

die das Mädchen

If you are learning articles word by word, you are doing thousands of small jobs instead of about twenty-five. In most German nouns the **ending** tells you the article, and in a compound the **last chunk** decides — however long the word gets. Below: the full ending table, the endings that are genuinely watertight, three named traps, and the honest list of where the rules break.

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01 00:12

You already read word endings in English

Read this word: *reticulation*. You have probably never seen it, and you still know three things about it instantly — it is a noun, it is abstract, and it is a thing rather than a person. Nobody taught you that. You learnt to read the ending **-tion** and stopped thinking about it.

You do the same with **-ness** (a quality), **-ship** (a state or relation), **-er** (someone who does it), **-ism** (a system of ideas), **-let** (a small one). English endings carry information, you read it automatically, and you never called it grammar.

German runs exactly this system, with one extra piece of information stapled on: the ending also tells you **der**, **die** or **das**. Not the meaning of the word. Not whether the thing is male, female or an object. The last few letters.

✓ Die Wohnung ist klein.

The flat is small. → the ending is -ung, so it is **die**. You did not need to know the word.

✓ Der Kapitalismus ist ein System.

Capitalism is a system. → -ismus, so **der**. Same word you already know in English.

✓ Das Dokument liegt auf dem Tisch.

The document is on the table. → -ment, so **das**.

That is the whole method. You are not learning gender for every noun — you are learning about twenty-five endings, once. The rest of this page is that list, plus the places where it is honestly not enough.

- ① One thing to drop straight away: German gender has nothing to do with real-world gender. **das Mädchen** (girl) is neuter, **die Person** is feminine even when it is your brother. Treat **der** · **die** · **das** as three arbitrary boxes with three arbitrary labels.

The ending table — this is the part you save

Read this once slowly, then never again as a block. You will meet these endings ten times a day and they fix themselves. The *How safe* column is the important one — some of these rows have no exceptions at all, and some are a coin flip with a thumb on the scale.

ENDING	ARTICLE	ENGLISH COUSIN	HOW SAFE	EXAMPLES
-ung	die	-ing · -tion	watertight as a suffix	die Wohnung · die Zeitung · die Meinung · die Übung
-heit	die	-ness · -hood	no exceptions	die Freiheit · die Krankheit · die Kindheit
-keit	die	-ness · -ity	no exceptions	die Möglichkeit · die Schwierigkeit
-schaft	die	-ship	no exceptions	die Freundschaft · die Wissenschaft · die Mannschaft
-tion · -sion	die	identical	no exceptions	die Nation · die Information · die Explosion
-tät	die	-ty	no exceptions	die Universität · die Qualität · die Realität
-anz · -enz	die	-ance · -ence	very high	die Distanz · die Konferenz · die Existenz
-ie	die	-y (biology)	very high — but das Genie	die Biologie · die Familie · die Energie
-ei	die	—	very high	die Bäckerei · die Polizei · die Datei
-ur	die	-ure	high — but das Abitur · der Flur	die Natur · die Kultur · die Temperatur
-ik	die	-ic · -ics	high	die Musik · die Politik · die Grammatik
-e	die	—	weakest rule on the page — see trap 02	die Lampe · die Blume · die Frage
-er (a doer)	der	-er (teacher)	high <i>only</i> for doers — see trap 03	der Lehrer · der Fahrer · der Computer
-ling	der	-ling (duckling)	no exceptions	der Frühling · der Schmetterling · der Zwilling
-ismus	der	-ism	no exceptions	der Kapitalismus · der Tourismus · der Realismus
-or	der	-or	high — but das Labor	der Motor · der Professor · der Autor
-ig · -ich	der	—	high	der Honig · der König · der Teppich
-ant · -ent (a person)	der	-ant · -ent	high for people only	der Student · der Praktikant · der Präsident

ENDING	ARTICLE	ENGLISH COUSIN	HOW SAFE	EXAMPLES
-chen	das	-let · -le (doggie)	no exceptions	das Mädchen · das Brötchen · das Märchen
-lein	das	-let	no exceptions	das Fräulein · das Büchlein · das Vöglein
-ment	das	-ment	very high — but der Moment · der Zement	das Dokument · das Instrument · das Medikament
-um	das	-um (museum)	very high — but der Konsum	das Zentrum · das Museum · das Datum · das Studium
-tum	das	-dom (Christendom)	high — two exceptions, both common	das Eigentum · das Wachstum — but der Reichtum · der Irrtum
-nis	das	-ness	mostly das, a handful die	das Ergebnis · das Erlebnis · das Geheimnis — but die Kenntnis · die Erlaubnis
-zeug	das	—	no exceptions	das Werkzeug · das Flugzeug · das Spielzeug
-ing (English loanword)	das	straight from English	reliable — but der Pudding	das Training · das Meeting · das Marketing

Do not try to hold twenty-six rows in your head. Hold **four**: **-ung** · **-heit** · **-keit** · **-schaft** are **die** and never anything else. Those four alone cover a large slice of every abstract noun in the language, and they are free from today.

