

Danish

A Comprehensive Grammar

2nd Edition

**Tom Lundskær-Nielsen and
Philip Holmes**



Routledge Comprehensive Grammars

Danish

A Comprehensive Grammar

2nd edition

Danish: A Comprehensive Grammar presents a fresh and accessible description of the language, concentrating on the real patterns of use in modern Danish. The volume is organized to promote a thorough understanding of Danish grammar. It offers a stimulating analysis of the complexities of the language, and provides full and clear explanations.

This edition has been fully updated to reflect changes in grammar, cultural changes and the impact of modern technology. All sections have been systematically revised, and a new section on phrases and an up-to-the-moment account of the use of the comma have been added. The examples and grammar explanations have been improved throughout.

Features include:

- A wealth of examples from present-day Danish
- Particular attention to areas of confusion and difficulty
- Danish–English parallels highlighted throughout the book
- An extensive index and clear paragraph numbering for easy navigation
- Cross-references in all parts of the book

Danish: A Comprehensive Grammar is the most comprehensive and detailed Danish grammar available in English and is an essential reference source for the learner and user of Danish at all levels. It is ideal for use in schools, colleges, universities and adult classes of all types.

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Danish

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**Tom Lundskær-Nielsen
and Philip Holmes**

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Contents

Preface	ix
Symbols and abbreviations used in the text	xiii
Chapter 1 Nouns	I
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Gender rules	2
1.3 Miscellaneous points of gender	10
1.4 Plural noun forms	21
1.5 Nouns with no plural form or no singular form, collective nouns and nouns expressing quantity	42
1.6 Differences in number between English and Danish	47
1.7 Some Danish noun homonyms	50
1.8 The genitive	53
1.9 The form of the indefinite article	60
1.10 The form of the definite article	61
1.11 The use of the indefinite and definite article	68
Chapter 2 Adjectives	81
2.1 Introduction to forms and use	81
2.2 Form and order	82
2.3 The indefinite declension	94
2.4 The definite declension	105
2.5 Adjectival nouns	112
2.6 Comparison of adjectives	118
2.7 Compound adjectives	135

Chapter 3	Numerals	137
3.1	Forms of numerals	137
3.2	The use of cardinal numbers	147
3.3	The use of ordinal numbers	150
3.4	Fractions	152
3.5	Dates	154
3.6	The time	157
Chapter 4	Pronouns	159
4.1	Personal pronouns	159
4.2	The use of subjective and objective forms	161
4.3	Reflexive pronouns	183
4.4	Emphatic pronouns	188
4.5	Possessive pronouns	192
4.6	Demonstrative pronouns	208
4.7	Interrogative pronouns	215
4.8	Relative pronouns	225
4.9	Indefinite pronouns	233
Chapter 5	Verbs	267
5.1	Verb forms	267
5.2	The use of the tenses	291
5.3	The use of the non-finite verb forms	310
5.4	Mood	325
5.5	Main, auxiliary, transitive, intransitive and reflexive verbs	340
5.6	–s forms of verbs and the passive voice	347
5.7	Compound verbs	363
5.8	Some problem verbs	370
Chapter 6	Adverbs	377
6.1	Form	377
6.2	Function	389
6.3	Location and movement	407
6.4	Some idiomatic usages	411

Chapter 7	Prepositions	417
7.1	Introduction	417
7.2	The use of some common prepositions	432
7.3	A brief survey of some other Danish prepositions	486
7.4	Danish equivalents of English 'of'	495
Chapter 8	Interjections	503
8.1	Introduction	503
8.2	Affirmations, denials, responses	504
8.3	Expressions of feelings, exclamations	507
8.4	Commands	509
8.5	Imitation	509
8.6	Greetings, exhortations	510
8.7	Expletives	512
Chapter 9	Conjunctions	514
9.1	Coordination and subordination	514
9.2	Coordinating conjunctions	519
9.3	Subordinating conjunctions	524
9.4	Other subordinators	541
Chapter 10	Sentence structure and word order	544
10.1	Clause elements	544
10.2	Phrases	557
10.3	Main clause word order – basic positions	573
10.4	Subordinate clause word order – basic positions	581
10.5	The position of adverbials	584
10.6	Order within positions	591
10.7	Main clause transformations and exceptions	597
10.8	Subordinate clauses	605
Chapter 11	Word formation	616
11.1	Introduction	616
11.2	Affixation	618
11.3	Compounding	634
11.4	Abbreviation	643
11.5	Assimilation of foreign loans	651

