

# Rutgers Learning Centers

At Camden Campus

## German: Grammatical Gender & Plural Forms

All German nouns have a grammatical gender; that is, nouns are either masculine, feminine or neuter. Grammatical gender in German does not correspond to natural gender, so a chair can be masculine, a street feminine and a book neuter. In German the grammatical gender of a noun is indicated by its definite article. Unlike English, where there is only one definite article '*the*,' German uses '*der*,' '*die*,' and '*das*' to indicate a noun's gender.

<i>German</i>		<i>English</i>
der Stuhl	(masculine)	the chair
die Straße	(feminine)	the street
das Buch	(neuter)	the book

The gender of German nouns is difficult to predict, so the best way to learn them is to simply memorize the articles with the nouns when you learn new nouns. Sometimes, however, one can make an educated guess at a noun's gender. Here are some hints to help you:

- Nouns taken from other languages are *usually* neuter: das Auto, das Hotel
- Nouns ending in -e are *usually* feminine: die Lampe, die Vase
- Nouns ending in -er are *usually* masculine: der Lehrer, der Führer
  
- Nouns ending in -lein and -chen are *always* neuter: das Fräulein, das Mädchen
- Nouns ending in -in are *always* feminine: die Studentin, die Professorin

### Plurals

German plurals also are formed differently from in English. In English the addition of 's' usually indicates the plural of a noun: houses, books, dogs. In German there are a variety of ways in which plurals are formed. Again, it is best to learn the plurals along with the gender when incorporating a new noun into your vocabulary. Below is a list of the ways in which plurals are formed. Note that all plurals use the article '*die*.'

<i>Add to Noun:</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
1. no change	das Theater	die Theater
2. umlaut on stem vowel	der Garten	die Gärten
3. umlaut + -e	die Wand	die Wände
4. -er	das Kind	die Kinder
5. umlaut + -er	das Buch	die Bücher
6. -en	der Professor	die Professoren
7. -n	die Lampe	die Lampen
8. -e	der Tisch	die Tische
9. -s	das Auto	die Autos

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## I. Using the Dictionary

Any good German dictionary will give you all the information you need to know about a noun. The dictionary will provide you with the gender, the manner in which the plurals are formed and genitive endings (a topic you'll learn about later). The abbreviations and notations in the dictionary can be confusing, but once you understand them, you'll find them very helpful. Here's how to glean the information you'll need from the dictionary:

Let's say you know the German word for book is Buch, but you can't remember the gender and have to find out how to form the plural as well. Here's what you'll see in the dictionary:

**Buch** [bu:x] *n* (-[e]s; -er) book; volume

The 'bu:x' in square brackets is the pronunciation for 'Buch.' The next item, usually in italics, is the gender. Here the '*n*' indicates that the noun is neuter, *das Buch*. The two elements in regular parenthesis are first, the genitive ending (ignore this for now!) and second, the plural. In this case, add umlauts and 'er' to the noun to get the plural 'Bücher.'

Look at the dictionary entry below. Can you determine the noun's gender and its plural form?

**Hund** [hunt] *m* (-[e]s; -e) dog; hound

That's right. Hund is a masculine noun: *der Hund*. The plural is *die Hunde*.

## II. Memorizing Gender and Plurals

The easiest way to remember genders and plurals is to make flash cards like the ones pictured below. It is VERY important to memorize this information when you learn each new noun, because you will need this information later when you learn the case system.

