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Overview of Finnish

Tervetuloa!

Welcome and congratulations on your choice to learn Finnish! This Grammar Basics help file will serve as your introduction to the most basic aspects of Finnish grammar. This overview will give you some more information about this exciting and different language.

Finnish is part of the Finno-Ugrian group of languages. This group of languages covers the territory from Norway into Siberia and down to the Carpathian Mountains. Hungarian and Estonian are also part of the Finno-Ugrian group. Finnish is spoken by approximately five million people, mostly in Finland but also in Sweden and in the United States.

Finnish is a phonetic language. Each letter represents one sound. However there are long and short vowels as well as long and short consonants.

Two things you will not need to learn are gender and articles, Finnish does not have either.

A defining characteristic of the language is inflection, endings and cases are added to words to show their grammatical function. This is the reason why some Finnish words are so long.

Finnish has many cases. Cases change the form of nouns and pronouns to show their relation to other words. Case is discussed in this help file, but briefly. Case information is not given in the grammatical annotation of the Title. At this stage, it is more important to focus on vocabulary, speaking and understanding. After using this Title for a time, you may want to further explore Finnish grammar and the cases alone will give you plenty to study!

Alphabet and Pronunciation

A	a
B	b
C	c
D	d
E	e
F	f
G	g
H	h
I	i
J	j
K	k
L	l
M	m
N	n
O	o
P	p
Q	q
R	r
S	s
T	t
U	u
V	v
X	x
Y	y
Z	z
Å	å
Ä	ä
Ö	ö

Finnish is a phonetic language. Each letter is represented by only one sound and each sound corresponds to only one letter.

VOWELS

All of the vowels can appear in short or long form, e.g. **a** or **aa**, **u** or **uu** etc.

It is important to distinguish between the long and short forms, both in spelling and pronunciation.

tuli	fire
tuuli	wind

Vowels can also be combined together. These combinations are called diphthongs. The two vowel sounds are pronounced one after another as a continuous sound.

paikka (place)
pieni (small)
koulu (school)
käydä (work)
löyly (steam)

CONSONANTS

All of the consonants can also appear in short or long form **except for d, h, v, and j**. In the long form, e.g. **kauppa**, **kortti**, **lippu**, make sure to pronounce both consonants.

It is important to distinguish between the long and the short forms both in spelling and pronunciation.

tuli	fire	kylä	village
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tulli customs

kyllä

yes

Letters b, c, d, f, g, q, x, and z are non-native consonants which appear only in loan-words. Finnish is gaining a lot more loan-words especially from English:

bestselleri, **c**amping-alue, **f**ax, and **x**erox-kopio

STRESS

The stress is always on the **first syllable** of a word.

kirja (book)

tyttö (girl)

Mikko

Helsinki

In a compound word, which is a word formed from two different words, the stress is on the first syllable of both components.

kirjoitusk**o**ne (typewriter)

luottok**o**rtti (credit card)

matkav**a**kuutus (travel insurance)

Nouns

A noun is a word that names a person, place, action, thing, or idea.

Pekka (Pekka is a male's name)

Helsinki (Helsinki is the capital of Finland)

talo (house)

Finnish is a gender free language like English.

Unlike English, where nouns are sometimes preceded by the articles a, an, or the, Finnish does not have articles at all.

Lentolippu a flight ticket

Juna a train

However, Finnish nouns are inflected, the form of the noun changes to show grammatical function. There are four suffixes that can be added to a noun, they will always follow the same order:

number + case + possessive + particle

See Also:

[Suffixes](#)

Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that stands for a previously mentioned or understood noun.

Pronouns can be used in various ways: as the subject of a verb or as the object of a verb. Like nouns, pronouns are inflected to show their grammatical function

Subject Pronouns are in the nominative case:

minä	I
sinä	you
hän	he/she
me	we
te	you (plural)
he	they

Object Pronouns are in the accusative or partitive case:

accusative	partitive	
minut	minua	me
sinut	sinua	you
hänet	hantä	him/her
meidät	meitä	us
teidät	teitä	you (plural)
heidät	heitä	them

Possessive Pronouns are in the genitive case:

minun	mine
sinun	yours
hänen	his/hers
meidän	ours
teidän	yours (plural)
heidän	theirs

The complete list of the other pronouns:

tämä	this
tuo	that
se	it
nämä	these
nuo	those
ne	they (unanimated)
kuka	who
ken	who
kumpi	which one
joka	which
eräs	one

See Also:

[Suffixes](#)

Interrogatives

To form a question from a **pronoun** an interrogative suffix **ko/-kö** is added to the pronoun.