Notice the shape of the list: the **die** block is by far the longest. That is not an accident — German builds most of its abstract vocabulary with feminine suffixes. If you are guessing blind on a long, abstract-sounding noun, **die** is the best bet you have.

03 01:45

The part that is free because you speak English

English and German split from the same parent, then English borrowed the same Latin vocabulary German did. The result: a whole layer of German nouns is a word you already own, wearing a slightly different ending — and that ending hands you the article.

YOUR ENGLISH ENDING	BECOMES	ARTICLE	A WORD YOU ALREADY KNOW
-tion	-tion	die	information → die Information · nation → die Nation
-ty	-tät	die	university → die Universität · quality → die Qualität
-ness · -hood	-heit · -keit	die	childhood → die Kindheit · possibility → die Möglichkeit
-ship	-schaft	die	friendship → die Freundschaft · membership → die Mitgliedschaft
-ance · -ence	-anz · -enz	die	distance → die Distanz · existence → die Existenz
-y (as in -ology)	-ie	die	biology → die Biologie · energy → die Energie
-ure	-ur	die	nature → die Natur · culture → die Kultur
-ism	-ismus	der	tourism → der Tourismus · optimism → der Optimismus
-or	-or	der	motor → der Motor · professor → der Professor
-ent · -ant (people)	-ent · -ant	der	student → der Student · president → der Präsident
-ment	-ment	das	instrument → das Instrument · argument → das Argument
-um	-um	das	museum → das Museum · album → das Album
-dom	-tum	das	Christendom → das Christentum · growth → das Wachstum
-ing (loanwords)	-ing	das	training → das Training · meeting → das Meeting

Nine of these fourteen rows land on **die**. If a German noun looks Latin, sounds academic and could appear in an English essay, feminine is the sensible default.

There is one thing English gives you that speakers of French, Spanish or Italian do not get: **nothing to unlearn**. They arrive with a gender for every noun already installed, and German ignores it. The sun is **die Sonne** in German and masculine in Spanish; the moon is **der Mond** in German and feminine in Spanish. Gender does not travel between languages. You start clean.

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Three named traps



TRAP 01

The ending beats the meaning. Always.

✓ **Das Mädchen liest ein Buch.**

The girl is reading a book. → **-chen** is the diminutive ending, and every diminutive is neuter. It does not care that the word means «girl».

✗ **Die Mädchen liest ein Buch.**

Wrong. You went by meaning. Worse: **die Mädchen** does exist — it is the plural — so this reads as «the girls is reading».

The same machine produces **das Brötchen** (bread roll), **das Häuschen** (little house), **das Fräulein**. A real diminutive usually umlauts the stem as well: **Haus** → **Häuschen**, **Buch** → **Büchlein**, **Vogel** → **Vöglein**.

And this cuts the other way too: **die Person** stays feminine when it is a man, **das Kind** stays neuter for a boy or a girl, **die Wache** (the guard) is feminine whoever is standing there. Meaning is not the input.

- ① Careful with lookalikes: **der Kuchen** (cake) and **der Knochen** (bone) end in the letters **-chen** but are not diminutives — there is no small «Ku» or «Kno». If the word does not mean «a little X», it is not the suffix.



TRAP 02

-e is the weakest rule on the page

Roughly three out of four nouns in **-e** are **die**: **die Lampe** · **die Blume** · **die Sprache** · **die Frage** · **die Straße**. Useful, but that last quarter contains some of the most common words in the language.

- **der** — **der Name** · **der Junge** · **der Käse** · **der Kollege** · **der Buchstabe** · **der Gedanke** · **der Löwe** · **der Hase**
- **das** — **das Ende** · **das Auge** · **das Interesse** · **das Gebäude** · **das Gemüse**

✓ **Ich habe eine Frage.**

I have a question. → **-e** behaving normally: feminine, so **eine**.

