You Can't Get There from Here: The Story of the Third Conjugation

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THE STORY OF THE THIRD CONJUGATION

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How does a student go from tettig 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
figo, fixi
fingo, fixi
iungo, iunxi

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

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

cayo, cayxi
arguo, arguere, argus
movo, movere, movi
nuo (and compounds) nuere, nu

A FOURTH TYPE: STANDARD U/V PERFECT STEM

Standard u/v perfect stem, as in first, second, and fourth conjunctions, 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:
anu, anuere, anu
arguo, arguere, argu
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):
ingemisco, ingemiscere, ingemnui
advesperasco, advesperascere, (no perfect)

A FIFTH TYPE: -ND STEM 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
carro, carpere, carpsi, carptus
cedo, cedere, cessus [ac-, de-, in-, pro-, re-, se-]
cingo, ciangere, cinxi, cinctus
tendo, tendere, tensus, tensus
tredo, tredere, trexi, tractus
cupio, cupere, cupis, cupidus
rapio, rapere, reptus, reptus
jingo, jingere, jinxi, jinctus
fingo, fingere, fingi, fictus
fago, fage, fisi, fictus
equo, equere, equus
nemti, nemere, nemi, nensus
trando, trare, traxi, tractus [and compounds]
trono, trase, traxi, tractus
vado, vadere, vasi, vatusus [in-, per-]
veho, vehe, vesi, vectus
vivo, vivere, vixi, victus [vigor]

CHANGE STEM VOWEL (Like Greek Second Aorist):
agog, agere, agi, actus
capio, capere, cepi, captus
cogo, cogere, cogi, coactus

gnuo (and compounds), novi
adscisco, adscivi
rapio and elicio also mimic second conjugation: rapui, eluici.
cupio and sapio mimic fourth conjugation: cupivi, sapivi.
polho, fallo, perdo, solvo, pendo, pario, suo, sterno, fzcndo, INCEPTIVES: nuo, alo, jkgio, fiango, facio, [dim]
vomo, volo, tribuo, tribuere, tribui, tributus [at-, con-, re-]
volo, velle [velere], volui [ma-no-]
vo mo, vome re, vomi, vomitus [evomo]
INCEPTIVES:
consus esco, consuses cere, consuevi, consuetus
-crebroso, -crebescere, -crebui cresco, crescre, crevi, cretus dilucoesco, dilucere, diluxi floresco, florescere, florui [floreo, flore (g)]nosco, (g)noscere, (g)novi, (g)notus [G visible in compounds: hebesco, hebescere ignosco, cognosco, praegnosco] ingemisco, ingemiscere, ingemui ingrasvexo, ingrascere mutesco, mutescere, mutsi obsoleuco, obsolevse, obsolevi, obsoleutus obtipseos, obtispescere, obistpiui, obstrepo, obstrere, obstrepu pasco, pascre, pavi, pastus percallesco, percallescere, percallui perhorresco, perhorrescere, perhorruui quiesco, quiesscere, quiere, quietursus tabesco, tabescere, tabui FOURTH CONJUGATION IN PERFECT arcesco, arcessere, arcessivi capio, cupere, cupivi, cupitus lacesco, laccseere, lacciessi peto, petere, petivi, petus [re-] quaevo, quaerere, quasivesi, quasitas [ae = i in compounds: exquiso] sapio, sapere, sapivi sino, sinere, sitvi, situs SAME STEM AS PRESENT:
defendo, defendere, defendi, defendens [offendo] incendco, incendere, incendi, incensu ico, icere, ici, icus prehendo, prehendere, prehendi, prehensus scendo, scandere, scendi, tendo, tendere, tendi, tentus vello, vellere, velli, volsus [divello] -vertere, verti, versus [ante-, a-] SOME FINAL NOTES 1. A few high-frequency verbs are third declension in the perfect but pass for first, second, or fourth conjugation verbs. Examples: in first conjugation, do, dare, dedi and sto, stare, steti are Type C; in the second conjugation, maneo, manere, manus is Type A; in the fourth, venio, venire veni is Type B. 2. The most frequent i-stems (facio, capio, iacio, fugio and their compounds) are Type B (vowel change like Greek second aorist): feci, cepi, ieci, fugi. Some fall into two camps at once: The compounds of -spicio are Type A and B (-spexi). In sum, when a third conjugation verb leads your students to "dictionary look-up" problems, they will feel stymied. A student who knows there is a problem is a student who is ready to learn the solution, and you will be able to lay out the whole system, and to good effect.

ENDNOTES 1 Given that u and v are really the same letter, the first, second, and fourth conjugations all have the same perfect: amas, mons, musiv. 2 The -d is assimilated to the s. 3 Letter b before s is d-voiced (pronounced like a p). 4 All of these lose their reduplication in compounds: contigi, dependi, and so on. 5 Compounds of this verb are all third: condio, condere, condidi, tradio, 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.