

## The Nominative Case: Endings and Usage

The nominative endings for the three possible classes of Serbian nouns are given in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: The nominative case of Serbian nouns**

	<b>Class I</b> (masculine: ending in a consonant) 'window'	<b>Class I</b> (neuter: ending in <b>-o</b> or <b>-e</b> ) 'village'	<b>Class II</b> (feminine: ending in <b>-a</b> ) 'woman'	<b>Class III</b> (feminine: ending in a consonant) 'love'
<b>SINGULAR</b>				
<b>Nominative</b>	prozor Jovan (John)	selo	žena	ljubav
<b>PLURAL</b>	'windows'	'villages'	'women'	'loves'
<b>Nominative</b>	prozor- <b>i</b>	sel- <b>a</b>	žen- <b>e</b>	ljubav- <b>i</b>

Notice that nominative feminine singular nouns (žena 'woman') have the same **-a** ending as the nominative neuter plural nouns (sela 'villages'). It's confusing, but you have to learn it. Can't sidestep the grammar!

How can you tell which noun belongs to which declension class? Follow these basic rules for classifying nouns in declension classes:

- i) If the noun ends in a **consonant**, most probably it's a **Class I masculine noun** (e.g. prozor 'window').
- ii) If the noun ends in vowels **-o**, or **-e** in singular nominative case, it's a **Class I neuter noun** (e.g. sel-o 'village', polj-e 'field'). However, there are some male proper names that end in these vowels, and are classified as **Class I masculine noun** (e.g. Marko, Rade), not neuter nouns. So, semantics wins!

**Neuter nouns that denote young persons or animals** have the regular nominative ending in **-o** or **-e**, but **their plural nominative ending** is either **-i**, just like Class I masculine nouns, or **-ad**. With the **-ad** ending, these nouns behave like collective nouns. Some examples:

**Table 2: Nominative endings of neuter nouns denoting young persons or animals**

<b>nominative singular</b>	momče 'young lad'	unuče 'grandchild'	pile 'chick'	tele 'calf'
<b>nominative plural -i:</b>	momčići 'young lads'	unučići 'grandchildren'	pilići 'chicks'	telići 'calves'
<b>nominative plural -ad:</b>	momčad 'young lads'	unučad 'grandchildren'	pilad 'chicks'	telad 'calves'

- iii) If the noun ends in **-a** in singular nominative case, it's a **Class II noun**, and these nouns are feminine. There is a small group of male-denoting nouns that also end in **-a**, (e.g. sudija 'judge', Steva – male name, gazda 'master, landlord', gospoda 'gentlemen'). But grammatically, these nouns act as feminine. So, forget about their semantics.

- iv) The **Class III nouns** are all feminine and end in a **consonant**, just like Class I nouns. How then to distinguish Class I masculine nouns from Class III feminine nouns? **Class III nouns typically denote abstract objects** (e. g. ljubav 'love', smrt 'death', bolest 'illness', mladost 'youth'). This class of nouns is not productive, i.e. when a new noun that ends in a consonant is imported into the language, it goes into Class I (masculine nouns), not into Class III (feminine nouns). For example, the loan noun **stres** (from the English 'stress') is classified as a Class I masculine noun.

### When to use the nominative case in sentences?

- **The nominative case is typically used as the subject of a sentence.** As a consequence, the nominative case can never appear after the preposition, unlike other cases. Notice that in the examples below, subjects can occur anywhere in the sentence, not only in the initial position. Word order is pretty free. At least, something easy!

**Table 2: Some examples of nominative nouns as subjects**

	Serbian	English
1.	Prozor je čist.	The window is clean.
2.	Jovan je došao iz Beograda.	John came from Belgrade.
3.	Ova žena dugo spava.	This woman sleeps a lot.
4.	Ja vidim moje selo.	I see my village.
5.	Čist je prozor.	(Clean is the window. = same as 1.)
6.	Došao je iz Beograda Jovan.	(came from Belgrade John = same meaning as in 2.)

Nominative case is also used in copular or predicative sentences (sentences that use verb **biti** 'to be' as the main verb). Some examples:

**Table 3: Some examples of nominative nouns in predicative sentences**

Serbian	English
Milan je <b>lekar</b> .	Milan is a doctor.
Milan je bio <b>dobar lekar</b> .	Milan was a good doctor.
Ovo je <b>Beograd</b> .	This is Belgrade.
One su <b>glumice</b> .	They are actresses.
Ja sam <b>Larisa</b> .	I am Larisa.
Ja se zovem <b>Larisa</b> .	I'm called Larisa (my name is Larisa)

Notice that in the above sentences, which are also called '**identificational**' constructions, both the subject (the noun before the conjugated verb **biti** 'to be') and the post-copular noun (shown in red) have nominative case.

Unlike other cases that can occur as both objects of verbs and prepositions, nominative case cannot occur as the object of a preposition. (Note: the [locative case](#) is the only case that occurs only with prepositions.)

To ask questions about the nominative case (subject), such as 'Who/What is that?' we use the following **interrogative pronouns in the nominative case**:

**Ko** 'who'      **Šta** 'what'

**Table 4: Some examples of questions that ask about the subject**

Serbian	English
Question: <b>Ko</b> je došao? Answer: <b>Jovan</b> je došao.	<u>Who</u> came? <u>John</u> came.
Question: <b>Ko</b> je to? Answer: To je <b>profesor</b> .	<u>Who</u> is that? <u>That</u> is a <u>professor</u> .
Question: <b>Šta</b> je ovo? Answer: <b>Ovo</b> je prozor.	<u>What</u> is this? <u>This</u> is a <u>window</u> .
Question: Kako se zove <b>ovo</b> ? Answer: <b>Ovo</b> se zove <b>knjiga</b> .	How do you call <u>this</u> ? <u>This</u> is called a <u>book</u> .
Question: Kako se kaže ' <b>book</b> '? Answer: <b>Book</b> se kaže ' <b>knjiga</b> '.	How do you say 'book'? <u>Book</u> is called ' <u>knjiga</u> '.

The last two questions can be very useful to find out how names of the objects or persons are called in Serbian. So, don't be shy and keep asking your teacher or a native speaker for the names of the objects, so you can enrich your vocabulary, and also learn the nominative case.