THE ABLATIVE

The Ablative Case is characterized by three broad uses: 1) **Separation** (*from*); 2) **Instrumentality or Means** (*by, with*); 3) **Locality** (*at* or *in* a *place* or *time*).[1]

I. Separative Ablative (*ablativus separativus*)

A. Ablative with Separative Prepositions, Verbs and Adjectives.

1. The ablative is used with separative prepositions *ā, ab* (*abs*), *dē, ex, sine*.
   - *Ab* or *a* to denote personal agent in the passive voice (*from whom or which* the action proceeds): *ab elephantīs obtrītī*, trampled by elephants. (Cf. I.E.2)
     - But the ablative of means (always *without* a preposition) is used to denote the instrument by which an action is performed: *Marcus gladiō interfectus est*. (Cf. II.A.1)
   - *Ab, a* or *ex* to express *point of view from which*: *ā tergo*, from the rear; *ā latere*, from the side; *ex hāc parte*, on this side.
   - *De* or *ex* to show *condition or situation from which*: *ex vinculīs causam dīcere*, to plead a cause in chains; *fiērī dē rhētore cōnsul*, to become consul from professor.
   - *Ex* to show *material of which a thing is made*: *pōcula ex aurō*, cups of (= made from) gold. (The preposition in this use is freely omitted by poets).
   - The ablative is always used with *cōram, palam, prae*, and *prō*. The original idea was one of separation: *cōram*, in the presence of, *prō*, in front of, etc.

2. Verbs meaning "keep away from, free from, deprive, lack," etc. take the ablative. The preposition (if used) is *ab, dē*, or *ex*.
   - A preposition is typically used with verbs of literal separation. But if the verb itself contains a separative preposition (*ab, dē*, or *ex*), the preposition is often omitted:
     ab urbe proficīscī, to set out from the city
     castrīs ēgressī or *ē castrīs ēgressī*, going out of the camp
   - The preposition is regularly omitted with verbs of figurative separation only:
     magistrātū sē abdicāvit, he abdicated his office (literally: " . . . himself from . . .")
     proeliō supersedēre, to refrain from battle

3. Adjectives of separation denoting "freedom from" or "want of" take the ablative, with or without *ab*.
   - In Cicero, these adjectives are *līber*, free; *pūrus*, pure; *nūdus*, stripped; *orbus*, bereft; *vacuus*, empty.
   - In later poetry and prose, these adjectives may take the genitive, in analogy to adjectives with the objective genitive.

B. Ablative with Verbs and Adjectives of Difference or Aversion

Verbs and adjectives of difference or aversion take the ablative with *ab*.
ab eō dissentiō, I disagree with him
abhorret ā meīs mōribus, it is foreign to my ways
Aliēnus may take or omit the preposition: *aliēnum dignitāte imperī*.
Aliēnus may also take a genitive or dative.
Late writers freely employ the dative with these verbs.

---

[1]No system has fully categorized the wide variety of uses of the ablative. This system is adopted from Greenough's *New Latin Grammar*, with borrowings from Hale & Buck's *A Latin Grammar* and Bradley's revision of Arnold's *Latin Prose Composition*.

3. Certain ablatives of comparison are used for brevity in place of clauses:

opīniōne, spē, solitō, dictō, aequō, crēdibilī, iūstō, exspectātiōne, necessāriō

> *celerius opīniōni*, sooner than expected
> *sērius spe omnium*, later than all hoped.
> *amnis solitō citātior*, a stream swifter than usual
> *gravius aequō*, more seriously than was right
> *longius necessārio*, farther than was necessary

II. Instrumental Ablative (*ablativus instrumentalis*)

A. Ablative of Means

1. The ablative of means denotes the means or instrument of an action.

> *meīs labōribus rem pūblicam līberāvī*, by my toils I have saved the state
> *gladiīs pugnātum est*, the battle was fought with swords
> *litterīs certior fiēbat*, he was informed by (means of) dispatches
>> But means may also be expressed by *per* + accusative: *cōnsuluistī mē per litterās*, you consulted me by letter.

2. The ablative is used with verbs and adjectives of filling, abounding, etc.

> *Deus bonīs omnibus explēvit mundum*, God has filled the world with all good things
> *opīmus praedā*, rich with spoils
> *vīta plēna et cōnferta voluptātibus*, a life filled and crowded with delights

3. The deponents *ūtor, fruor, fungor, potior, vescor* (with their compounds) govern the ablative.

> *Potior* sometimes takes the genitive, as in *potīrī rērum*, to be master of affairs.

4. *Opus est* and *ūsus est* (impersonal expressions) take an ablative of the thing needed.

> *magistrātibus opus est*, there is need of magistrates
> *nunc vīribus ūsus est*, now there is need of strength
>> But the ablative with *ūsus* is rare in classical prose.
> *Opus* is often used as a predicate, with the thing needed in the nominative as subject.
> *dux nōbis opus est*, we need a leader

B. Ablative of Manner (*ablativus modi*)

1. The manner in which an action is performed is expressed by the ablative, with *cum* if no adjective is present. If an adjective modifies the noun, *cum* is optional but, if used, is placed between adjective and noun.

