

German Adjective Endings — All Three Declensions

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An adjective standing in front of a noun takes an ending. Which one depends on three things at once — the case, the gender of the noun, and what comes before the adjective. That third factor is what gives German its three declension patterns, and it is the part learners usually miss.

The question is never just "which case?" It is **"which case, and is there an article doing the work already?"**

1. After der, die, das — the weak endings

The article has already marked the case, so the adjective does almost nothing. This entire pattern uses only two endings.

	M	F	N	PL
Nominativ	-e	-e	-e	-en
Akkusativ	-en	-e	-e	-en
Dativ	-en	-en	-en	-en
Genitiv	-en	-en	-en	-en

der gute Mann · den guten Mann · mit dem guten Mann

The shortcut: everything below the nominative row, and the whole plural column, is **-en**. Learn the top row and let -en cover the rest.

This pattern also applies after *dieser, jeder, welcher* and *alle*, because those carry the same case marking as the definite article.

2. After ein, kein, mein — the mixed endings

ein has no ending in three places: masculine nominative, and neuter nominative and accusative. In exactly those three places the adjective has to carry the case marking instead. Everywhere else this pattern is identical to the weak one.

	M	F	N	PL
Nominativ	-er	-e	-es	-en
Akkusativ	-en	-e	-es	-en
Dativ	-en	-en	-en	-en
Genitiv	-en	-en	-en	-en

ein guter Mann · ein gutes Buch · einen guten Mann

Compare directly: *der gute Mann* but *ein guter Mann*. The -er did not disappear — it moved from the article onto the adjective.

The same applies after *kein* and every possessive: *mein, dein, sein, ihr, unser, euer*.

3. No article at all — the strong endings

With nothing in front of it, the adjective carries the full case marking alone. Its endings look almost exactly like the definite article, which is a useful way to remember them.

	M	F	N	PL
Nominativ	-er	-e	-es	-e
Akkusativ	-en	-e	-es	-e
Dativ	-em	-er	-em	-en
Genitiv	-en	-er	-en	-er

guter Kaffee · kaltes Wasser · mit kaltem Wasser

This pattern appears where German naturally drops the article: with **mass nouns** (*Ich trinke gern warmen Kaffee*) and with **plurals** (*alte Freunde, mit alten Freunden*). You will rarely need it for a singular countable noun, because those almost always take an article.

The rule that saves you most often

Look at the three tables together and one thing stands out: **-en** fills most of the space. Every dative and genitive form in the weak and mixed patterns is -en. Every plural in those two patterns is -en.

So a practical order of operations:

1. Is it dative or genitive, or plural, after *der* or *ein*? → **-en**. Done.
2. Is it nominative or accusative? → then you need the table, and only the top two rows.
3. Is there no article? → the adjective takes the article's own ending.

Adjectives that change their stem

Three small groups adjust before an ending is added:

ADJECTIVE	WITH AN ENDING	NOTE
teuer	<i>die teure Jacke</i>	-er loses its e
dunkel	<i>das dunkle Zimmer</i>	-el loses its e
hoch	<i>das hohe Haus</i>	c drops out
müde	<i>der müde Mann</i>	already ends in -e, so nothing is added

Note that *sauber* keeps its e — *das saubere Zimmer*. Only *teuer* reliably drops it.

When to learn what

LEVEL	FOCUS
A2	<i>nominative and accusative, after der and after ein</i>
B1	<i>the dative, and the no-article pattern with mass nouns and plurals</i>
B2	<i>the genitive across all three patterns</i>