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YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE: THE STORY OF THE THIRD CONJUGATION

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How does a student go from *tetigit* 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.¹ 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*²
*scribo, scripsi*³
duco, duxi
figo, fixi
tingo, tinxi
iungo, iunxi

Like Greek Type B: Change stem vowel (like a Greek second aorist). Examples:

capio, cepi
facio, feci
iacio, ieci
rumpo, rupi

Like Greek Type C: Reduplicate initial consonant (like a Greek perfect).⁴ This usually weakens the stem vowel. Examples:

curro, cucurri
pango, pepigi
parco, peperci
pario, peperci
pendo, pependi
tango, tetigi

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, acuere, acui
arguo, arguere, 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):

ingemisco, ingemiscere, ingemui
advesperasco, advesperascere, (no perfect)

gnosco (and compounds), *novi*

adscisco, adscivi

rapio and *elicio* also mimic second conjugation: *rapui, elicui*.
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, carpsi, carptus
cedo, cedere, cessi, cessurus [ac-, de-, in-, pro-, re-, se-]
cingo, cingere, cinxi, cinctus
claudio, claudere, clausi, clausus
cludo, cludere, clusi, clusus
confido, confidere, confisus sum
dico, dicere, dixi, dictus
diligo, diligere, dilexi, dilectus
divido, dividere, divisi, divisus
duco, ducere, duxi, ductus
extinguo, extinguere, extinxi, extinctus [exc to -u base]
figo, figere, fixi, fixus
tingo, tingere, tinxi, tinctus
-fligo, -fligere, -flixi, -flictus
flecto, flectere, flexi, flectus
fluo, fluere, fluxi, fluctus
gero, gerere, gessi, gestus
iungo, iungere, iunxi, iunctus
ludo, ludere, lusi, lusus [all long]
mergo, mergere, mersi, mersus [emerge, submerge]
mitto, mittere, misi, missus
neglego, neglegere, neglexi, neglectus
pango, pangere, panxi, panctus
parco, parcere, peperci,
pecto, pectere, pexi, pexus [var. *pexui*]
pingo, pingere, pinxi, pictus
pono, ponere, posui, positus [double perfect infix. im-, sup-]
premo, premere, pressi, pressus
rego, regere, rexi, rectus [erego, pergo, porrigo, surgo]
repo, repere, repsi, repturus [irrepo (inrepo) Cf. serpo]
scribo, scribere, scripsi, scriptus [de-, pro-, sub]
serpo, serpere, serpsi [same as repo?] *spargo, spargere, sparsi, sparsus*
[sperg in compounds: *dispergo*]
-spicio, -spicere, -spexi, -spectus
stringo, stingere, strinxi, strictus [and compounds]
struo, struere, stuxi, structus [exstruo, instruo]
sumo, sumere, sumpsit, sumptus [sub-emo]
tego, tegere, texi, tectus
traho, trahere, traxi, tractus [and
-uro, -urere, -ussi, -ustus [combuo, exuro, inuro]
vado, vadere, vasi, vasurus [in-, e-, per-]
veho, vehere, vexi, vectus
vivo, vivere, vixi, victus [vigor]

CHANGE STEM VOWEL (Like Greek Second Aorist):

ago, agere, egi, actus
capio, capere, cepi, captus
cogo, cogere, coegi, coactus

emo, emere, emi, emptus [inter-, per-, red-, e=i in compounds:
redimo, redemi]
facio, facere, feci, factus [fic in compounds: *perficio, perfecī*]
fero, ferre, tuli, latus
frango, frangere, fregi, fractus [a=i in compounds: *infringo*]
fugio, fugere, fugi
fundo, fundere, fudi, fusus
iacio, iacere, ieci, iactus
lego, legere, legi, lectus [lig in compounds: *eligo, elegi*]
lino, linere, levi, litus [oblino]
linquo, linquere, liqui, lictus [de-, re-]
pello, pellere, puli, pulsus [de-, re-]
percello, percellere, perculi
retundo, retundere, retudi, retusus
rumpo, rumpere, rupi, ruptus
-sido, -sidere, -sedi, sessurus [in-, prae-, sub-]
vinco, vincere, vici, victus