Minä**kö**? Do you mean me?
Tämä**kö**? Do you mean this one?

To form a question from an **adjective** an interrogative suffix **ko/-kö** is added to the adjective.

Amerikkalainen**ko**? Is he/she American?
Sininen**kö**? Is it the blue one?

Adjectives

An adjective is a word that limits or qualifies a noun or other substantive.

Adjectives agree with nouns in number, and they precede the noun: **iso** (big)

Iso talo	a big house
Isot talot	big houses

Talo on iso.	The house is big.
Talot ovat isoja.	The houses are big.

Finnish adjectives are also inflected according to the case of the noun it qualifies.

Iso issa talo issa	in the big houses
Iso ihin talo ihin	to the big houses

See Also:

[Suffixes](#)

Adverbs

An adverb is a word used to modify a verb, adverb, or adjective by expressing time, place, manner, degree, cause etc.

Many adverbs can be formed from adjectives by adding a suffix **sti** to the adjective, however, the consonants are subject to change, and the vowel changes apply before this ending.

Nopea	fast	hidas	slow
Nope asti	fast	hita asti	slowly

See Also:
[Adjectives](#)

Suffixes

Suffixes are a feature of the Finnish language that make it unique. They are the cases and endings that are added to words that exemplify a word's grammatical function. There are four types of suffixes: **number, case, possessive and particle.**

Number

Finnish has two forms, singular and plural.

The plural nominative ending is **t**.

auto	(car)	autot	(cars)
talo	(house)	talot	(houses)
lippu	(ticket)	liput	(tickets)

This form is the equivalent of the English definite plural. The ending **t** is added to the main body of the word. If there are any consonants that are subject to the consonant gradation, they change, and the vowel changes apply before this ending.

kirja	a book	kirjat	the books
pankki	a bank	pankit	the banks
kirje	a letter	kirjeet	the letters
nainen	a woman	naiset	the women

The plural for other cases is **-i**.

Case

There are sixteen cases in Finnish language.

The **nominative case** is the basic form. When you look up a word in the dictionary, you will be looking up the nominative form. Other case endings are added to this form.

talo	house
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The **genitive case** shows possession, as in "Saana's cat" or "the name **of the restaurant**". The genitive case ending is usually **-n**.

talon	of the house
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Many of the things which in English are expressed with preposition, in Finnish are expressed with different cases (elative, inessive, illative, adessive, ablative, allative, essive and translative are a few).

junassa	in a train
lapsena	as a child

Possessive

When you need to indicate that something is yours, you can use endings, which are called **possessive suffixes**. They perform the same function as the words *my, your, his, her, our, and their* in English. The possessive suffixes are:

-ni	my
-si	your (singular, informal)
-nsa/-nsä	his/her
-mme	our
-nne	your (plural, formal)
-nsa/-nsä	their

passini	my passport
passisi	your passport

passinsa	his/her passport
passimme	our passport
passinne	your passport
passinsa	their passport

The possessive suffix is added to the very end of the word. If the word has a case ending, the possessive suffix is added after the case ending.

Lipu|ssani in my ticket auto|stanne from your car

The possessive pronouns are used with the possessive suffix in the spoken language.

Minun ystäväni	my friend
Sinun ystäväsi	your friend
Hänen ystävänsä	his/her friend
Meidän ystävämmme	our friend
Teidän ystäväanne	your friend (plural, formal)
Heidän ystävänsä	their friend

There are some useful expressions using this structure with the verb:

Infinitive verb + kse + possessive suffix
Tietää + kse + ni tietääkseni

Tietääkseni	as far as I know
Muistaakseni	as far as I can remember
Totta puhuakseni	to tell you the truth
Tietääkseni	as far as I know

Particle

In Finnish grammar adverbs, postpositions (acts as a preposition, but is attached to the end of a word), prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections form a group called **particles**.

