me	— / kenet
Partitiivi	-a, -ta, -tta	- (object, 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
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
Ablatiivi	-ltä	from	talolta	from a house	miltä / keneltä
Essiivi	-na	as	talona	as a house	—
Translatiivi	-ksi	into (transformation)	taloksi	into a house	—
Instruktivi	-n	with (the aid of)	taloin	with a house	—
Abessiivi	-tta	without	talotta	without a house	—
Komitatiivi	-ne-	(together) with	taloine	with a house	—

5. Apply word stem modification

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

word type A

strong weak



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.

similar modifications apply to endings
Note vowel harmony!
with light vowels. → see 7.

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	-aa-
some	-akse-
old	-ii-
new	-ikse-
from adj.	-ude-
from verb	-ukse-
-is	-ude-
-us	-ukse-

*partitiivi exceptions apply

6. Apply KPT modification

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

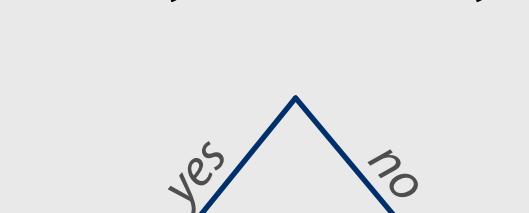
weak strong

-, 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?



light	ä ↔ o
dark	ö ↔ u
light	y ↔ u
dark	ä ↔ a

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 -ltä: **pöytältä**
- 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."