✓ **Wie ist dein Name?**

What is your name? → not **deine**. **Name** is one of the masculine **-e** words, and this is the sentence you will say on day one.

Practical rule: if you are going to be suspicious of anything on this page, be suspicious of an **-e** word. Everywhere else, trust the ending and move on.



TRAP 03

-er is not a gender ending — it is a job description

Most lists print «-er → der» flat, and then you meet **die Mutter** and lose confidence in the whole method. The rule is narrower than the lists admit: -er means **der** when the word is built from a verb and means **the one who does it**.

✓ Der Lehrer erklärt die Regel.

The teacher explains the rule. → **lehren** (to teach) + -er = the one who teaches. This is the ending working.

✓ Das Fenster ist offen.

The window is open. → a window does not «fenst». No verb behind it, so the -er tells you nothing.

✗ ~~Der~~ Fenster ist offen.

Wrong. You applied the doer rule to a word that is not a doer.

-ER WORD	ARTICLE	WHY
der Fahrer · der Sprecher · der Verkäufer	der	built from fahren · sprechen · verkaufen — a doer
der Computer · der Kalender · der Pullover	der	loanwords that joined the doer group anyway
die Mutter · die Schwester · die Tochter	die	ancient family words, older than the suffix
die Butter · die Leiter · die Feier	die	not doers, and feminine
das Fenster · das Wasser · das Messer	das	not doers, and neuter
das Zimmer · das Theater · das Wetter	das	not doers, and neuter

Test before you use the rule: can you say «*someone who ...s*»? If yes, take **der**. If not, the ending is silent and you learn that word individually.

05 03:50

No ending? Then go by group

Short, old, everyday nouns often have no suffix at all — **Tisch · Baum · Hund · Bier**. For those there is a second, weaker system: categories of meaning. Treat it as a set of good bets rather than rules, and note the exceptions written next to each row, because those are exactly the words you will use first.

GROUP	ARTICLE	EXAMPLES	WATCH OUT
Days · months · seasons	der	der Montag · der Januar · der Sommer	reliable
Weather and compass points	der	der Regen · der Schnee · der Wind · der Norden	die Sonne · das Eis · das Wetter
Male people and animals	der	der Vater · der Bruder · der Hahn	das Mädchen · das Kind
Alcoholic drinks	der	der Wein · der Wodka · der Schnaps	das Bier — of course
Car makes	der	der BMW · der Golf · der Audi	motorbikes and ships go die
Rocks and minerals	der	der Stein · der Granit · der Diamant	reliable
Numbers used as nouns	die	die Eins · die Null · die Million	das Hundert · das Tausend
Flowers and trees	die	die Rose · die Tulpe · die Eiche · die Tanne	der Ahorn · der Kaktus
Most fruits and berries	die	die Banane · die Kirsche · die Erdbeere	der Apfel · der Pfirsich
Female people	die	die Frau · die Mutter · die Tochter	the -chen words override this
Ships	die	die Titanic · die Queen Mary	reliable
Young living things	das	das Kind · das Baby · das Lamm · das Kalb	reliable
Metals and elements	das	das Gold · das Silber · das Eisen · das Kupfer	der Stahl · die Bronze
Colours used as nouns	das	das Rot · das Blau · das Grün	reliable
Languages and letters	das	das Deutsch · das Englisch · das große A	usually used with no article at all
Countries and cities	das	das schöne Italien · das moderne Berlin	die Schweiz · die Türkei · der Iran
Verbs used as nouns	das	das Essen · das Lernen · das Leben · das Schwimmen	no exceptions — 100%

One row in this table is a real rule and the rest are bets. Take any infinitive, write it with a capital letter, and it is a neuter noun: **schwimmen** → **das Schwimmen**. That is an infinite supply of nouns whose article you will never have to look up.

✓ Das Essen ist fertig.

Dinner is ready. → **essen** (to eat) turned into a noun, so **das**. No exceptions to check.

✓ Der Montag ist mein freier Tag.

Monday is my day off. → days of the week are masculine, and so is **der Tag** itself.

- ① Honest limit: these groups are patterns somebody noticed afterwards, not laws. If a group bet fails you twice on the same word, stop betting and learn that word with its article, the way you learn an

irregular verb.