See Also:

[Prepositions and Postpositions](#)

Verbs: Tense and Mood

A verb expresses action, existence, or occurrence.

In the dictionary a verb is listed in its infinitive form. The infinitive form is the basic form of the verb without inflection. The infinitive can be inflected to show **mood** and **tense**.

Moods:

Indicative: expresses objective statements and questions

The indicative mood has a variety of **tenses**.

Present: expresses something happening presently. All verbs form to pronouns and adopt personal endings.

Laula/a (to sing)

Laulan	I sing
Laulat	you sing
Laulaa	he/she sings
Laulamme	we sing
Laulatte	you sing (plural, polite)
Laulavat	they sing

Past (Imperfect): expresses an event that occurred at a particular time in the past. The imperfect tense is marked by **I**, which is added before the personal ending. Sometimes the vowel *i* can cause other vowels to change when added.

Oi/la (to be)

tul/la (to come)

Present	past	present	past
Olen	olin	tulen	tulin
Olet	olit	tulet	tulit
On	oli	tulee	tuli
Olemme	olimme	tulemme	tulimme
Olette	olitte	tulette	tulitte
Ovat	olivat	tulevat	tulivat

To express the negative of the past tense, the past participle is used together with the negative verb **ei** which agrees with the pronoun.

En ollut	I was not
Et ollut	you were not
Ei ollut	he/she was not
Emme olleet	we were not
Ette olleet	they were not
Eivät olleet	they were not

Perfect: expresses an event that occurred in the past, without a fixed time to it. It expresses both to have done and to have been doing. The auxiliary verb is **olla** (to be). The past participle ending is **nut/-nyt** in the singular and **neet** in the plural.

Olen asunut	I have lived
Olet asunut	you have lived
On asunut	he/she has lived
Olemme asuneet	we have lived
Olette asuneet	you have lived
Ovat asuneet	they have lived

Negative perfect tense for **syö/dä** (to eat)

En ole syö nyt	I have not eaten
Et ole syö nyt	you have not eaten
Ei ole syö nyt	he/she has not eaten
Emme ole syö neet	we have not eaten
Ette ole syö neet	you have not eaten
Eivät ole syö neet	they have not eaten

Pluperfect: expresses a past event that preceded another event, also in the past. The pluperfect tense means both I had lived and I had been living. The auxiliary verb **olla** (to be) is in the past tense. The participle ending **nut/-nyt** in singular or **neet** in plural is added to the stem of the infinitive.

Olin asunut	I had lived
Olit asunut	You had lived
Oli asunut	he/she had lived
Olimme asuneet	we had lived
Olitte asuneet	you had lived
Olivat asuneet	they had lived

Negative pluperfect tense for **matkusta/a** (to travel)

En ollut matkustanut	I had not traveled
Et ollut matkustanut	you had not traveled
Ei ollut matkustanut	he/she had not traveled
Emme olleet matkustaneet	we had not traveled
Ette olleet matkustaneet	you had not traveled
Eivät olleet matkustaneet	they had not traveled

Future: expresses an event that will happen. There is no separate future tense in Finnish. The present tense **olen** means both I am and I will be. The future is indicated in the context with an expression referring to the future.

ylihuomenna (a day after tomorrow)

tunnin kuluttua (after an hour)

pian (soon)

Conditional: expresses a future event from an orientation in the past. The conditional is formed by adding a suffix **isi** before the personal ending to the third person singular form of the verb in present tense.

Infinitive	3d person	conditional
Ymmärtää (to understand)	ymmärtää	ymmärtä isi
Vaihtaa (to exchange)	vaihtaa	vaihta isi
Ostaa (to buy)	ostaa	osta isi

Ostais in	I would buy
Ostais it	you would buy
Ostais i	he/she would buy
Ostais imme	we would buy
Ostais itte	you would buy
Ostais ivat	they would buy

Negative conditional form for **soitta|a** (to call)

En soittaisi	I would not call
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Et soittaisi	you would not call
Ei soittaisi	he/she would not call
Emme soittaisi	we would not call
Ette soittaisi	you would not call
Eivät soittaisi	they would not call

Conditional Perfect: expresses something that should have been done, but has not yet. The conditional perfect is formed with the conditional of the auxiliary verb **olla** (to be) with the past participle of the verb.

