

GRAMMAR

1. Personal Pronouns

The subject of a sentence is often expressed with the help of subject pronouns, which are as follows:

minä	I	you	<i>sing.</i>
sinä		s/he, it	
hän, se		we	
me		you	<i>informal pl. and formal sing. and pl.</i>
te		they	
he			

As you can see, there are two words for 'you.' *Sinä* is used to address one person in an informal manner, e.g., when talking to family, friends, close acquaintances, children or young people. *Te* has several uses: it is used when talking to more than one person in an informal manner, as well as for more formal discourse, e.g., when talking to strangers or people to whom the speaker wants to show respect, in both the singular and plural. Notice that there is no difference between she and he, both are expressed by *hän*. An inanimate subject is expressed by the pronoun *se*. However, *se* also is used for referring to people in colloquial speech. If you have studied Germanic, Romance or Slavic languages, you will appreciate the fact that Finnish has no grammatical gender.

2. Verb Conjugation

Finnish verbs are in close agreement with the subject of the sentence. This means that verbs will take on different personal

endings depending on who or what the subject is. Therefore, unless they carry special emphasis, the pronouns *minä*, *sinä*, *me* and *te* typically are omitted in written Finnish, because the form of the verb clearly indicates about whom the speaker is talking. The pronouns are used commonly in spoken discourse, but *minä* and *sinä* are abbreviated to *mä* and *sä*.

In the glossary, you will find the basic (infinitive) form of every Finnish verb. In order to conjugate the verb in accordance with the subject, you have to follow the same procedure every time. First, you must locate the verb stem by detaching the ending of the infinitive. Then, you must add the appropriate personal ending required by the subject. To do this, you must learn to recognize infinitive endings, listed below. The two variants in each group are due to vowel harmony (see page 7).

Finnish verbs fall into four main groups, established on the basis of their infinitive.

Group	Infinitive ending	Example	Stem
I.	-a/-ä	puhua (to speak)	puhu-
II.	-da/-dä	saada (to get)	saa-
III.	-ta/-tä	haluta (to want)	halu-
IV.	-la/-lä, -na/-nä, -ra/-rä	tulla (to come)	tul-

Personal endings are added directly to the stems of Groups I and II verbs. In verbs belonging to Groups III and IV, an additional linking vowel (-a/-ä in Group III, -e in Group IV) is required before the actual ending.

The examples below illustrate the present tense of verbs in the different groups. For the sake of clarity, the personal endings (and the linking vowels in Groups III and IV) are separated by a hyphen from the infinitive stem.

Group I: puhua to speak

(minä) puhu-n	I speak	(me) puhu-mme	we speak
(sinä) puhu-t	you speak	(te) puhu-tte	you speak
hän puhu-u	s/he speaks	he puhu-vat	they speak

Group II: syödä to eat

(minä) syö-n	I eat	(me) syö-mme	we eat
(sinä) syö-t	you eat	(te) syö-tte	you eat
hän syö-	s/he eats	he syö-vät	they eat

Group III: haluta to want

(minä) halu-a-n	I want	(me) halu-a-mme	we want
(sinä) halu-a-t	you want	(te) halu-a-tte	you want
hän halu-a-a	s/he wants	he halu-a-vat	they want

Group IV: tulla to come

(minä) tul-e-n	I come	(me) tul-e-mme	we come
(sinä) tul-e-t	you come	(te) tul-e-tte	you come
hän tul-e-e	s/he comes	he tul-e-vat	they come

The s/he form lacks a personal ending; instead, the last vowel of the stem is lengthened. If the stem ends in a long vowel or a diphthong, it remains unchanged.

The "they" suffix has two variants (-vat/-vät), the use of which is governed by vowel harmony.

The system of verb tenses in Finnish is quite simple when compared to English. Since there is only one present tense, the verb forms above can mean different things in different contexts.

For example, *puhun* means 'I speak,' 'I am speaking,' 'I do speak,' 'I shall speak' and 'I will be speaking.'

The verb olla (to be)

Below are the different present tense forms of the verb 'olla' (to be). These forms are somewhat irregular. Since this is a very important and commonly used verb, it is a good idea to memorize them.

(minä) olen	I am
(sinä) olet	you are
hän on	s/he is
(me) olemme	we are
(te) olette	you are
he ovat	they are

The stem of this verb is *ole-*.

3. Asking and Answering Questions

When the sentence begins with a question word, the word order is the same as in statements (subject-verb):

Kuka sinä olet?	Who are you?
Missä asutte?	Where do you live?
Mitä opiskelet?	What are you studying?
Mikä tämä on?	What is this?

