

The Vocative Case: Endings and Usage

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

Table 1: The vocative case of Serbian nouns

	Class I (masculine: ending in a consonant in nominative) 'brother'	Class I (neuter: ending in -o or -e in nominative) '(badly behaved) child'	Class II (feminine: ending in -a in nominative) 'woman'	Class III (feminine: ending in a consonant in nominative) 'love'
SINGULAR				
Vocative	brat- e	derište- o	žen- o	ljubav- i
PLURAL	'boys'	'(badly behaved) children'	"women"	'loves'
Vocative	dečac- i	derište- a	žen- e	ljubav- i

When to use the vocative case?

The name **vocative** comes from the Latin verb **vocare** which means 'to call, to voice'. Thus, the vocative case is used when you want **to address or call a person** (or a thing – metaphorically speaking).

Some phonological variations in vocative endings

For **Class I masculine nouns**, the vocative ends in **-e** in singular, and **-i** in plural (which is equivalent to the nominative plural).

- Please note that nouns ending in the following consonants: **k, g, h** undergo [palatalization \(or consonant 'softening'\)](#) before the vocative ending **-e**. Some examples:

nominative singular	ćove k 'man'	dru g 'comrade'	du h 'spirit'
vocative singular:	ćove če 'hey man'	dru že 'hey comrade'	du še 'hey spirit'

However, this rule doesn't apply to foreign proper names. Examples:

nominative singular	Dik 'Dick'	Greg 'Greg'	Bah 'Bach'
vocative singular:	Dik 'Dick'	Greg 'Greg'	Bah 'Bach'

- The nouns ending in the following consonants: **č, ć, đ, lj, nj, š, ž**, have their singular vocative endings in **-u**, not **-e**. Some examples:
mladić-u 'young man' **muž-u** 'husband' **prijatelj-u** 'friend'.
This rule doesn't apply to proper male names, like: **Miloš-e**, **Uroš-e**.
- The nouns ending in **-r** can have either endings **-e** or **-u**. Examples:
lekar-e, **lekar-u** 'doctor' **poštar-e**, **poštar-u** 'mailman'
- And finally, another **exceptional noun is brat** 'brother', which has an irregular vocative ending **-o** in plural: **brat-e** vs. **brać-o** 'brothers'.

Most class I neuter nouns have both singular and plural vocative endings equal to their nominatives: **-o** or **-e** in singular (e.g. sel-o 'village', polje 'field') and **-a** in the plural (e.g. sel-a 'villages', polja 'fields').

- However, the **exception to this rule arises with neuter nouns that denote young persons or animals**. Their singular vocative ending is regular: either **-o** or **-e**, but **their plural vocative ending** is either **-i**, just like Class I masculine nouns, or **-ad**. With the **-ad** ending, these nouns behave like collective nouns.

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

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

- The following neuter nouns have the vocative plural ending in **-o**, just like feminine singular nouns:

vocative singular	dete 'child'	brat 'grandchild'	pile 'chick'	tele 'calf'
vocative plural -o:	deco 'children'	unučići 'grandchildren'	pilići 'chicks'	telići 'calves'

Most **Class II feminine nouns** have the vocative singular ending in **-o**, as indicated above.

- This includes **two-syllable proper names (both female and male)** which have a long-rising accent on the first syllable in the nominative singular: In the examples below, I indicated a long-rising accent with the capital letters. In the vocative, the first vowel changes to a long-falling accent.

nominative singular	NA Da , MI ca (female names)	JO va , PE ra (male names)
vocative singular:	Mi ro , Mico o	Jov o , Per o

- **Most other proper names** (both female and male) have the vocative ending in **-a**, just like the nominative:
female names: **Larisa**, **Marija**, **Vera** male names: **Nikola**, **Luka**
- However, **proper names ending in -ica that are three or more syllables long**, have the vocative ending in **-e**, not **-a** or **-o**.

nominative singular	Mar ica (female name)	Radoj ica (male name)
vocative singular:	Maric e	Radojic e

- And finally, **male denoting common nouns** that belong to this feminine class have either ending in **-a** (just like the nominative ending) or **-o**: Examples: **mušterij-a**, **mušterij-o** 'customer' **sudij-a**, **sudij-o** 'judge'