Vara|ta (to reserve)

Olisin varannut	I would have reserved
Olisit varannut	you would have reserved
Olisi varannut	he/she would have reserved
Olisimme varanneet	we would have reserved
Olisitte varanneet	you would have reserved
Olisivat varanneet	they would have reserved

Imperative Mood: expresses a command. Imperative form is also used to make a polite request in combination with please **ole hyvä** (singular), or **olkaa hyvä** (plural).

The singular form or the familiar form is the same as the stem of the present tense of the verb without a personal ending. The easiest way is to take the first person singular and drop its **n** ending.

Tule/n	-> tule!	Come!
Kirjoita/n	-> kirjoita!	Write!

To tell someone not to do something, simply add the word dont **älä** in front:

Älä tule!	Dont come!
Älä kirjoita!	Dont write!

The plural and polite request is formed from the infinitive of the verb by dropping the infinitive ending, and adding the ending **-kaa/-kää**.

Kirjoitta/a	Kirjoittakaa!	Write!
Etsi/ä	Etsikää	Search!

It is polite to add please **ole hyvä** (singular) or **olkaa hyvä** (plural) either before or after the verb.

Ole hyvä ja lue!	Read, please!
Istukaa, olkaa hyvä!	Sit down, please!

The negative imperative is formed by changing the **kaa/-kää** to **ko/-kö** and adding **älkää** in front of the verb.

Älkää istuko!	Dont sit down!
Älkää tupakoiko!	Dont smoke!

See Also:

[Verbs: Person and Number](#)

Verbs: Person and Number

In Finnish, the personal endings of the verbs always indicate the subject. Therefore, it is not always necessary to add the personal pronouns, although it is common to do so especially in the spoken Finnish. The third person singular pronoun **hän** (he/she) is used to refer human beings, and the pronoun **se** (it) to refer to things and inanimate objects.

Infinitive endings:

Saapu/a	to arrive
Saavun	I arrive
Saavut	you arrive
Saapuu	he/she/it arrives
Saavumme	we arrive
Saavutte	you arrive
Saapuvat	they arrive

In Finnish the word **ei** (no) has endings like a verb.

En ole	I am not
Et ole	you are not
Ei ole	he/she/it is not
Emme ole	we are not
Ette ole	you are not
Eivät ole	they are not

Finnish has no separate verb for **to have**. The verb to be **olla** is used together with the adessive case **lla/-llä** to express to have. The adessive ending is added to the word indicating who has, it is followed by **on** (the third person of the verb olla).

Minulla on	I have
Sinulla on	you have
Hänellä on	he/she has
Sillä on	it has
Meillä on	we have
Teillä on	you have
Heillä on	they have
Minulla ei ole	I have not
Sinulla ei ole	you have not
Hänellä ei ole	he/she has not
Sillä ei ole	it has not
Meillä ei ole	we have not
Teillä ei ole	you have not
Heillä ei ole	they have not

See Also:

[Verbs: Tense and Mood](#)

Prepositions & Postpositions

Finnish uses endings to express many of the things which in English are expressed with prepositions. They are called case endings. Furthermore, there is a group of words that have a meaning of a preposition, however, they come after the word. These words are called

postpositions:

vieressä	next to
edessä	in front of
takana	behind
lähellä	close to
ohi	past
kanssa	with
yli	over
välissä	between
luokse	over to
ohella	alongside

A noun or a pronoun is in a genitive case when used with a postposition.

Minun vieressä	next to me
Talon takana	behind the house

There are very few **prepositions** in Finnish. Among the few are:

Ennen	before
Kohti	toward

A noun or a pronoun is in a partitive case when used with a preposition.

Ennen yhdeksää	before nine
Kohti seinää	toward the wall

Conjunctions

A conjunction is an uninflected word used to connect words, phrases, clauses and sentences.

Most used Finnish conjunctions are:

mutta but
jotta in order that
kun when
koska because
sillä for
että that
jos if
vaan but

