

Construct Chains (word pairs)

Uses: The construct state is used to express possessive relationships between nouns, and also some of the relationships that are expressed by the preposition “of”. If you are familiar with declined languages like German or Latin, the construct state is used like the genitive case. The normal, non-construct form of the noun is called the absolute state.

Below are examples of phrases where the construct would be used in Biblical Hebrew:

the doorposts of your house

the son of the king*

the king’s son*

the man’s house

the city of the king

*note that the difference in English between a possessive like *the king’s son* and a prepositional phrase like *the son of the king* is one of style or emphasis, not meaning.

Sound changes:

A series of words in the construct state is pronounced as a single unit, with the accent on the accented syllable of the final word. The final word in the construct chain is always in the absolute, all other words are in construct. Because of the movement of the stress, certain changes occur in the construct forms. Some constructs have endings that allow you to easily identify construct forms, others show only vowel changes, or no changes at all. A few basic principles govern the changes to vowels in construct forms:

1. Long vowels in closed, unaccented syllables are shortened
2. Long vowels in open syllables that end up two or more syllables away from the accent volatilize, that is, they become vocal shevas. Remember that the accent in a construct chain is on the accented syllable of the *final word*. This means that a vowel can end up two or more syllables away from the accent, even if the word in which the vowel occurs has only one or two syllables.
3. If the #2 above results in two vocal shevas being together, the first will become a full vowel again, usually a short vowel.
4. Nothing happens to unchangeably long vowels.

The Easy Cases:

(Feminine) nouns ending in הַ

the ה becomes ת

the ך shortens to ך (the closed syllable rule; #1 above)

the usual vowel shortenings associated with constructs will take place

Examples:

absolute form	add the ending	vowel changes	final construct form
בְּהֵמָה	בְּהֵמָת*	long vowels in open unaccented syllables become vocal shevas (בְּהֵמָת*). We cannot have two vocal shevas together, so the first one becomes a full vowel	בְּהֵמָת
מִצְוָה	מִצְוֹת		מִצְוֹת
תּוֹרָה	תּוֹרוֹת		תּוֹרוֹת

- An asterisk in front of a word form means that it's a hypothetical form being used for illustration purposes. You won't actually see this form in any real text.

Some words that follow this pattern have irregular vowel changes, for example מִשְׁפָּחָה , which becomes מִשְׁפַּחַת in the construct.

(Masculine) plurals ending in ם

ם becomes ם

the usual vowel shortenings associated with constructs will take place

absolute form	add the ending	vowel changes	final construct form
אֲנָשִׁים	אֲנָשִׁי*	long vowels in an open syllable become vocal shevas (אֲנָשִׁי*). We cannot have two vocal shevas together, so the first becomes a full vowel	אָנָשִׁי
דְּבָרִים	דְּבָרִי*	the long vowel becomes a vocal sheva (דְּבָרִי*). The first sheva then becomes a full vowel	דְּבָרִי
עֲבָדִים	עֲבָדִי*	the long vowel becomes a vocal sheva (עֲבָדִי*). Then the first sheva becomes a full vowel	עֲבָדִי

Feminine plurals ending in ת

the ת ending remains the same

the usual vowel shortenings associated with constructs will take place

absolute form	vowel changes	final construct form
בָּנוֹת	long vowel reduces	בָּנוֹת
מְשֻׁפְּחוֹת	long vowel reduces. The resulting two shevas are allowed because the first is silent, not vocal.	מְשֻׁפְּחוֹת
שְׂמוֹת	long vowel reduces	שְׂמוֹת
אֲבוֹת	long vowel reduces	אֲבוֹת

The Less Easy Cases

Singular nouns with only one syllable:

No changes if the vowel is short or unchangeably long

Absolute	Construct
אִישׁ	אִישׁ
יוֹם	יוֹם
עִיר	עִיר
בַּת	בַּת
הַר	הַר
עָם	עָם

If the vowel is changeably long, it will shorten

Absolute	Construct
בֵּן	בֶּן
דָּם	דֶּם
דָּד	דֶּד
שֵׁם	שֶׁם

אָב and אָח are simply irregular

אָב אָבִי

אָח אָחִי

Two syllable nouns

If the first syllable is open and the second closed, the first vowel will become a vocal sheva and the second will shorten if possible

Absolute	Construct
דָּבָר	דְּבַר
נְבִיא (prophet)	נְבִיא
מְקוֹם (place)	מְקוֹם

If both syllables are closed, only the long vowel in the second syllable will shorten

Absolute	Construct
מִשְׁפָּט	מִשְׁפָּט
מִדְּבָר	מִדְּבָר

Segholates

Segholates are a special class of noun. In the singular, they have two syllables and are always accented on the first syllable. The vowel of the second syllable is usually a segol, but it may be a patach if the middle or final consonant is a guttural.

Segholates always have the same form in the construct as in the absolute:

מִלְדָּ
נְעַר
שְׁעַר
עֶבֶד
נֶפֶשׁ
דְּרֹד
אֶרֶץ
לֶחֶם