

7 Plural of nouns

In German, plural nouns are not distinguished by gender. The plural forms of German nouns are not always predictable and, as with gender, have to be learnt. The ways of forming the plural are:

- Group 1:** no ending, with or without Umlaut
- Group 2:** ending -e, with or without Umlaut
- Group 3:** ending -er, with or without Umlaut
- Group 4:** ending -(e)n (add -n if noun ends in -e, -el or -er)
- Group 5:** ending -s (often used for words borrowed from English or French)

There are some guidelines to which plural form is likely to apply. These are linked to the noun's gender and ending.

7.1 Masculine nouns

These have plural forms from groups 1-5 above.

■ 7.1.1 Group 1: no ending, with or without Umlaut

- The majority of masculine nouns ending in -el, -en, -er have no plural ending and no Umlaut, so their singular and plural forms are identical:
der Löffel – die Löffel (*spoon*)
der Wagen – die Wagen (*car, carriage*)
der Fehler – die Fehler (*mistake*)
Common exceptions: der Bauer – die Bauern (*farmer*) (see 8.2.3 a), der Muskel – die Muskeln (*muscle*), der Vetter – die Vettern (*cousin*)
- A few masculine nouns ending in -el, -en, -er have no ending but their stressed vowel takes an Umlaut, e.g.:
der Apfel – die Äpfel (*apple*)
der Bruder – die Brüder (*brother*)
der Garten – die Gärten (*garden*)

■ **7.1.2 Group 2:** ending -e, with or without Umlaut
The great majority of masculine nouns belong to this category, especially one-syllable words. About half of these take an Umlaut. Examples:

der Arm – die Arme (<i>arm</i>)	der Fuß – die Füße (<i>foot</i>)
der Freund – die Freunde (<i>friend</i>)	der Vertrag – die Verträge (<i>contract</i>)

■ **7.1.3 Group 3:** ending -er, with or without Umlaut
This group is relatively small. These nouns form the plural with an Umlaut where possible, e.g.:

der Gott – die Götter (<i>god</i>)
der Irrtum – die Irrtümer (<i>error</i>)
der Ski – die Skier (<i>ski</i>)
der Wald – die Wälder (<i>forest</i>)

■ 7.1.4 Group 4: ending -(e)n

Most masculine nouns belonging to this group are 'weak'; see 8.2.3 for examples. Other common examples are:

der Schmerz – die Schmerzen (<i>pain</i>)
der See – die Seen (<i>lake</i>)
der Staat – die Staaten (<i>state</i>)

■ 7.1.5 Group 5: ending -s

A few words have this ending, e.g.:

der Hit – die Hits
der Trend – die Trends

7.2 Feminine nouns

These have plural forms from groups 1, 2 and 4 above.

■ 7.2.1 Group 1: no ending, with or without Umlaut

There are only two nouns in this group. Both take an Umlaut:
die Mutter – die Mütter (*mother*)
die Tochter – die Töchter (*daughter*)