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- Short and concise explanations with numerous example sentences
- Common mistakes made by learners (collected from over 10,000 lessons)
- Guidance on pronunciation, spelling, and punctuation

Alexander M. Pühringer

German Grammar Complete
the comprehensive German grammar

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by Alexander M. Pühringer

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German Grammar Complete

die gesamte deutsche Grammatik

Alexander M. Pühringer

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Noun Declension / Nomen Deklination

Der Mann gibt den Frauen die Aufgaben. (*The man gives the tasks to the women.*)

We must modify words or word groups to form meaningful and grammatically correct sentences. For nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and numeral words, this modification is called declension. Words are declined according to case, number, and gender. Declension is crucial because it allows us to recognise the affiliation, circumstance, or role of one or more things or persons in an action.

Example:

Der Mann erklärt der Frau die Grammatik. (*The man explains the grammar to the woman.*)

Die Frau erklärt dem Mann die Grammatik. (*The woman explains the grammar to the man.*)

In general, we decline (modify) the articles of the nouns. However, in some cases and declension classes, we must modify the nouns themselves. More on this in *Genitive* (p. 115) and *n-Declension* (p. 124).

Der bestimmte Artikel

	Maskulinum	Femininum	Neutrum	Plural
Nominativ	der Mann	die Frau	das Kind	die Eltern
Genitiv	des Mannes	der Frau	des Kindes	der Eltern
Dativ	dem Mann	der Frau	dem Kind	den Eltern
Akkusativ	den Mann	die Frau	das Kind	die Eltern

Der unbestimmte Artikel

	Maskulinum	Femininum	Neutrum	Plural
Nominativ	(k)ein Mann	(k)eine Frau	(k)ein Kind	keine Eltern
Genitiv	(k)eines Mannes	(k)einer Frau	(k)eines Kindes	keiner Eltern
Dativ	(k)einem Mann	(k)einer Frau	(k)einem Kind	keinen Eltern
Akkusativ	(k)einen Mann	(k)eine Frau	(k)ein Kind	keine Eltern

The indefinite article (der unbestimmte Artikel) is used when referring to an unspecified person or thing or when the person or thing is not known. The indefinite articles “ein” (masculine), “eine” (feminine), and “ein” (neuter) exist only in the singular form. We do not use an article when we want to mention indefinite things in the plural.

Example:

Ich kaufe eine Jacke. Ich kaufe Jacken.

(I buy a jacket. I buy jackets.)

Der Mann schreibt einen Brief. Der Mann schreibt Briefe.

(The man writes a letter. The man writes letters.)

Function of Declension / Funktion der Deklination

Der Mann lernt den Satz. *(The man learns the sentence.)*

Den Satz lernt der Mann. *(The sentence learns the man.)*

The purpose of declension is to indicate precisely who is performing the action and who or what is the object of the action. This provides us with particular flexibility in the German language.

Example:

The man writes the letter.

The letter writes the man.

The second sentence of the example above sounds absurd and likely does not convey the intended information. The corresponding words for this sentence in German are: der Mann (*the man*), der Brief (*the letter*), and schreiben (*to write*). When we write these two sentences in German, the following happens:

Der Mann schreibt den Brief.

Den Brief schreibt der Mann.

Through the articles (i.e., through declension), we recognise that the man is the subject and the letter is the object in both sentences. Both sentences communicate the same information.



Note:

Note that our sentence “Den Brief schreibt der Mann” emphasises that the man is writing the letter and nothing else, for example, “It is the letter that the man is writing, not the text.” Generally, there are certain tendencies that we usually follow in sentence structure. More on this in *Sentence Structure Tendencies* (p. 82).

Word Formation / Wortbildung

Word formation is an essential component of the German language and describes the production of words using other words or units of meaning. A language's smallest unit of meaning is also known as a morpheme. Morphemes are meaning-forming elements and can be whole words (Herz) or word parts such as affixes ("-lich": herzlich).

Compound Words / Komposita

Ablaufdatum, wegfahren, letztendlich (*expiration date, to drive away, ultimately*)

Compound words are words composed of two or more words, forming a new meaning. Compound words are a central element of the German language. We use compound words primarily because they are shorter. However, we try to avoid unnecessarily long words.

Example:

Wohnzimmertisch – Tisch im Wohnzimmer

(*living room table – table in the living room*)

Most compound words consist of two or three elements and can form various parts of speech. Most compound words comprise nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions.

Example:

Schwarzfahrer, umweltfreundlich, vorwärtsfahren

(*fare dodger, environmentally friendly, to drive forward*)

The last word in the compound is always the base word. This base word determines the grammatical properties of the entire compound word.

