

# German Noun Plurals — die Hunde, die Frauen, die Kinder

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German has no single plural ending. There are five main patterns, an umlaut that may or may not join them, and a group of nouns that change nothing at all. Which one a noun takes is a property of the word — but gender predicts a great deal, so the system is far less arbitrary than it first appears.

## The five endings

| ENDING           | EXAMPLE                               | TYPICAL OF                            |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>-en / -n</b>  | <i>die Frau</i> → <i>die Frauen</i>   | most feminine nouns                   |
| <b>-e</b>        | <i>der Hund</i> → <i>die Hunde</i>    | many masculine and neuter             |
| <b>-er</b>       | <i>das Kind</i> → <i>die Kinder</i>   | mostly neuter, usually with an umlaut |
| <b>-s</b>        | <i>das Auto</i> → <i>die Autos</i>    | loanwords and abbreviations           |
| <b>no ending</b> | <i>der Lehrer</i> → <i>die Lehrer</i> | masculine and neuter in -er, -en, -el |

## Gender predicts the pattern

**Feminine nouns take -n or -en** almost without exception, and they never take an umlaut. Since the feminine endings are themselves predictable — anything in *-ung*, *-heit*, *-keit*, *-schaft* or *-ion* is feminine — a large share of German plurals can be worked out rather than memorised.

die Wohn**ung** → die Wohnung**en** · die Frei**heit** → die Freiheit**en** · die Nation → die Nation**en**

Feminine nouns ending in **-in** double the n before the ending: *die Lehrerin* → *die Lehrerinnen*, *die Ärztin* → *die Ärztinnen*. This group is large, because it covers the feminine form of every profession.

## The nouns that change nothing

Masculine and neuter nouns ending in **-er**, **-en** or **-el** usually add no ending at all. Only the article tells you it is plural.

*der Lehrer* → **die** Lehrer · *das Fenster* → **die** Fenster · *der Löffel* → **die** Löffel

Some of this group take an umlaut instead of an ending: *der Vater* → *die Väter*, *der Bruder* → *die Brüder*, *der Garten* → *die Gärten*.

## The umlaut

The stem vowels **a**, **o**, **u** and **au** can shift to **ä**, **ö**, **ü**, **äu** in the plural, usually alongside an ending.

*der Mann* → *die Männer* · *die Hand* → *die Hände* · *der Baum* → *die Bäume* · *das Haus* → *die Häuser*

It never happens to **e** or **i**, and never to a feminine noun taking **-en**. So *die Frau* stays *die Frauen*, not *die Fräuen*.

## -s is for borrowed words

The smallest group, and the easiest to spot: *das Auto*, *das Hotel*, *das Baby*, *der Chef*, *das Sofa*, *die Kamera*. If the word looks like it came from English, French or Italian, it probably takes **-s**. Abbreviations do too: *der Lkw* → *die Lkws*.

## The article never varies

Whatever the ending, the plural article is **die** in the nominative and accusative — for every gender. That is one of the few places where German gets simpler in the plural rather than harder.

| CASE             | ARTICLE    | NOUN        |
|------------------|------------|-------------|
| <b>Nominativ</b> | <i>die</i> | die Kinder  |
| <b>Akkusativ</b> | <i>die</i> | die Kinder  |
| <b>Dativ</b>     | <i>den</i> | die Kindern |
| <b>Genitiv</b>   | <i>der</i> | die Kinder  |

The dative plural adds **-n** to the noun — unless it already ends in **-n** or **-s**, in which case there is nothing to add: *den Frauen*, *den Autos*.

## How to learn them

**Learn the plural with the noun, like the article.** The most efficient form to memorise is all three parts at once: *der Hund, die Hunde*. Learning the singular alone means relearning it later.

**Use gender as your first guess.** Feminine? Almost certainly **-n** or **-en**. Masculine or neuter ending in **-er**, **-en**, **-el**? Probably no ending. That covers a large share of everyday vocabulary before you have memorised anything.

**Drill the ones you get wrong.** The practice app tracks which nouns you miss and brings them back rather than repeating the ones you already know.