



Grammatical Gender: Nouns and Pronouns



All nouns in German are classified grammatically as masculine, neuter, or feminine. When a noun refers to people, the grammatical gender usually matches the biological sex and is indicated by a form of the definite article: “der” (masculine), “das” (neuter), or “die” (feminine), all meaning “the”.

MASCULINE

der Mann

der Student

FEMININE

die Frau

die Studentin

However, when we refer to things or concepts, the grammatical gender obviously has nothing to do with the biological sex.

MASCULINE	NEUTER	FEMININE
der Computer	das Telefon	die Lampe
der Schnee	das Buch	die Sonne

“die” is the plural article used for all genders: die Männer, die Frauen, die Bücher...

When we replace a noun with a personal pronoun, the personal pronoun reflects the gender of the noun it replaces. For example, “er” refers to “der Computer” because the grammatical gender of “computer” is masculine.

der → er = he, it

das → es = it

die → sie = she, it

die (pl.) → sie = they

Usually, the grammatical gender cannot be predicted from the form of the word. **Therefore, we strongly recommend to learn the corresponding definite article along with each new noun.**

There are some rules in German that might help you predict the grammatical gender of nouns based on the ending of a noun: for example, nouns that end in –e, for example “die Sonne” or “die Lampe”, are usually feminine and nouns that end in –er, for example “der Computer” or “der Wasserkocher“ (kettle), are usually masculine.

There are also a few other noun endings that indicate grammatical gender:

MASCULINE:

-ling **der** Lehrling (apprentice)
-ismus **der** Tourismus

FEMININE:

-keit: **die** Möglichkeit (possibility, opportunity)
-heit: **die** Vergangenheit (past)
-ung: **die** Hoffnung (hope)
-schaft: **die** Mannschaft (team)
-ei: **die** Bäckerei (bakery)
-ion: **die** Situation
-in: (Person) **die** Lehrerin (female teacher)

NEUTER:

-chen **das** Mädchen (girl)

In German, *-chen* or *-lein* are diminutives. There's an old saying in German: „*-chen und -lein machen alle Dinge klein.*“ (-chen and -lein make all things small). When you add them to a word, the word changes its gender to neuter.

der Tisch (table) → das Tischlein (little table)

die Katze (cat) → das Kätzchen (little cat)

das Buch (book) → das Büchlein (little book)

ACHTUNG All German nouns are capitalized, whether they are common nouns (objects, concepts: “die Lampe”, “der Freund“ (male friend)) or proper nouns (names of people, countries, etc.: “Heidi”, “Deutschland”).