

Determining Gender

For the most part, the gender of English nouns is based upon being male, female, or an inanimate object. German is similar only in a small degree. Many nouns that refer to males or females are masculine or feminine respectively. But this similarity to English soon ends. The gender of most German nouns can be determined by examining their makeup. Certain prefixes, suffixes, and structural elements are signals that a noun is a specific gender. And that gender doesn't necessarily have to do with the noun being male, female, or inanimate.

Masculine nouns can be identified by the following characteristics:

1. Nouns that refer to males: **der Vater, der Junge** (*father, boy*)
2. Many nouns that end in **-er, -en, and -el**: **der Lehrer, der Wagen, der Mantel** (*teacher, car, coat*)
3. Days of the week, months, and seasons: **der Montag, der Januar, der Herbst** (*Monday, January, autumn*)
4. Foreign words with the accent on the last syllable: **der Soldat, der Elefant** (*soldier, elephant*)
5. Nouns formed from an infinitive minus the **-en** ending: **der Besuch (besuchen), der Lohn (lohnen)** (*visit, wages*)
6. Many nouns that form their plural by (umlaut) + **e**: **der Brief (die Briefe), der Satz (die Sätze)** (*letter, sentence*)
7. Nouns that end in **-ich, -ig, -ismus, -ist, -ling, and -us**: **der Teppich, der Käfig, der Kommunismus, der Kapitalist, der Lehrling, der Rhythmus** (*carpet, cage, communism, capitalist, apprentice, rhythm*)

Feminine nouns can be identified by the following characteristics:

1. Nouns that refer to females: **die Mutter, die Frau** (*mother, woman or wife*)
2. Names of numerals: **die Eins, die Hundert** (*one, hundred*)
3. Names of many rivers: **die Elbe, die Mosel** (*the Elbe, the Moselle*) *der Rhein*
4. Many nouns ending in **-e**: **die Lampe, die Ernte** (*lamp, harvest*)
5. Nouns ending in **-in** that identify females in professions: **die Lehrerin, die Ärztin** (*teacher, physician*)
6. Many nouns ending in **-a**: **die Kamera, die Pizza** (*camera, pizza*)
7. Many nouns that form their plural by **-(e)n**: **die Tante (die Tanten), die Zeitschrift (die Zeitschriften)** (*aunt, magazine*)

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8. Nouns that end in **-ei, -heit, -keit, -ie, -ik, -nz, -schaft, -ion, -tät, -ung, and -ur**: die Schweinerei, die Einheit, die Einsamkeit, die Fotografie, die Topik, die Konferenz, die Landschaft, die Position, die Universität, die Prüfung, die Natur (*mess, unity, loneliness, photography, topic, conference, landscape, position, university, test, nature*)

Neuter nouns can be identified by the following characteristics:

1. Diminutive nouns that end in **-chen** or **-lein**: das Mädchen, das Röslein (*girl, little rose*)
2. Nouns formed from an infinitive: das Einkommen, das Singen (*income, singing*). These nouns do not have a plural form.
3. Most nouns that end in **-nis**: das Bekenntnis, das Gedächtnis (*confession, memory*)
4. Many nouns with the prefix **Ge-**: das Gemälde, das Gelächter (*painting, laughter*)
5. Nouns that refer to metals: das Gold, das Silber (*gold, silver*)
6. Nouns that end in **-ment**: das Regiment, das Experiment (*regiment, experiment*)
7. Most nouns that form their plural by (umlaut) + **er**: das Haus (die Häuser), das Kind (die Kinder) (*house, child*)
8. Nouns that end in **-tel, -tum, and -um**: das Viertel, das Königtum, das Gymnasium (*quarter, monarchy, prep school*)

Exercise 1

Identify the gender of the following nouns by supplying the missing definite article (**der, die, or das**).

1. _____ Apfel
2. _____ Bruder
3. _____ Übung
4. _____ Gesetz
5. _____ Reise
6. _____ Album
7. _____ Krankheit
8. _____ Eisen
9. _____ Schwester
10. _____ Eigentum
11. _____ Appartement
12. _____ Qualität
13. _____ Eleganz

- 14. _____ Onkel
- 15. _____ Explosion
- 16. _____ Eigenschaft
- 17. _____ Schwimmen
- 18. _____ Lehre
- 19. _____ Schlag
- 20. _____ Ereignis
- 21. _____ Donau
- 22. _____ Museum
- 23. _____ Honig
- 24. _____ Sozialismus
- 25. _____ Regen

Exercise 2

Provide nouns that exemplify the characteristics shown in parentheses. For example:

(-ung) die Untersuchung

- 1. (-nis) das _____
- 2. (-heit) die _____
- 3. (Ge-) das _____
- 4. (-e) die _____
- 5. (-um) das _____
- 6. (-er) der _____
- 7. (-el) der _____
- 8. (-keit) die _____
- 9. (-ling) der _____
- 10. (-ig) der _____
- 11. (-tum) das _____
- 12. (-in) die _____
- 13. (-en) der _____
- 14. (-lein) das _____
- 15. (-ion) die _____

Exercise 3

Rewrite the following plural nouns as singular nouns. Provide the appropriate definite article.

1. die Tannen _____
2. die Flüsse _____
3. die Bücher _____
4. die Übungen _____
5. die Zeiten _____
6. die Bäume _____
7. die Arme _____
8. die Kinder _____
9. die Freundinnen _____
10. die Könige _____
11. die Zeitungen _____
12. die Länder _____
13. die Bälle _____
14. die Finger _____
15. die Mädchen _____

Exercise 4

Rewrite the following singular nouns as plural nouns.

1. der Mantel die _____
2. die Frau die _____
3. das Haus die _____
4. das Fräulein die _____
5. die Küste die _____
6. das Schwimmen die _____
7. der Wagen die _____
8. der Lehrer die _____
9. die Richterin die _____
10. der Bleistift die _____

- 11. der Platz die _____
- 12. die Sitte die _____
- 13. das Lachen die _____
- 14. die Nase die _____
- 15. der Lautsprecher die _____

Exercise 5

1. List ten masculine nouns, five of which refer to males and five of which are inanimate objects.

- | male | object |
|-----------|-----------|
| der _____ | der _____ |
| der _____ | der _____ |
| der _____ | der _____ |
| der _____ | der _____ |
| der _____ | der _____ |

2. List ten feminine nouns, five of which refer to females and five of which are inanimate objects.

- | female | object |
|-----------|-----------|
| die _____ | die _____ |
| die _____ | die _____ |
| die _____ | die _____ |
| die _____ | die _____ |
| die _____ | die _____ |

3. List ten neuter nouns, five of which refer to living persons or things and five of which are inanimate objects.

- | living thing | object |
|--------------|-----------|
| das _____ | das _____ |
| das _____ | das _____ |
| das _____ | das _____ |
| das _____ | das _____ |
| das _____ | das _____ |