

## Silly Mnemonics and Miscellaneous Memory Aids

When you learn any language, you'll find some things lodge in your memory without any effort, some lodge there after you make an effort and some just seem to want lodgings somewhere other than in your brain.

To persuade these last to take up permanent residence, it can help to think up mnemonics, silly rhymes, use your visual imagination, or make up new words to songs you know. (My secondary school German teacher invented 'Michael row the dative objects ashore' to the tune of 'Michael row the boat ashore'. We sophisticated teenage girls rolled our eyes, but we sang it—and we all knew our dative objects.) What works for one person may not work so well for another, but here I'm giving you some of the ridiculous devices that helped me, in case they might help someone else (and spare them the embarrassment and/or bother of thinking up their own).

Some people object to such aides on the ground that they're 'crutches'. OK— but if crutches enable you to walk for a time when you couldn't otherwise, surely that's better than the alternative. Bear in mind, too, that for the most part, you'll only need mnemonics and other memory devices in the earlier stages of learning. After you've seen words in context over and over, the sheer repetition will make you remember: the silly devices are only to get you started.

### Interrogatives

Often it's the shortest words that are hardest to remember in a foreign language, especially if there are a lot of them that are similar. Most Koine interrogatives begin with π + ο / ὦ. Keeping them straight can be a challenge, since unlike a lot of nouns, verbs and adjectives, these don't have colourful meanings that you can visualise. Here are some silly gimmicks I came up with to keep them straight.

πότε: when? When did you last eat compote?

πῶς: how? How did I make so many typos?

ποῖος, α, ον: what kind of? The iota in ποῖος is like the i in kind.

ποῦ: where? Where are you? ποῦ sounds like you.

πόσος, η, ον: how many / much? How many sheriffs were riding in the posse?

τίς, τί: who, what, why? Tsk, tsk: *who* were you with last night, *what* were you doing and *why*?

πόθεν: where from / whence, how, why? Whence came the apothecary? How did he come and why?

ποσάκις: how often? How often do you drink sakē?

If you think these aren't very good (or your conversation does not regularly feature words like compote, posse, apothecary and sakē), let your disdain spur you to see what you can come up with for yourself!

### μετά + acc or gen

μετά is a preposition that can take either of two cases, and its meaning changes depending on which case it takes: + accusative = after; + genitive = with. To determine whether the

preposition means 'with' or 'after', we have to notice the case of the following noun and then remember which case goes with which meaning. One way to remember the difference is to think of Aristotle's work, the *Metaphysics*. It was so called because it treated matters that came *after* those treated in the *Physics*: in τὰ μετὰ τὰ φυσικά the articles and noun are accusative, so if you think of Aristotle you will never forget that μετὰ + accusative means 'after' and therefore, by default, + genitive must mean 'with'.

### διὰ + acc or gen

With the genitive, διὰ means 'through'. With the accusative, it means 'because of'. You can remember which is which by linking the 'g' in 'genitive' to the 'g' in through and thinking of the phrase 'It was Because of his BeAdy eyes' to link the 'a' (like accusative) to the 'b' in 'because'.

### ἀλλὰ and ἄλλα

You won't have difficulty distinguishing most forms of ἄλλος (other, another) from ἀλλὰ (but, yet, except), except that the feminine form differs only by its accent. You can remember which is which because ἄλλα has the same stress pattern as 'other': first syllable stressed, second unstressed. That's enough to tell them apart, but if you also remember that ἀλλὰ has the same stress pattern as 'except', then you'll be additionally reminded that it doesn't only mean 'but' but can also mean 'except'.