Chapter 12 Punctuation	659
12.1 Punctuation marks	659
12.2 The comma	660
12.3 The full stop	665
12.4 The colon	668
12.5 The exclamation mark	668
12.6 Quotations	669
12.7 Direct speech conventions	670
12.8 The apostrophe	670
12.9 The hyphen	672
12.10 The dash	673
12.11 Addresses	674
12.12 Dates	675
 Chapter 13 Orthography	 676
13.1 Symbols and sounds	676
13.2 Spelling	680
13.3 Small and capital letters	686
13.4 Miscellaneous	695
 Linguistic terms	 700
Latin, Danish and English linguistic terms	708
Short bibliography	712
Index	716

Preface

Small languages like Danish are often poorly provided with adequate reference material for learners. Our aim with this book has therefore been to make available a substantial work of reference on Danish grammar which may serve as an aid not only to beginners but also to more advanced students and to teachers. Danish obviously counts as a minor European language in terms of the number of speakers, but it is the medium of a rich culture as well as being an official EU language which is both learnt and taught widely in Europe and beyond.

Danish may be small, but it is not perfectly formed; the language is changing quite rapidly in some key areas, and we hope to have been able to demonstrate this in our snapshot of the language in the mid-1990s.

This is both a general and a comparative account concentrating on the areas of Danish which pose problems for English speakers and providing translations of most of the examples. But its starting-point is nearly always Danish rather than English.

We have attempted to strike the difficult balance between accuracy of linguistic description and analysis on the one hand and clarity and usability on the other. The structure of the book is deliberately traditional in order to help users who are often not linguists. Terms that may not be familiar are explained either when they are first used in the text or in the section on Linguistic Terms.

The book contains a hierarchy of detail from the major summary charts and tables provided for ready reference to the minor detail to be found in the Notes. The comprehensive Index is intended to facilitate rapid location of problem areas and details, as the book is most likely to be used from the Index rather than studied chapter by chapter. In Chapter 10, however,

users are advised to begin by reading Section A, which lays the foundation for the detailed account of sentence structure that follows in that chapter.

Any work of this kind draws on the labours of the many others who have gone before. The Bibliography lists major sources and provides a guide for those who wish to delve deeper into specific aspects of the language. The authors primarily responsible for the individual chapters of the book are as follows: Chapters 1, 2, 3 (PH), Chapters 4, 5 (TLN), Chapter 6 (RA), Chapters 7, 8 (TLN), Chapters 9, 10 (RA), Chapters 11, 12, 13 (PH).

We wish to acknowledge the generous help and encouragement of many Danes and others. The International Office of the Danish Ministry of Education has, through the good offices of Dinah Bechshøft and Ida Boisen, taken a great interest in this project and has generously provided funds for several research visits to Denmark. The EU through its Lingua programme has helped towards the publication costs of this book.

We owe a particular debt to Ian Hinchliffe, who, with Phil Holmes, did the groundwork in writing *Swedish: A Comprehensive Grammar*, which has provided a firm foundation for the present book.

Our thanks go also to a number of friends and colleagues: Jørgen Bang, Michael Barnes, Joseph Crabtree, Wendy Davies, Kirsten and Glyn Jones, Hans Anton Kofoed, Else and Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Niels Davidsen-Nielsen, Hans Frede Nielsen, Jørgen Højgaard Jørgensen, Bjarne le Fevre Jakobsen, Jannie Roed, Birgitte and Peter Skov-Jakobsen, Georg Søndergaard, Suzanne and Michael Taylor, Karen and Poul Vad, and to Erik Hansen and the staff at Dansk Sprognævn for advice and encouragement.

We are extremely grateful to Henrik Galberg Jacobsen for reading the manuscript and giving invaluable advice, and to Katie Lewis who single-handedly compiled the Index and made many helpful comments at proof stage.

Finally, the two other authors wish to thank Phil Holmes for undertaking the unenviable and arduous task of setting the entire manuscript for printing.

