

Latin Verbs: The Idea of a Conjugation

A conjugation is a pattern of endings shared by different verbs.

Many verbs seem similar and go through the same kinds of changes in their endings. We can say that they are therefore all in one "class" or "group" or "mental box." That box is called a *conjugation*. Nouns show a similar pattern, and their "boxes" are called *declensions*.

The verbs listed on the page that explains the principal parts of verbs are all from what is called the **first conjugation**. This conjugation includes **all those verbs whose second principal part ends in -âre**. The standard endings for the principal parts of verbs in this conjugation are:

-ô, -âre, -âvî, -âtus.

Note 1: This pattern is not without exception. *Dô* (I give) has an infinitive in *-are*, with a short *-a*, but this word has been assimilated to the regular first conjugation pattern.

Note 2: Sometimes you may find another form used for the fourth part, ending in **-um**. In this presentation, the fourth part is considered a type of adjective, and declined like other adjectives ending in **us-a-um** (*bonus, novus*, etc.).

Notice what is left when you remove the **-âre** of the infinitive: **am -âre**

This is the **base** to which you will frequently add some letters that will change the tense or mood of the verb. The **base plus these letters** is like a **stem** onto you will often add a **personal ending**, to indicate whether the subject is **I / we; you / you (plural); or he, she, it / they**. Thus there are typically three parts to a Latin verb: **base - infix - personal ending**.

What are the most important forms that a verb usually takes in Latin?

Using the third-person singular, this table presents the main changes of meaning that are typically available for verbs. Notice that the representation of the subjunctive meanings are only conventional: there are many ways of translating subjunctives in different contexts.

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| 3 Simple tenses - Active / Passive | <i>Present</i> <i>Imperfect</i> <i>Future</i> | x loves / x is loved x was loving / x was being loved x will love / x will be loved |
| 3 Perfect tenses - Active / Passive | <i>Present Perfect</i> <i>Past Perfect</i> <i>Future Perfect</i> | x has loved / x has been loved x had loved / x had been loved x will have loved / x will have been loved |
| 4 Subjunctive tenses - Active / Passive [Various translations are possible.] | <i>Present</i> <i>Imperfect</i> <i>Perfect</i> <i>Past Perfect</i> | let x love / let x be loved x would love / x would be loved [I ask what] x has loved / [I ask what] has been loved x would have loved / x would have been loved |
| 4 Participles | <i>Present (active)</i> <i>Past (passive)</i> <i>Future Active</i> <i>Future Passive</i> | loving loved about to love about to be loved |
| 3 Infinitives - Active / Passive | <i>Present</i> <i>Perfect</i> <i>Future</i> | to love / to be loved to have loved / to have been loved to be about to love / to be about to be loved |
| 1 Imperative - Active / Passive | <i>Present</i> | Love! / Be loved! |