In yes or no questions, word order is reversed (verb-subject). The interrogative suffix *-ko* (or *-kö*) is attached to the particular

word at which the question is directed. Generally, the verb is the first element in these types of sentences.

- Puhutko Peter suomea? Does Peter speak Finnish?
 Oletko (sinä) suomalainen? Are you Finnish?
 Asutko (te) Helsingissä? Do you (all) live in Helsinki?
 Onko tämä auto? Is this a car?

Short affirmative answers are typically given by repeating the verb. This may be combined with *kyllä* for more emphasis. A short answer also may consist of *kyllä* by itself.

- Asutko Helsingissä? Asun./Kyllä asun.
 Puhutko englantia? Puhun./Puhun kyllä.

In colloquial speech, you will often hear *joo* meaning 'yes.' It comes from Swedish, along with many Finnish colloquialisms and slang expressions.

4. The Inflection of Nouns¹

In a Finnish dictionary, you will find the singular form of nouns. This is the basic form, used, with some exceptions, when the noun is the subject of the sentence. Finnish nouns have many different forms depending on their grammatical function in the sentence. Whereas grammatical relations in English commonly are expressed with the help of prepositions (*in* the house, *for* you, *at* the doctor's), Finnish uses suffixes, or case endings, attached to the stem of the noun. You will learn several of these suffixes in the following lessons. The difficulty is that suffixes cannot always attach to the basic form of the noun, but instead require that the noun undergo phonetic changes beforehand.

1. The same applies to adjectives as well. For simplicity, we will refer to nouns only in this explanation.

Consequently, suffixes can change the appearance of the noun radically, making it a little harder to find in the dictionary. But don't despair. These changes are, in most cases, very regular and predictable. Once you learn the main rules that govern them (see pages 7 to 8), it will seem like child's play. In addition, Appendix 1 lists the major inflectional types of nouns and their different stems. When you learn a new noun, you also should learn its principal forms, which determine to which inflectional group the noun belongs. In the glossary at the end of this book, the number after every noun indicates the inflectional group.

5. Suffixes

5.1 Case Suffixes (Preview)

In the following chapters, you will get to know the most common Finnish case suffixes. Here is a little sample to show how they work. One of the so-called local suffixes is *-ssa* (*-ssä*), which is used primarily to express that something is located in, at or inside of something or someplace.

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Asun kesustassa. | I live downtown. |
| (keskusta + <i>-ssa</i>) | |
| Opiskelen Suomessa. | I study in Finland. |
| (Suomi + <i>-ssa</i>) | |
| Olen työssä yliopistossa. | I work at the university. |
| (yliopisto + <i>-ssa</i>) | |

5.2 The Suffix *-lainen/-läinen*

This suffix is most commonly used to form adjectives from place names to express that someone or something comes from a certain place. The resulting adjective is never capitalized.

Amerikka (America)	amerikkalainen (American)
Englanti (England)	englantilainen (English)
Ranska (France)	ranskalainen (French)
Helsinki	helsinkiläinen (someone or something from or in Helsinki)
Tukholma (Stockholm)	tukholmalainen (someone or something from or in Stockholm)

This suffix is not used to designate the language of a country!

suomi or suomenkieli
ranska or ranskankieli

Finnish (language)
French (language)

5.3 The -kin suffix

This particle means *also* and is attached to the word to which it refers.

Minäkin olen opiskelija.
Puhun englantiaikin.

I am also a student.
I also speak English.

6. Numbers

The numbers from 1-10 are as follows:

1	yksi	6	kuusi
2	kaksi	7	seitsemän
3	kolme	8	kahdeksan
4	neljä	9	yhdeksän
5	viisi	10	kymmenen

For numbers between 11 and 19, add the suffix *-toista*:

11 yksitoista
12 kaksitoista, etc...

Numbers between 20 and 99 are formed with the help of the suffix *-kymmentä* as follows:

21 kaksi + kymmentä + yksi =
kaksikymmentäyksi
57 viisi + kymmentä + seitsemän =
viisikymmentäseitsemän
98 yhdeksän + kymmentä + kahdeksan =
yhdeksänkymmentäkahdeksan

100 sata
1000 tuhat
1000000 miljoona

No matter how long they are, numbers are always written as one word.

156 sataviisikymmentäkuusi
1342 tuhatkolmesataaneisjäkymmentäkaksi

Years always start with *tuhat* (or *kaksituhatta*). In Finnish, you cannot say 'nineteen(hundred) fifty', you must say 'one thousand nine hundred fifty':

1950 tuhatyhdeksänsataaviisikymmentä