

VOCATIVE FORMS

The vocative case endings are distinct from those of the nominative case only in the singular and only with masculine and feminine nouns. For nouns in the plural and for all pronouns and adjectives, VOCATIVE: A CALL is expressed by the nominative case (see NOMINATIVE: A NAME). For feminine nouns, only those ending in -a have a vocative ending distinct from the nominative. No neuter nouns have vocative endings distinct from the nominative.

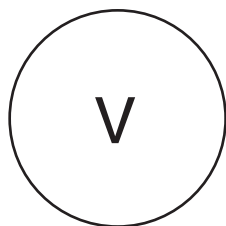
The vocative case endings are more easily dealt with based simply on noun endings in the nominative case:

- a ⇒ -o with nouns ending in -a: Honza ⇒ Honzo!, Milena ⇒ Mileno!
- e ⇒ -e with nouns ending in -e: Marie ⇒ Marie (no change)
- K ⇒ -u with nouns ending in the velar consonants (-K = -k, -g, -ch, -h): Ludvík ⇒ Ludvíku
- Č ⇒ -i with nouns ending in soft consonants (-Č = *): Tomáš ⇒ Tomáši, učitel ⇒ učíteli 'teacher'!
- C ⇒ -e with nouns ending in all other hard consonants (-C = all other hard consonants): Václav ⇒ Václave

Some common irregular forms: Petr ⇒ Petře, bratr ⇒ bratře 'brother!', otec ⇒ otče 'father!', Bůh ⇒ Bože 'God!', člověk ⇒ člověče 'man!', syn ⇒ synu 'son!'.

*NOTE: Stems ending in *c, č, d', j, ň, ř, š, t', ž* are always soft and some soft stems may end in *b, d, l, m, n, p, s, t, v, z*, which are associated with both hard and soft stems (See Appendix).

VOCATIVE:



A CALL

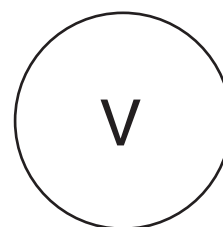
PROLOGUE

The vocative is by far the simplest case in Czech. It has only one meaning and is not associated with any prepositions, verbs or other “trigger words”. In fact many people will argue that the vocative doesn’t even deserve to be called a case at all because it doesn’t participate in the formation of sentences, but rather stands at the edge of sentences, offset from actual sentences by a comma. This is because all the other cases give us information about the relationship of the words they mark to other elements in a sentence (for example, the nominative case can tell us that an item is the subject of a verb, the genitive can tell us that one item is a whole of which another item forms a part, the dative can tell us that an item is an indirect object, the accusative can tell us that an item is a direct object, the locative can provide adverbial information about the setting of an event, and the instrumental can tell us about the means used to bring an event about). The vocative doesn’t give us any information about grammatical relationships of this kind, because its purpose is entirely pragmatic — it tells us instead about the relationship of the person speaking to someone else. The purpose of the vocative case is precisely to let someone know that the speaker is talking to them rather than about them, and its meaning adds up to nothing more than ‘Hey, you!’. Because calling someone by their name and stating the name of a person or thing are very similar actions, the vocative can be replaced by NOMINATIVE: A NAME, as mentioned in the chapter on the nominative case. Thus even in its sole and minimal meaning, the vocative is dispensable, since the nominative can stand in for it.

VOCATIVE: A CALL

Since the vocative is not a part of a sentence, it often stands alone, when people call each other’s names to greet them or get their attention, as in this example:

- (1) “**Jiříku!**”, uvítala mě maminka.
 [“**Jiřík-VOC!**”, greeted me-ACC mother-NOM.]
 “**Jiřík!**”, my mother greeted me.



VOCATIVE: A CALL
(circle labeled V)

VOCATIVE: A CALL
with calling and
greeting people.



If a person has a message to deliver after getting someone’s attention, they can insert a brief pause (signalled by a comma) to separate the vocative form from the sentence that contains the message, as in this example:

VOCATIVE: A CALL
can be used
with inanimate
objects.

- (2) **Maminko a tatínku**, ať už to mám za sebou, klidně mně můžete nasekat na zadek.
[**Mom-VOC** and **Dad-VOC**, may-it-be already that-ACC have behind self-INST,
calmly me-DAT can spank on bottom-ACC.]
Mom and Dad, I want to get this over with, you can just go ahead and spank me.



Although the vast majority of vocative forms you are likely to hear or read will involve names for people, it is entirely possible to create and use vocative forms for nouns that designate inanimate objects, as evidenced in this sentence, where the writer offers advice to the World Bank:

- (3) **Světová banko**, přestaňte vydávat 92 procent svého dopravního rozpočtu na motorovou dopravu, motoristickou infrastrukturu a výstavbu masivních silnic!
[**World Bank-VOC**, stop spend 92-ACC percent-GEN own transportation budget-GEN on motor-vehicle transportation-ACC, motor-vehicle infrastructure-ACC and construction-ACC massive highways-GEN!]
O World Bank, stop spending 92 percent of your transportation budget on motor vehicle transportation and infrastructure, and the construction of massive highways!



You might have noticed that the vocative case has no plural forms. When groups of people are addressed, as in *Vážené dámy a pánové!* [Esteemed ladies-NOM and gentlemen-NOM!] ‘Ladies and gentlemen!’, the nominative case forms must be used, even though the context is expressly vocative. Here is an example of how a plural nominative form is obliged to take on vocative function:

- (4) **Vážení posluchači**, mám tu čest přivítat mezi námi nám tak vzácného hosta — pana prezidenta Václava Havla.
[Esteemed listeners-NOM, have that honor-ACC welcome among us-INST us-DAT such precious guest-ACC — Mr. president Václav Havel-ACC.]
Dear listeners, I have the honor of welcoming a guest who is very special to us — president Václav Havel.



EPILOGUE

The vocative case is so named because it is merely a vocalization used to evoke a reaction (and the three words *vocative*, *vocal*, and *evoke* are all related to each other through a common root). The vocative is a defective case both grammatically (it doesn’t refer to any grammatical relationships at all, unlike other cases) and formally (it doesn’t have any plural forms and can be replaced by the nominative). But the vocative is very handy for getting people’s attention, and you’ll never get through a day in the Czech Republic without hearing it many times over. It’s a ubiquitous yet very simple part of Czech that stems from our human need for verbal interaction, since there’s no point in talking to someone unless you can get their attention.

