

Noun plurals

— DER PLURAL

The German plural is the form a noun takes to name more than one thing: die Bücher, die Autos.

Saying “die Hundes” instead of “die Hunde” is a very common slip. English has one plural ending, -s, and it leaks into German. German has five types.

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Why it looks so messy

 **SHORTCUT** Words that take **die** almost always form their plural with -(e)n. That one rule rescues most everyday vocabulary.

In English the plural is an **ending**: book → books, house → houses. Add -s and you are done (apart from the odd *child* → *children*). In German the plural is a matter of **vocabulary** — the ending depends on the word, and sometimes the vowel inside the word changes too.

- ✓ **das Buch → die Bücher**
an ending was added and the u inside changed
- ✓ **das Auto → die Autos**
just -s (the one that looks like English)
- ✓ **das Fenster → die Fenster**
nothing changed, like English sheep

The good news: this mess is not random. **A noun's article largely tells you which ending it leans towards.** Once you have the table below in your head, you can make an accurate guess even with a word you have never seen.

- ① In the plural the article is always **die** — whatever the word's gender in the singular. So **der Mann → die Männer**, **das Kind → die Kinder**.

Five types — the table to save

TYPE	TYPICAL GENDER	EXAMPLES
-(e)n	die — almost a rule	die Frau → die Frauen · die Lampe → die Lampen · die Blume → die Blumen · die Tür → die Türen · die Zeitung → die Zeitungen
-e (sometimes + Umlaut)	mostly der	der Tisch → die Tische · der Tag → die Tage · der Hund → die Hunde · der Stuhl → die Stühle · die Stadt → die Städte
-er (+ Umlaut if possible)	das and some der	das Kind → die Kinder · das Buch → die Bücher · das Ei → die Eier · der Mann → die Männer · das Haus → die Häuser
no ending (sometimes + Umlaut)	words ending in -er · -el · -en	der Lehrer → die Lehrer · das Fenster → die Fenster · der Onkel → die Onkel · der Apfel → die Äpfel · das Mädchen → die Mädchen
-s	foreign words · words ending in a vowel	das Auto → die Autos · das Hotel → die Hotels · die Oma → die Omas · das Handy → die Handys · das Team → die Teams

You do not have to memorise the table. **On day one, just the first row:** words that take **die** almost always form their plural with **-(e)n**. That one rule rescues most everyday vocabulary.

- **Do not learn a word on its own.** Look it up as a set in the dictionary: **das Buch, "-er** → article + plural together.
- If you do not know a word's plural and it takes **die**, say **-(e)n**. Your chance of being wrong is low.
- A word that has taken the diminutive endings **-chen** or **-lein** **does not change at all** in the plural.

Umlaut — where it can appear, where it never does

The umlaut (ä · ö · ü) is not decoration; it is part of the plural. But not every word can have one: only words with **a · o · u · au** in the stem. If the stem has **e** or **i**, there is no chance of an umlaut — those vowels do not have one.

VOWEL IN THE STEM	UMLAUT POSSIBLE?	EXAMPLE
a	possible → ä	der Mann → die Männer
o	possible → ö	der Sohn → die Söhne
u	possible → ü	das Buch → die Bücher
au	possible → äu	das Haus → die Häuser
e · i	never	das Kind → die Kinder (no umlaut)

In the **-er** type, if an umlaut is possible it appears **almost every time**: Buch → Bücher • Haus → Häuser • Mann → Männer. In the **-e** type it varies: Stuhl → Stühle but Tag → Tage.

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The rule everyone forgets: dative plural -n

You built the plural correctly, put it in a sentence — and it was still wrong. The reason: **in the dative plural, one more -n is added to the end of the word**. The article also becomes **den**.

- ✓

Ich spiele mit den **Kindern**.

I'm playing with the children. — **mit** takes the dative, so -n was added to the plural
- ✗

Ich spiele mit den **Kinder**.

no -n

PLURAL FORM	DATIVE PLURAL	EXPLANATION
die Kinder	den Kindern	-n added
die Bücher	den Büchern	-n added
die Frauen	den Frauen	already ends in -n , nothing added
die Autos	den Autos	no -n after an -s plural

In short: **if the plural does not already end in -n or -s, add an -n in the dative**.

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Three traps

⚠

TRAP 01

Using -s the way English does

The English reflex sticks an **-s** on every word: **die Buchs • die Manns ✗**. In German, **-s** belongs to a narrow group: foreign words (**das Hotel • das Team**) and words ending in a vowel (**die Oma • das Handy**). The correct forms are **die Bücher • die Männer**.



TRAP 02

"Mädchen" does not change in the plural

Every word ending in **-chen** or **-lein** stays the same in the plural: **das Mädchen** → **die Mädchen** · **das Brötchen** → **die Brötchen**. Only the article changes. There is no such thing as **die Mädchens**.



TRAP 03

Mistaking the accusative plural for the dative

The dative plural adds **-n**, but **in the accusative plural nothing changes**: **Ich sehe die Kinder.** (acc.) · **Ich helfe den Kindern.** (dat.). Only the dative earns the extra **-n**.

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Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+7

Take the full test

13 questions · timed · rule breakdown at the end



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GENAU — NOT RULES, THE MOMENT IT CLICKS.