> *cum celeritāte vēnit*, he came with speed
> *magnā celeritāte vēnit*, he came with great speed
> *magnā cum celeritāte vēnit*, he came with great speed

2. Certain words regularly take the ablative without preposition, having the force practically of adverbs:

> *casū*, by chance   *iūre*, rightly
> *cōnsiliō*, by design   *iniūriā*, unjustly
> *cōnsultō*, deliberately *silentiō*, silently
> *forte*, by chance   *vī*, by force
> *fraude*, deceitfully

E. Ablative of Quality (Descriptive Ablative)

1. Quality may be denoted by the ablative + adjective or genitive modifier.

   animō meliōre sunt gladiātōrēs, the gladiators are of a better mind

   vir summō ingeniō, a man of the greatest genius

   mulier eximiā pulchritūdine, a woman of rare beauty

2. Physical qualities are often denoted by this use of the ablative.

   capillō sunt prōmissō, they have long hair

   ut capite opertō sit, to have his head covered

F. Ablative of Price, Value, or Penalty (*ablativus pretii*)

1. The definite price of an object is put in the ablative.

   agrum vēndidit sēstertium sex mīlibus, he sold the land for 6,000 sesterces

2. An indefinite price may be expressed by the ablative.

   magnō ēmerat, he had bought at a high price

   nōn nihilō aestimandum, not to be reckoned as worthless

   parvō pretiō redēmpta, bought at a low price

      The genitive is also often used in this construction.

3. With verbs of exchanging, either the thing obtained or the thing given may be in the ablative.

   fidem suam pecūniā commūtat, he barters his faith for money

   exsilium patriā sēde mūtāvit, he exchanged his native land for exile

4. Verbs of punishing or fining may take the ablative.

   capite pūnīrētur, he is punished with death

   multātōs agrīs, mulcted of their fields.

      Verbs of condemning regularly take a Genitive of Penalty (e.g., *capitis damnāre*), but occasionally the ablative, especially with *capite.*

G. Ablative of Specification (*ablativus limitationis*)

1. The ablative is used to denote that *in respect to which* anything is or is done.

   virtūte praecēdunt, they excel in courage

   claudus alterō pede, lame in one foot

   maior nātū, older

   paulum aetāte prōgressus, somewhat advanced in age

2. Similar is the use of the ablative to express that *in accordance with which* anything is or is done.

   meō iūre, with perfect right

   meā sententiā, in my opinion

3. The adjectives *dīgnus* and *indīgnus* take the ablative.

   suppliciō dignus, worthy of punishment

   indigna homine līberō, unworthy of a free man

      The gentive is sometimes seen in poetry and colloquial usage. (Cf. III.D.3).

2. The following Locative Ablatives are used by Cicero without a preposition:

dextrā, on the right

laevā, sinistrā, on the left

corpore, on or in the body

animō, animīs, in mind (but *in animō* with *est* and *habeō*)

memoriā, in or within the memory

linguā, in the language

nōmine, under the name

speciē, under the pretext

lēge, condicione, under the condition

C. Ablative of Time at or within Which (*ablativus temporis*)

1. The Time at or within Which anything is or is done is usually expressed by the ablative without preposition

diē septimō pervenit, he arrives on the seventh day

superiōre aestāte cognōverat, he had learned the previous summer

2. *In* is reguarly used:

- To denote a time of life (unless accompanied by a modifer):

in pueritiā, in boyhood

But: *extrēmā pueritiā,* at the end of boyhood

- To denote an office held (unless accompanied by a numeral):

in cōnsulātū nostrō, in my consulship

But: *quārto cōnsulātū,* in his fourth consulship

- To express situation:

in tālī tempore, in such a state of affairs

in cīvīlī bellō, in a civil war

But: *secundō Pūnicō bellō,* in the second Punic War

- With a numeral:

ter in annō, three times in a year

D. Locative Ablative with Certain Verbs and Adjectives

1. *Fīdō* and *cōnfīdō* may take the ablative.

multum nātūrā locī cōnfīdēbant, they had great confidence in the nature of the country

Fīdō and *cōnfīdō* also take the Dative, regularly of a person in Cicero.

Diffīdō takes the Dative in Cicero, both Dative and Ablative in later writers.

2. *Nītor,* rely, *stō, constō,* abide by, take an ablative, typically without *in.*

3. *Contentus, dignus, indignus* (cf. II.G.3), *frētus,* and *laetus* take an ablative.

contenus hāc inīquitāte nōn fuit, he was not content with this iniquity

cognitiōne dignum, worthy of acquaintance

indigna homine līberō, unworthy of a free man

frētus grātiā Brūtī, relying on the favor of Brutus

laetus praedā, rejoicing in the booty