

Nouns

What is a noun?

A **noun** is a 'naming' word for a living being, thing or idea, for example, *woman, happiness, Andrew*. German nouns change, according to their gender, case and number. This is called declension.

Using nouns

- In German, all nouns are either masculine, feminine or neuter. This is called their gender. In English, we call all things – for example, *table, car, book, apple* – 'it', but in German, even words for things have a gender. It is important to know that the gender of German nouns rarely relates to the sex of the person or thing it refers to. For example, in German, the word for 'man' is masculine, but the word for 'girl' is neuter and the word for 'person' is feminine.

der Mann	man
das Mädchen	girl
die Person	person

Tip

German nouns are always written with a capital letter.

- Whenever you are using a noun, you need to know whether it is masculine, feminine or neuter as this affects the form of other words used with it, such as:
- adjectives that describe it
 - articles (such as **der** or **ein**) that go before it
 - pronouns (such as **er** or **sie**) that replace it
- ⇒ For more information on **Adjectives, Articles or Pronouns**, see pages 51, 28 and 89.
- You can find information about gender by looking the word up in a dictionary – in the *Easy Learning German Dictionary*, for example, you will find the **definite article** (the word for *the*) in front of the word. When you come across a new noun, always learn the word for *the* that goes with it to help you remember its gender.
- **der** before a noun tells you it is masculine
 - **die** before a noun tells you it is feminine
 - **das** before a noun tells you it is neuter
- ⇒ For more information on the **Definite article**, see page 28.

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- ▶ We refer to something as singular when we are talking about just one, and as plural when we are talking about more than one. The singular is the form of the noun you will usually find when you look a noun up in the dictionary. As in English, nouns in German change their form in the plural.

die Katze cat → **die Katzen** cats

- ▶ Adjectives, articles and pronouns are also affected by whether a noun is singular or plural.

Tip

Remember that you have to use the right word for *the, a* and so on according to the gender and case of the German noun.

Gender

- ▶ In German a noun can be masculine, feminine or neuter. Gender is quite unpredictable – the best thing is simply to learn each noun with its definite article, that is the word for *the* (**der, die** or **das**) which goes with it:

der Teppich	carpet
die Zeit	time
das Bild	picture

However, there are some clues which can help you work out or remember the gender of a noun, as explained below.

Masculine nouns

- ▶ Nouns referring to male people and animals are masculine.

der Mann	man
der Löwe	(male) lion
- ▶ Seasons, months, days of the week, and points of the compass are masculine.

der Sommer	summer
der August	August
der Freitag	Friday
der Norden	north
- ▶ Most nouns referring to things that perform an action are also masculine.

der Wecker	alarm clock
der Computer	computer

Grammar Extra!

German nouns taken from other languages and ending in **-ant, -ast, -ismus**, and **-or** are masculine:

der Trabant	satellite
der Ballast	ballast
der Kapitalismus	capitalism
der Tresor	safe

For further explanation of grammatical terms, please see pages viii-xii.

- Nouns with the following endings are masculine.

Masculine Ending	Example	Meaning
-ich	<u>der</u> Teppich	carpet
-ig	<u>der</u> Essig	vinegar
-ling	<u>der</u> Frühling	spring

KEY POINTS

- ✓ Nouns referring to male people and animals are masculine.
- ✓ Seasons, months, days of the week, weather and points of the compass are masculine.

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Feminine nouns

- Most nouns ending in **-e** are feminine.

die Falte crease, wrinkle
die Brücke bridge

- ❗ Note that male people or animals ending in **-e** are masculine and nouns beginning with **Ge-** and ending in **-e** are normally neuter.

der Löwe the lion
das Getreide crop

- Nouns with the following endings are feminine.

Feminine Ending	Example	Meaning
-heit	die Schönheit	beauty
-keit	die Sehenswürdigkeit	sight
-schaft	die Gewerkschaft	trade union
-ung	die Zeitung	newspaper
-ei	die Bäckerei	bakery

Grammar Extra!

German nouns, some taken from other languages and ending in **-anz**, **-enz**, **-ie**, **-ik**, **-ion**, **-tät**, **-ur** are feminine, with some exceptions.

die Distanz	distance	BUT: der Kranz	wreath
die Konkurrenz	competition		
die Theorie	theory	BUT: das Knie	knee
die Panik	panic	BUT: der Pazifik	Pacific
die Union	union	BUT: der Spion	spy
die Elektrizität	electricity		
die Temperatur	temperature	BUT: das Abitur	A levels

- Numbers used in counting, for example *one, three, fifty* are feminine.

Er hat eine Drei gekriegt. He got a three.

- In German, there are sometimes very different words for male and female, just as in English.

der Mann man
die Frau woman

der Vater father
die Mutter mother

der Bulle bull
die Kuh cow

For further explanation of grammatical terms, please see pages viii-xii.

- Many masculine German nouns can be made feminine by adding **-in** in the singular and **-innen** in the plural.

der Lehrer	(male) teacher
die Lehrerin	(female) teacher
Lehrer und Lehrerinnen	(male and female) teachers

der Leser	(male) reader
die Leserin	(female) reader
unsere Leser und Leserinnen	our readers (male and female)

Grammar Extra!