REDUPLICATE INITIAL CONSONANT (Like Greek Perfect):

bibo, bibere, bibi, bibitus
cado, cadere, cecidi, casurus, [compounds short i: *concido, excido*]
caedi, caedere, cecidi, caesus [compounds long i: *concido, excido*]
cano, canere, cecini, cantus
condo, condere, condidi, conditus [re-]
credo, credere, credidi, creditus
curro, currere, cucurri, cursus [re-]
dedo, dedere, dedidi, deditus
disco, discere, didici, disciturus
edi, edere, edidi, editus
fallo, fallere, fefelli, falsus
pario, parere, peperī, partus
pendo, pendere, pependi, pensus
perdo, perdere, perdidī, perditus
posco, poscere, poposci
pungo, pungere, pupugi, punctus
reddo, reddere, redidi, reditus
sisto, -sistere, -stiti, [reduplicated *sto*, de-, in-]
tango, tangere, tetigi, tactus [a=i in compounds: *contingo*]
trado, tradere, tradidi, traditus
vendo, vendere, vendidi, venditus

SECOND CONJUGATION IN PERFECT (fall back to basic u/v infix):

acuo, acuere, acui, acutus
arguo, arguere, argui, argutus
alo, alere alui, altus
cerno, cernere, crevi, cretus [de-, se-]
colo, colere, colui, cultus [re-]
congruo, congruere, congrui
consulo, consulere, consului, consultus
elicio, elicere, elicui, elicitus
exuo, exuere, exui, exutus [opp. *induo*]
gemo, gemere, gemui
gigno, gignere, genui, genitus [reduplicated gen]
imbuo, imbuere, imbui, imbutus
incumbo, incumbere, incubui
luo, luere, lui, lutus [*diluo, eluo*]
metuo, metuere, metui, metutus
minuo, minuere, minui, minutus [compounds: *diminuo, imminuo*]
nuo, nuere, nui, nutus [ab-, ad-]
polluo, polluere, pollui, pollutus
ruo, ruere, rui [*inruo*]
solvo, solvere, solvi, solutus [*exsolvo*]
-statuo, -statuere, -statui, stitutus [a = i in compounds: *constituo*]
sterno, sternere, stravi, stratus
suo, suere, sui, sutus [*insuo*]
tribuo, tribuere, tribui, tributus [at-, con-, re-]
volo, velle [*velere*], *volui* [ma- no-]
vomo, vomere, vomui, vomitus [*evomo*]

INCEPTIVES:

consuesco, consuescere, consuevi, consuetus

-crebresco, -crebrescere, -crebui
cresco, crescere, crevi, cretus
dilucesco, diluescere, diluxi
floresco, florescere, florui [*floreo, florre*]
(g)nosco, (g)noscere, (g)novi, (g)notus [G visible in compounds:
hebesco, hebescere
ignosco, cognosco, praegnosco]
ingemisco, ingemiscere, ingemui
ingravesco, ingravescere
mutesco, mutescere, mutui
obsolesco, obsolescere, obsolevi, obsoletus
obstipesco, obstipescere, obstipui
obstrepo, obstrepere, obstrepui
pasco, pascere, pavi, pastus
percallesco, percallescere, percallui
perhorresco, perhorrescere, perhorruī
quiesco, quiescere, quievi, quieturus
tabesco, tabescere, tabui

FOURTH CONJUGATION IN PERFECT

arcesso, arcessere, arcessivi
cupio, cupere, cupivi, cupitus
laccio, lacessere, lacessivi
peto, petere, petivi, petitus [re-]
quaero, quaerere, quaesivi, quaesitus [ae = i in compounds: *exquiro*]
sapio, sapere, sapivi
sino, sinere, sivi, situs

SAME STEM AS PRESENT:

defendo, defendere, defendi, defensus [*offendo*]
incendo, incendere, incendi, incensus
ico, icere, ici, ictus
prehendo,prehendere,prehendi,prehensus
scendo, scendere, 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*⁵ and *sto, stare, steti* are Type C; in the second conjugation, *maneo, manere, mansi* 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

¹Given that u and v are really the same letter, the first, second, and fourth conjugations all have the same perfect: *amav, monv, muniv*.

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: *contigi, dependi*, and so on.

⁵Compounds of this verb are all third: *condo, condere, condidi, trado, 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.