HU

HUNGARIAN LESSON

Hungarian Grammar 2 · Chapter 1 · How Cases Work

🧩 Cases — Az esetek

English uses little words (in, on, to, from, with) in front of a noun. Hungarian glues a suffix to the end of the noun instead. This chapter explains the idea, builds the plural, fixes the order in which suffixes pile up, and gives you the map of every case the rest of the course covers. Hungarian Grammar 1 gave you the harmony and linking-vowel rules; here they start doing real work.

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

A Hungarian noun does the job of an English preposition by taking a **case suffix** at its very end: *ház* (house) becomes *házban* (in the house). The suffix order is always **stem + plural + possessive + case**, and the case comes last. Adjectives stay as they are; only the noun (and a word like *ez*, this) carries the case.

1. What a case is

A **case** is the form a noun takes to show its job in the sentence: the doer, the thing acted on, the place, the receiver, the means. English shows most of these jobs with word order and prepositions. Hungarian shows them with the ending. The same noun can therefore appear in many shapes:

JOB OF THE NOUN	ENGLISH	HUNGARIAN	CASE
The house is big	the house	**a ház**	nominative (no suffix)
I see the house	the house (object)	**a ház**at	accusative
Inside it	in the house	**a ház**ban	inessive
Going toward it	to the house	**a ház**hoz	allative
Coming away from it	from the house (a person's place)	**a ház**tól	ablative
Together with it	with the house	**a ház**zal	instrumental

Two things to notice. First, the article *a/az* stays in front and never changes. Second, the suffix is written as part of the word, with no space, and always in lower case (even after a name: *Budapestre*).

> **Why learn cases as a system and not as phrases**
>
> In *Hungarian Basic 1–3* you met many of these endings inside ready-made phrases. The phrases work, but a new noun needs a rule. Every case in this course is one suffix with one meaning, and Hungarian Grammar 1 already told you which vowel it takes (chapters 2 and 3). Learn the meaning once and you can apply it to any noun.

2. The nominative: the form with no suffix

The **nominative** (*alanyeset*) is the dictionary form: the noun with nothing added. It is the case of the subject and of the thing being described.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH	JOB OF THE NOUN
A ház nagy.	The house is big.	subject
A telefon az asztalon van.	The phone is on the table.	subject (*asztalon* is another case)
Philip tanuló.	Philip is a learner.	describing noun (no *is* needed)

When a Hungarian dictionary or word list gives you a noun, it is always in the nominative singular, and that is the stem you start from.

3. The plural: -k, with a linking vowel

The plural suffix is **-k**. After a consonant it needs a linking vowel to be pronounceable, which is the rule from *Hungarian Grammar 1, chapter 4*. After a final *a* or *e* the stem vowel lengthens and no linking vowel is needed.

STEM ENDS IN…	PLURAL	EXAMPLES
Consonant, back vowels (most words)	**-ok**	**asztal** → **asztalok** · **ablak** → **ablakok** · **orvos** → **orvosok** · **telefon** → **telefonok**

STEM ENDS IN…	PLURAL	EXAMPLES
Consonant, a few common back words	**-ak**	**ház** → **ház**ak · **fal** (wall) → **fal**ak · **hal** (fish) → **hal**ak
Consonant, front vowels	**-ek**	**kert** → **kert**ek · **szék** → **szék**ek · **könyv** → **könyv**ek · **kábel** → **kábel**ek
Consonant, many rounded-front words	**-ök**	**kör** → **kör**ök · **sör** → **sör**ök · **tükör** → **tükr**ök (the stem drops its vowel)
Final *a* or *e*	**-k** with a lengthened vowel	**alma** → **alm**ák · **kefe** → **kef**ék
Other final vowel	**-k**	**autó** → **autó**k · **fiú** → **fiú**k · **hajó** → **hajó**k

> **The plural after a number: stay singular**
>
> After a number or a word meaning "many", Hungarian keeps the noun **singular**: **három ház** (three houses), **sok könyv** (many books), **néhány kábel** (a few cables). Use the plural when no number or quantity word is present: **a házak** (the houses). Chapter 10 returns to this in the cases.

4. The order of suffixes on a noun

A noun can carry up to three suffixes, and their order never changes: **plural → possessive → case**. Think of the case as the last coat you put on.

STEM	+ PLURAL	+ POSSESSIVE	+ CASE	MEANING
ház			**ban**	**ház**ban · in the house
ház	**ak**		**ban**	**ház**akban · in the houses
könyv		**em**	**ben**	**könyv**emben · in my book
barát		**aim** (my … (plural))	**hoz**	**barát**aimhoz · to my friends
szülő		**im** (stem *szüle-*)	**nél**	**szüleim**nél · at my parents'

The possessive endings are the subject of Chapter 8, so here you only need to recognise the pattern: *the case suffix is outermost*. Whatever the stem and the other suffixes look like, the case goes on the end, and the vowel it takes is chosen by the vowel just before it.

5. The map: which case is in which chapter

Grammars count cases differently. A common count is **18**, and a few border cases (such as *-kor*, "at a time") are sometimes added. This table is the course plan: every suffix, its meaning, and the chapter that teaches it.