### Easily Confused Forms

1. How to remember the difference between the definite article and the relative pronoun:  
The relative pronouns all begin with a vowel with a rough breathing and all have an accent; none has a tau. The forms of the article either begin with a vowel with a rough breathing but NO accent, or with a tau. Short version: if it has a tau, it's the article. If it has no tau but an accent, it's the relative pronoun.
2. How to remember the difference between the interrogative and indefinite adjectives:  
The interrogatives are all accented on the only or first syllable (if the form has two syllables). The indefinite forms either have no accent (if they have only one syllable) or if they have two syllables, are accented on the second. The other hint is that an interrogative pronoun begins a question, so there should be a semi-colon (the question mark in Greek) somewhere after the adjective. Looking for the question mark can help you at the beginning, or function to confirm what you thought, but it's a good idea to learn the little rule if you want to learn to read Greek with any fluency, so you don't interrupt the flow of reading to run to the end of the sentence looking for the question mark.
3. Differences of meaning between cases used in prepositional phrases concerned with time: the accusative is used in prepositional phrases denoting time to express duration; the dative is used to express a single point in time. Often context will make clear which is intended, but if it doesn't, you can remember the difference this way: DATive is like DOT, a single point. ACCUSative is like people hurling ACCUSations at each other in a quarrel: they just go on and on.
4. διὰ + accusative means 'for the sake of', while + genitive it means 'through'. You can remember the first by associating the /k/ sound in aCCusative with the /k/ sound in

'sake'. That should be enough, but you can also think of the g in genitive like the g in 'diagonal', a line which cuts THROUGH a square from corner to corner.

### Not exactly GNT (but useful for other purposes)

How to remember the four Christological heresies ruled out as valid Christian belief at the Council of Chalcedon (451).

This is a gross simplification, but that's what a mnemonic is. I subscribe to the Peg Bracken philosophy of housekeeping ('better a fast swipe at the kitchen sink than no swipe all'). Just so: better to remember some simplified version of the main Christological heresies than not know or remember anything about them at all.

So here they are, the four views ruled to be contrary to the Christian community's teaching about the person of Jesus Christ, in mnemonic form:

ARIus the ARID Denied the DIvinity.  
ApoLLinarius the Languid denied the human souL  
EUtyches the Unionist mixed everything together.  
And NesTORius TORe everything apart.

Now, no one knows too much about the actual persons whose names are associated with these heresies and I certainly don't know if Arius was a dinner party bore or if Apollinarius was a couch potato—this is a petulant memory device, not a clinical character analysis.

Arianism comes in many varieties and it's hard to know exactly what the historical Arius thought. But 'Arianism' denotes the view that Jesus Christ was either not divine at all or not of equal divinity to the Father. It was first condemned at the first Council of Nicaea in 325.

Apollinarianism denotes the view that Jesus' humanity consists in having a human body, but not a human soul (and so effectively denies he had a human mind and will). It was first condemned at the first Council of Constantinople in 381.

Eutychianism is the notion that Jesus Christ had two natures, divine and human, but these are mingled together, so producing a third entity, which is effectively neither one nor the other, just as green is composed of blue and yellow, yet no one would call the grass on a golf course 'blue' or 'yellow'. First condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

Nestorianism: is the notion that the two natures in Christ, divine and human, are so distinct or separated from each other that we can only call Mary the mother of Jesus and not the mother of God, even though Jesus is (per the denial of Arianism and Apollinarianism) both truly human and truly divine. So Nestorianism does not allow for the dynamic relations of the divine and human natures (which theologians call *communicatio idiomatum* or, less frequently, *perichoresis*). First condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431.

These four views were declared to be inadequate or erroneous representations of the views of the Christian churches long after the writings of the New Testament were composed. The so-called Chalcedonian Christology (a view of the person of Christ which affirms two natures, human and divine, neither mingled nor separated) is compatible with

the New Testament, and arguably makes the best sense of its internal diversity and tensions, but you cannot straightforwardly haul this set of views out of the Bible, or at least, you can only do so by ignoring some inconvenient texts. The Bible is the basis of Christian belief, but what is now considered orthodox Christianity represents a community's *interpretation* of the writings it held to be sacred witnesses and a development from them, in accordance with their own logic.