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THE STORY OF THE THIRD CONJUGATION

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How does a student go from tetēgis in the text to tango in the dictionary? Verbs in the third conjugation often prove difficult even for intermediate and advanced Latin students. The other conjugations all form the perfect stem with a v infix, with or without the thematic vowel. Third conjugation verbs form their perfect stem in five ways. Three of these ways correspond to Greek; the fourth way is with the standard u/v infix; and the fifth way is with no stem-change at all. A complete overview of these five types may preemptively spare your students time and grief.

THREE TYPES OF GREEK-LIKE PERFECTS

The Greek-like perfects of third conjugation are formed:
(a) like a Greek aorist,
(b) like a Greek second aorist, or
(c) like a Greek perfect.

You do not have to know Greek for this to be helpful. It means that the general run of third conjugation verbs fall into one of three main sets:

Like Greek Type A above: Add s to stem (like a Greek first aorist). Examples:
cedo, cessi
scribo, scripsi
duco, duxi
figo, fixi
jingo, jinxi
iungo, iunxi

Like Greek Type B: Change stem vowel (like a Greek second aorist). Examples:
capio, cepi
facio, feci
tacio, teci
rumpo, rupi

Like Greek Type C: Reduplicate initial consonant (like a Greek perfect). This usually weakens the stem vowel. Examples:
curo, cucurri
pango, pepigi
parco, peperci
pario, peperti
pendo, pependi

A FOURTH TYPE: STANDARD U/V PERFECT STEM

Standard u/v perfect stem, as in first, second, and fourth conjugations, is used

1. If the present stem ends in -u, then the u doubles as the perfect stem. Such a verb gets a second-conjugation style perfect:

acuo, acure, acui
arguo, arguer, argui
moveo, movere, movi
nuo (and compounds) nuere, nui

2. If there is an inceptive (sc) infix. If the verbs with the inceptive -sc- infix (which are all third conjugation) have a perfect active form, (many have no perfect or a deponent perfect), then the inceptive is lost (in the perfect tense, of course, inceptive would not make sense):

ingenisco, ingenimicere, ingenui
advesperasco, advesperascere, (no perfect)

gnoco (and compounds), novi
adscisco, adscivi
rapio and elicio also mimic second conjugation: rapui, elucui.
cupio and sapio mimic fourth conjugation: cupivi, sapivi.

A FIFTH TYPE: -ND STEMS WITH NO CHANGE AT ALL

Third conjugation verbs in -nd undergo no change at all for their perfect stem:
defendo, defendi
scendo, scendi
tendo, tendi.

Here are some of the main third conjugation verbs sorted by manner of forming the perfect stem.

ADD S (Like Greek Aorist):
ango, angere, anxi
carpo, carpere, capsi, capptus
cedo, cedere, cessus [ac-, de-, in-, pro-, re-, se-]
cingo, ciangere, cixi, cinctus
cloado, claudere, clasti, clantus
cluado, cludere, clasti, clanu
confisco, confisere, confis 
dico, dicere, dixi, dictus
diligo, dilligere, dilexi, diletus
divido, dividere, divi, divisus
duco, ducere, dixi, ductus
existingo, exstingere, estinxu, estinxus [exc to -u base]
figo, figere, fixi, fixus
jingo, jingere, jixi, jicxus
flugo, fligere, flxi, flcxtus
flogo, fligere, flxi, flctic
fleco, fleitere, flexi, flectus
fluco, fluere, fluixu, fluictus
gero, gerere, gexi, gestus
tango, tangere, inxi, inctus
luado, luderi, lusti, lustus [all long]
mergo, mergere, mersi, mersus [emergo, submergo]
mitto, mitere, misi, misus
neglego, neglegere, neglexi, neglectus
pango, pangere, panxi, pinctus
parco, parcere, pepecri
peco, pectere, pexi, pexus [var. pexui]
pingo, pingere, pixi, picxus
pono, ponere, possi, positus [double perfect infix: im-, sup-]
promo, promere, presi, pressus
rego, regere, resi, rectus [ero, pergo, porrigor, surgor]
repo, repere, repsi, repertus [irrepo (inrepo) Cf. serpo]
scribo, scribere, scripsi, scriptus [de-, pro-, sub-
sermo, serpere, serps [same as repo] spargo, spargere, sparsi, sparsus
speng in compounds: dissipere]
-espicio, -spicare, -speri, -spectus
stringo, stingere, strixi, strictus [and compounds]
struo, strueri, structri, structus [exstruo, instru]
sumo, sumere, sumpsi, sumptus [sub-em]
tegeo, tegere, texi, rectus
traho, trahere, traxi, tractus [and -turo, -turne, -tassi, -tassus [cumubo, exuto, intru]
vado, vadere, vasti, vatus [in-, c- per-
veho, vehere, vexi, vectus
vivo, vivere, vivixi, victus [vigor]

CHANGE STEM VOWEL (Like Greek Second Aorist):
ago, agere, egi, actus
capio, capere, cepi, captus
cogo, cogere, corgi, coactus
fallo, gemo, perdo, posco, poscere, poposci
solvo, suo, sterno, consuesco, consuescere,
-statue,
vomo, vomere, vomui, vomitus, evomo

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Reduplication Initial Consonant (Like Greek Perfect):
caedi, caedere, cecidi,
bibo, bibere, bibi, bibitus
cado, cadere, cecci, cassus,
caeli, caedere, cecci, caesus
baho, fullere, fulli, fullus
parto, parere, peperi, partus
perdido, condendii, condidii, condidit
credito, credere, credidi, credidit
curro, currere, curruci, cursus
dedo, dedere, dedidi, deductus
dico, discere, didici, discituros
edo, edere, edidi, editus
fallo, fallere, fellii, fallus
tango, tangere, tettigi, tactus
tradidus, tradere, tradidi, traditus
vendo, vendere, vendidi, vendidit

Second Conjugation in Perfect (fall back to basic u/v infix):
acuo, acuere, acui, acutus
arguo, arguere, argui, argutus
alo, alere alui, alius
cerno, cernere, crevi, cretus
colo, colere, colui, cultus
congro, congnere, congrui
consulo, consulare, consului, consultus
elico, elicere, elicui, elicius
exo, exuere, exui, exutus

gemo, gemere, gemni
gigno, gignere, genui, genuitus
imbuo, imbure, imbui, imbuitus
incumbo, incumbere, incubui
luo, loere, luei, lutus
meta, metere, metui, metutus
minuo, minuere, minui, minuitus
nuo, nuere, nui, nutus
polluo, pollure, pollui, pollutus
rno, rure, rui [inrro]
solvo, sobere, solvi, solutus [exsolvo]
stinuere, stinuere, stituere, stituus
sto, stere, stravi, stratus
suo, suere, sui, sutus
tribuo, trubere, tribui, tributus
volo, velle [velere], voluei [ma-no-]
ovo, vomere, vomui, vomitus [evomo]

Inceptives:
consuesco, consuescere, consuevi, consuetus

Endnotes
1Given that u and v are really the same letter, the first, second, and fourth conjugations all have the same perfect: amo, amon, amum.
2The -d is assimilated to the s.
3Letter b before s is de-voiced (pronounced like a p).
4All of these lose their reduplication in compounds: contigui, defendi, and so on.
5Compounds of this verb are all third: condos, condere, condidi, trados, tradere, tradidi, and the like.

Thomas Winter taught his first Latin class in 1966, and is a second-year Russian student. Russian will be his ninth language.