SOME SPECIAL TRAITS OF GERMAN NOUNS

nouns are classified into grammatical genders

Every German noun falls into one of three categories. The three categories were originally based on the sound of the noun. The original sounds have been lost, but the three categories still remain. The names of the categories were borrowed from Latin and are based on gender, however, the categories have nothing to do with biological gender. There is no clue with any German noun as to which category that noun belongs. Each noun must be memorized along with its category. There is nothing about the physical trait of any noun that helps identify its category. Note that the German word for “the” changes according to gender.

(masculine)
- der Tisch: the table
- der Löffel: the spoon
- der Zug: the train

(feminine)
- die Lampe: the lamp
- die Gabel: the fork
- die U-bahn: the subway

(neuter)
- das Buch: the book
- das Messer: the knife
- das Auto: the car

pronouns match the gender of the nouns they replace

Pronouns stand in place of a noun along with the other words that accompany that noun. In German, the gender of the pronoun must match that of the original noun. Note that the German word for “it” changes according to the gender of the original noun.

(noun) ("it")
- der Tisch (masculine): er
- das Papier (neuter): es
- die Lampe (feminine): sie
- die U-bahn (feminine): sie
- der Löffel (masculine): er
- das Messer (neuter): es
- das Auto (neuter): es
- der Zug (masculine): er
- die Gabel (feminine): sie

Other plural forms:
- add ending “er”
  - das Kind: die Kinder
  - der Garten: die Gärten
  - das Auto: die Autos
- add umlaut to stem vowel
  - das Buch: die Bücher
  - die Ärztin: die Ärztinnen
- add “nen” to end of noun
  - das Mädchen: die Mädchen
- make no changes
  - das Blatt: die Blätter
  - die Ärztin: die Ärztinnen

nouns have many different plural forms

In English, the typical plural formation of a noun is simply an “s” or “es” on the end of that noun. In German, there are many common forms used to create the plural. The plural form for each noun must be memorized.

Typical plurals for masculine nouns:
- add “e” to the end of the noun
  - der Tag: die Tage
day/days
  - der Bleistift: die Bleistifte
  - der Monat: die Monate
  - der Stein: die Steine

Typical plurals for feminine nouns:
- add “n” or “en” to the end of the noun
  - die Frau: die Frauen
  - die Lampe: die Lampen
  - die Gabel: die Gabeln
  - die Autobahn: die Autobahnen

Typical plurals for neuter nouns:
- add “er” to end of noun and umlaut to stem vowel
  - das Buch: die Bücher
  - das Dach: die Dächer
  - das Blatt: die Blätter
  - das Glas: die Gläser

Other plural forms:
- add ending “er”
  - das Kind: die Kinder
- add umlaut to stem vowel
  - der Garten: die Gärten
- add “nen” to end of noun
  - die Ärztin: die Ärztinnen
- make no changes
  - das Blatt: die Blätter

nouns take case forms

(1) Der Garten ist schön.
(2) Der Nachbar mag den Garten.
(3) Der Nachbar arbeitet in dem Garten.
(1) The yard is nice.
(2) The neighbor likes the yard.
(3) The neighbor is working in the yard.

(1) nominative (subject)
(2) accusative (direct object)
(3) dative (location)