Example:

das Wohnzimmer, der Wohnzimmertisch (*the living room, the living room table*)

die Sonnenblume, das Sonnenblumenöl (*the sunflower, the sunflower oil*)

Formation of Compound Words / Bildung von Komposita

In general, we can combine words arbitrarily to create new terms.

Example:

Haus (*house*), Tür (*door*): die Haustür (*the front door*)

Auto (*car*), Tür (*door*): die Autotür (*the car door*)

Eingang (*entrance*), Tür (*door*): die Eingangstür (*the entrance door*)

When incorporating verbs into a compound word where the verb is not the base word, we use the present stem (infinitive without “-(e)n”).

Example:

gießen (*to pour*), Kanne (*can*): die Gießkanne (*the watering can*)

essen (*to eat*), Tisch (*table*): der Esstisch (*the dining table*)

Unfortunately, there are many irregularities. It is best to learn these irregularities along with developing a general sense of word composition.

Joining Elements / Fugenelemente

One of these irregularities is the use of joining elements (Fugenelemente). Although they have grammatical origins, nowadays, they primarily serve to facilitate pronunciation. Approximately one third of all compound words require a joining element, such as -e-, -(e)s-, -er-, -(e)n-.

Example:

Hund (*dog*), Hütte (*hut*): die Hundehütte (*doghouse*)

Arbeit (*work*), Platz (*place*): der Arbeitsplatz (*workplace*)

The most common joining element is the *Fugen-S*. The *Fugen-S* is always used after the following endings: -ing, -ion, -heit, -keit, -ling, -schaft, -tät, -tum, -ung.

Gender of Nouns / Nomen Geschlecht

The most common mistake is the use of the wrong gender of nouns. There are approximately 300,000 to 500,000 base words in the German language, and a significant portion of them are nouns. 46% of nouns are feminine, 36% are masculine, and 18% are neuter.

However, you don't need to learn all nouns to assign their gender correctly. There are some guidelines that cover approximately 20% of all nouns.

Nouns with the following endings are masculine and have the article “der”:

-or, -ling, -ig, -ner, -smus.

Example:

der Generator (*generator*), der Frühling (*spring*), der Honig (*honey*), der Rentner (*retiree*), der Kapitalismus (*capitalism*)

Nouns with the following endings are feminine and have the article “die”:

-ung, -ie, -ei, -keit, -heit, -schaft, -tät, -ik, -tion.

Example:

die Zeitung (*newspaper*), die Komödie (*comedy*), die Bäckerei (*bakery*), die Tätigkeit (*activity*), die Schönheit (*beauty*), die Mannschaft (*team*), die Universität (*university*), die Musik (*music*), die Situation (*situation*)

Nouns with the following endings are neuter and have the article “das”:

-chen, -lein, -ment, -tum, -ma, -um.

Example:

das Mädchen (*girl*), das Fräulein (*miss*), das Supplement (*supplement*), das Rittertum (*chivalry*), das Schema (*scheme*), das Museum (*museum*)

Note:

A few nouns can also have two or even all three genders and are used differently depending on the region, for example, der/die/das Joghurt (*yogurt*).



Additional Rules / Weitere Regeln

Generally, male beings, both humans and animals, are masculine and therefore have the article “der”. This also applies to nouns that refer to female beings.

Example:

der Angestellte – die Angestellte (*employee – female employee*)

der Fuchs – die Füchsin (*fox – vixen*)

The following words are almost always masculine and have the article “der”:

- Days, months, and seasons
- Cardinal directions, e.g., der Norden (*north*)
- Car or train brands, e.g., der BMW

The following words are almost always feminine and have the article “die”:

- Cardinal numbers, e.g., die Eins (*one*)
- Names for ships, planes, or motorcycles, e.g., die Titanic, die BMW

The following words are almost always neuter and have the article “das”:

- Colours when used as nouns, e.g., das Rot (*red*)
- Verbs used as nouns, e.g., das Schwimmen (*swimming*), das Lesen (*reading*)
- Nouns in the diminutive, e.g., das Männlein (*little man*), das Männchen (*little male*)
- Many nouns directly borrowed from English, e.g., das Meeting (*meeting*), but:
der Computer (*computer*)

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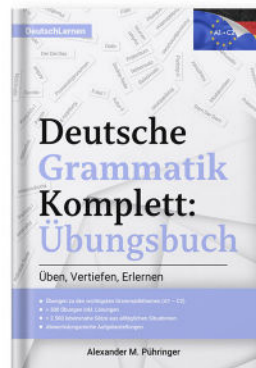
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A1



C2

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