CASE	SUFFIX	BASIC MEANING	CHAPTER
Nominative	none	subject; dictionary form	1
Accusative	**-t** (with linking vowels)	direct object	2
Dative	**-nak / -nek**	to, for (a person)	3
Inessive	**-ban / -ben**	in	4
Superessive	**-on / -en / -ön** (or **-n**)	on	4
Adessive	**-nál / -nél**	at, by	4
Illative	**-ba / -be**	into	5
Sublative	**-ra / -re**	onto	5
Allative	**-hoz / -hez / -höz**	to, towards	5
Elative	**-ból / -ből**	out of	6
Delative	**-ról / -ről**	off; about	6
Ablative	**-tól / -től**	from (away from)	6
Instrumental	**-val / -vel**	with, by means of	7
Translative	**-vá / -vé**	turning into	7

CASE	SUFFIX	BASIC MEANING	CHAPTER
Causal-final	**-ért**	for; because of	7
Terminative	**-ig**	until; as far as	7
Essive	**-ul / -ül · -ként**	as; in the role of	7
Temporal	**-kor**	at (a time)	7

> **The 3 × 3 grid of place cases**
>
> Nine of these cases are really one idea, repeated: *where something is*, *where it goes to* and *where it comes from*, each for three kinds of place: inside, on the surface, and near/with. Learn the grid once and you have nine endings at a stroke.

	INSIDE	ON THE SURFACE	NEAR / AT SOMEONE
Where? (static)	**-ban / -ben** in the house	**-on / -en / -ön** on the table	**-nál / -nél** at my friend's
Where to?	**-ba / -be** into the house	**-ra / -re** onto the table	**-hoz / -hez / -höz** to my friend's
Where from?	**-ból / -ből** out of the house	**-ról / -ről** off the table	**-tól / -től** from my friend's

6. Where the case goes: the noun, not the adjective

Languages such as German or Latin put the case on the article and the adjective as well as the noun. Hungarian does not. The adjective stays in its dictionary form and only the noun is marked. The one common exception is a demonstrative (*ez* this, *az* that), which also takes the case.

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH	WHAT CARRIES THE CASE
a nagy házban	in the big house	the noun only

HUNGARIAN	ENGLISH	WHAT CARRIES THE CASE
a kis szoba**ban**	in the small room	the noun only
ebben a házban	in this house	both *ez* and the noun (*ez* + *ben* becomes *ebben*)
abban a szobában	in that room	both *az* and the noun

> **Watch out: do not put the case on the adjective**
>
> A learner coming from German often writes *a nagyban házban*. In Hungarian only the noun is marked: *a nagy házban*. The adjective also stays singular: *a nagy házakban* (in the big houses), never *a nagyakban házakban*.

🗣️ In Use — Használatban

Short exchanges showing the plural, the case and the suffix order. Read each aloud and find the nominative stem inside each form.

① Where is it?

A:

Hol van a telefon?

Where is the phone?

B:

Az asztalon, de a kábel a táskában van.

On the table, but the cable is in the bag.

② What is in the boxes?

A:

Mi van a dobozokban?

What is in the boxes?

B:

A kábelek és a billentyűzetek. A telefonok a szekrényben vannak.

The cables and the keyboards. The phones are in the cupboard.

③ Weekend plans

A:

Hol alszol szombaton?

Where are you sleeping on Saturday?

B:

A szüleimnél. Utána a barátaimhoz megyek.

At my parents'. Afterwards I'm going to my friends'.

📋 Quick Reference — Gyorstábla

IDEA	RULE	EXAMPLE
Nominative	the bare dictionary form	**ház**
Plural	-k, with -ok / -ak / -ek / -ök after a consonant; lengthened vowel after *a*, *e*	**házak** · **kertek** · **almák**
Suffix order	stem + plural + possessive + case	**házakban** · **könyvemben**
Harmony	last vowel of what comes before the case chooses its form	**házban** · **kertben** · **körhöz**
Adjectives	never take the case	**a nagy házban**
After a number	noun stays singular	**három ház**

🖍️ Try It Yourself — Gyakorlás

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Which of these is the nominative: *házban, ház, házat*?

▼ Show answer

ház. The nominative has no suffix.

2. Make the plural of *kert*.

▼ Show answer

kertek. Front vowel: -ek.

3. Make the plural of *telefon*.

▼ Show answer

telefonok. Back vowels: -ok.

4. Make the plural of *alma* (apple).

▼ Show answer

almák. A final *a* lengthens before the plural -k.

5. Build "in the houses" from *ház*.

▼ Show answer

házakban. Stem + plural (-ak) + case (-ban).

6. Build "in the gardens" from *kert*.

▼ Show answer

kertekben. Stem + -ek + -ben; the case vowel follows the last vowel, *e*.

7. Build "in my book" from *könyv* + *-em* (my) + the "in" case.

▼ Show answer

könyvemben. Stem + possessive + case.

8. Fix the sentence: *a nagyban házban* (in the big house).

▼ Show answer

a nagy házban. Only the noun takes the case.

9. Fix the sentence: *ez a házban* (in this house).

▼ Show answer

ebben a házban. The demonstrative *ez* also takes the case (*ez* + *ben* becomes *ebben*).

10. Fix the sentence: *három házak* (three houses).

▼ Show answer

három ház. After a number the noun stays singular.

Coming up in Chapter 2: The Accusative. The *-t* ending for the direct object, its linking vowels (*házat, kezet*), the stems that change first, and the personal pronouns *engem* and *téged*.