Some German adjectives are used as feminine nouns. They have feminine adjective endings which change according to the article which comes before them.

eine Deutsche	a German woman
die Abgeordnete	the woman MP

⇒ For more information on **Adjectives used as nouns** and for **Feminine adjective endings**, see pages 63 and 53

KEY POINTS

- ✓ Most nouns ending in **-e** are feminine.
- ✓ Many feminine nouns end in: **-heit, -keit, -schaft, -ung, -ei**.
- ✓ Masculine German words referring to people can be made feminine by adding **-in** in the singular and **-innen** in the plural.
- ✓ Numbers used in counting are feminine.

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Neuter nouns

- Most nouns beginning with **Ge-** are neuter.
das Geschirr crockery, dishes
das Geschöpf creature
das Getreide crop
- Nouns ending in **-lein** or **-chen** are also neuter. These are called the diminutive form and refer to small persons or objects.

Endings to form the diminutive	Example	Meaning
-lein	das Kindlein	little child
-chen	das Häuschen	little house

- ⓘ Note that if these words have one of the vowels **a**, **o** or **u**, an umlaut should be added above the vowel. The final **-e** should also be dropped before these endings.

der Bach → **Bäch** → **das Bächlein** (small) stream
die Katze → **Kätz** → **das Kätzchen** kitten

- Fractions are also neuter.
ein Drittel davon a third of it
- Nouns which refer to young humans and animals are neuter.
das Baby baby
das Kind child
das Kalb calf
das Lamm lamb

- ⓘ Note that the animals themselves can be any gender.

der Hund dog
die Schlange snake
das Vieh cattle

- Infinitives (the 'to' form of verbs) used as nouns are neuter.
das Schwimmen swimming
das Spielen playing
das Radfahren cycling

↔ For more information on **Infinitives**, see page 181.

- Most nouns with the following endings are neuter.

Neuter Ending	Example	Meaning
-nis	das Ereignis	event
-tum	das Eigentum	property

For further explanation of grammatical terms, please see pages viii-xii.

Grammar Extra!

German nouns taken from other languages and ending in **-at, -ett, -fon, -ma, -ment, -um** are neuter.

das Reservat	reservation	
das Tablett	tray	
das Telefon	phone	
das Thema	subject, topic	
das Medikament	drug	
das Ultimatum	ultimatum	BUT: der Reichtum wealth
das Studium	studies	

KEY POINTS

- ✓ Most nouns beginning with **Ge-** are neuter.
- ✓ The diminutive form of nouns is neuter.
- ✓ Nouns referring to young humans and animals are neuter.
- ✓ Infinitives used as nouns are neuter.
- ✓ Nouns ending in **-nis** or **-tum** are neuter.

Compound nouns

What is a compound noun?

A **compound noun** is a noun made up of two or more words, for example, *tin-opener* and *railway station*.

- In German, these words nearly always take their gender from the LAST noun of the compound word.

die Armbanduhr (Armband + die Uhr)	wristwatch
der Tomatensalat (Tomaten + der Salat)	tomato salad
der Fußballspieler (Fußball + der Spieler)	footballer

Grammar Extra!

Some German nouns have more than one gender. A few nouns have two genders and sometimes one of them can only be used in certain regions.

der/das Marzipan	marzipan	(<i>der Marzipan</i> is used mostly in Austria)
der/das Keks	biscuit	(<i>das Keks</i> is used mostly in Austria)
der/das Kaugummi	chewing gum	

Other nouns have two genders and the meaning of the word changes depending on which gender it has.

der Band	volume, book
das Band	ribbon, band, tape; bond

der See	lake
die See	sea

der Leiter	leader, manager
die Leiter	ladder

- In German, abbreviations have the same gender as the word they come from.

die BRD	the Federal Republic of Germany (from die Bundesrepublik Deutschland)
die DB	the German Railways (from die Deutsche Bahn)
das ZDF	German TV channel (from das Zweite Deutsche Fernsehen)

KEY POINTS

- ✓ Compound nouns are nouns made up of two or more words and usually take their gender from the last part of the compound word.
- ✓ Some German nouns have more than one gender and this can affect their meaning.
- ✓ German abbreviations have the same gender as the words they come from.

For further explanation of grammatical terms, please see pages viii-xii.

Test yourself

1 Complete the phrase by adding the feminine form of the noun. Don't forget to include the article.

- a der Minister und
- b ein König und
- c ein Student und
- d der Schüler und
- e ein Deutscher und
- f der Schauspieler und
- g ein Angestellter und
- h ein Arzt und
- i ein Löwe und
- j der Besitzer und

2 Match the two columns.

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| a der Sonnabend | eine Jahreszeit |
| b das Mädchen | ein größerer Ort |
| c die Stadt | ein Gewicht |
| d der Frühling | ein Wochentag |
| e das Pfund | eine weibliche Person |

3 Add the correct definite article (*der, die* or *das*) to the following nouns.

- a Gesicht
- b Krankheit
- c Anarchie
- d September
- e Katze
- f Kätzchen
- g Italiener
- h Finsternis
- i Zeitung
- j Hase

Test yourself

4 Form a compound noun, including article, from the two nouns given.

- a das Gummi + der Ball
- b die Hand + die Tasche
- c die Blumen + der Topf
- d die Wand + der Schrank
- e der Kaffee + die Tasse
- f die Karten + das Haus
- g das Papier + die Tüte
- h der Titel + das Bild
- i die Last + der Wagen
- j das Telefon + die Zelle

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