06 04:45

The part nobody teaches: in a compound, the last chunk decides

You already know this rule in English and were never told it either. A *houseboat* is a boat. A *boathouse* is a house. A *bus stop* is a stop, not a bus. The final word carries the identity; everything in front of it is description.

German does the same thing, glues it all into one word, and adds one consequence: **the article comes from the last chunk too**. Nothing else in the word matters.

✓ Die Haustür ist offen.

The front door is open. → **das Haus** + **die Tür**. It is a door, so it is **die**.

✗ ~~Das~~ Haustür ist offen.

Wrong. You took the article from **Haus**, the first chunk. The front of a compound never decides anything.

✓ Der Apfelbaum steht im Garten.

The apple tree is in the garden. → **Baum** decides; **Apfel** is only telling you which kind.

COMPOUND	BUILT FROM	LAST CHUNK	ARTICLE
die Haustür	das Haus + die Tür	Tür	die
der Apfelbaum	der Apfel + der Baum	Baum	der
der Handschuh	die Hand + der Schuh	Schuh	der
die Autobahn	das Auto + die Bahn	Bahn	die
das Wörterbuch	das Wort + das Buch	Buch	das
der Geburtstag	die Geburt + der Tag	Tag	der
die Jahreszeit	das Jahr + die Zeit	Zeit	die
das Flugzeug	der Flug + das Zeug	Zeug	das
der Arbeitsplatz	die Arbeit + der Platz	Platz	der
die Krankenversicherung	krank + die Versicherung	Versicherung → -ung	die
das Fußballspiel	der Fußball + das Spiel	Spiel	das

The little **-s-** and **-en-** that appear between chunks (**Arbeitsplatz** • **Krankenversicherung**) are glue, not grammar. They change nothing about the article.

Now the famous monster: **die Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaft** — Danube-steam-ship-travel-company. Forty-something letters, and you answer it with the last ten: **Gesellschaft** → **-schaft** → **die**. You did not need to understand a single other syllable.

This is why long German words are the wrong thing to be afraid of. A long word is small words glued together, and it hands you both the meaning and the article in its final chunk. The genuinely hard German words are the short ones: **Tisch · Stuhl · Buch · Bier**. No ending, no compound, nothing to read.

- ① Two chunks combined can also form a word whose two ends are read differently — **der See** (lake) and **die See** (sea) are two words spelled the same. Rare, but it exists, and no ending rule will save you there.

07 05:50

How to put this in your notebook

The single change that fixes this topic is not studying harder. It is refusing, from today, to ever write a German noun on its own. A bare noun is not a German word — it is half of one.

- **✗ Tisch** = table
- **✓ der Tisch, die Tische** = table — article and plural in the same breath
- **✗ Wohnung** = flat
- **✓ die Wohnung, die Wohnungen** — and mark it: *-ung, so die, no thinking required*

Take the plural at the same time on purpose. German plurals are as unpredictable as the articles, they cost nothing extra at the moment you first meet the word, and they cost a lot to bolt on six months later.

- When a new noun arrives, ask one question first: **does it end in something from the table?** If yes, do not memorise the article at all — you already have it, and memorising it again is wasted work.
- Keep a second, short list called «*no ending, had to learn it*». That is where **der Tisch · das Bier · die Zeit** live. It will stay surprisingly small.
- Say the word with its article, never alone — **die Zeitung**, not **Zeitung**. You are training your mouth, not your memory.
- Once a week, take five nouns you wrote down and say which rule each one falls under. If a word has no rule, it belongs on the short list.
- Every time you hesitate mid-sentence, write down the noun. Ten hesitations later you will see that the same eight words keep doing it — and eight words is an evening, not a year.

A last piece of perspective on getting it wrong. Article mistakes almost never destroy a sentence. **Ich suche der Wohnung** is wrong and everyone still understands you and answers. Fluency is not built by never risking an article — it is built by saying the sentence, taking the correction, and having a system that files the correction somewhere useful.

- ① The honest summary: no ending on this page is a law of nature, and a small handful — **-chen · -lein · -heit · -keit · -schaft · -tion** — are close enough to one that you can bet on them without hesitating. Everything else beats guessing, and everything beats memorising thousands of nouns one at a time.

08 BUILD

Build the sentence yourself

Tap the words and put them in order. This is the hardest part of German — and there are no options to pick from, **you** build it.

TAP THE WORDS

TAP THE WORDS

TAP THE WORDS

08 06 : 40

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+4

Take the full test

10 questions · timed · rule breakdown at the end



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