Robin Allan	Philip Holmes	Tom Lundskær-Nielsen
London, Hull and Cambridge		November 1994

Preface to the Reprint, 1998

This reprint has allowed us to correct a number of errors and to make minor changes to the text. We are especially grateful to Michael Taylor

for many helpful suggestions, some of which we have followed. Since the publication of the book in 1995, the new comma has been introduced, which has made it necessary to rewrite paragraphs 1202–04 in order to take account of this. However, for practical reasons, we have preserved the use of the traditional comma in the examples.

July 1998

Preface to the second edition 2010

This second edition has been prepared by Tom Lundskær-Nielsen and Philip Holmes. Our previous co-author Robin (Bob) Allan decided not to be part of it this time, so we would like to take this opportunity to thank Bob for his past contribution and to acknowledge the great help it was to be allowed to build on Bob's work on Chapters 6, 9 and 10, for which he was chiefly responsible in the first edition. It is a tribute to Bob that much of the structure and data from these chapters has survived in this new edition.

The authors primarily responsible for each chapter are: Chapters 1–3 (PH), Chapters 4–9 (TLN), Chapters 11–13 (PH), while the revision of Chapter 10 has been a combined effort.

The first edition appeared in 1995 and the 1998 reprint included a limited number of corrections and updates as well as some additional examples. While this second edition involves no major changes to the structure of the book, there are nevertheless some significant alterations. Most visibly, an entirely new paragraph numbering system has been used and there have been numerous changes to the content of the book, both in the explanatory text and in the examples. Some new material has also been incorporated. Among the more substantial changes are the following:

- Changes to Chapter 1 regarding plural forms and the genitive
- A rearrangement of Chapter 6
- A revision of Chapter 10 including the addition of a section on phrases
- Alterations to the assimilation of foreign loans in Chapter 11
- A new section on the guidelines for use of the comma in Chapter 12
- An update of the Bibliography

In the Preface to the first edition we acknowledged our indebtedness to a number of friends and colleagues for their help and comments, and we

would like to repeat that here although, sadly, some of them are no longer with us. For the second edition we have greatly benefited from the advice given us by a few anonymous readers whose opinions were sought by Routledge. We are grateful to Ane Laanemets, Tartu, for some helpful comments on Chapter 5, and we wish to express our thanks to Sonja van Leeuwen, assistant editor at Routledge, for her support and cooperation.

Tom Lundskær-Nielsen and Philip Holmes
Cambridge and Kington

September 2009

Symbols and abbreviations used in the text

Jeg tror, (at) han kommer i dag.	word in brackets may be omitted
kørs(e)len, hundred(e)	letter in brackets may be omitted
låsede/låste	alternatives
...	word(s) omitted
/at/	approximate pronunciation using normal Danish spelling
[di]	phonetic transcription
vent/ <i>ede</i>	verb stem with inflectional ending
måltid	elements in a compound
*Han gik ham en tur.	incorrect usage
*hjulen	incorrect form
-e, -er, -r	inflectional endings
-ske, -inde	word ending in the suffixes -ske, -inde
x → y	x changes into y
x ↔ y	y refers to or agrees with x
I, II, III, IV	verb conjugations
en 'bolig	stress on syllable following mark
en 'sød, 'grå 'kat	stress on words

A	adjective	def.	definite
a, A	adverbial positions	ditr.	ditransitive
adj.	adjective	DO	direct object
adv.	adverb	F	front position
attrib.	attribute, attributive	FE	first element in a compound
aux.	auxiliary	FS	formal subject
compl.	complement	FV	finite verb
conj.	conjunction, conjugation	H	head word
coord.	coordinating conjunction	IO	indirect object
conj.			

<div> <div>Symbols and abbreviations used in the text</div> </div>	inf.	infinitive	pp	past participle
	intr.	intransitive	premod.	premodifier
	k _s	coordinating conjunction (Dan. <i>sideordnet konjunktion</i>)	prep.	preposition(al)
			RS	real subject
			S	subject
	k _u	subordinating conjunction (Dan. <i>underordnet konjunktion</i>)	SC	subordinate clause, subject complement
			SE	second element in a compound
	<i>Lit.</i>	literal translation		
	MC	main clause	sg.	singular
	n, N	noun, nominal positions	sub. conj.	subordinating conjunction
	NFV	non-finite verb		
	NP	noun phrase	tr.	transitive
	O	object	v, V	verb, verbal positions
	obj.	object(ive)	v ¹ , v ²	verb first, verb second clause
	OC	object complement		
	para.	paragraph	X ₁ , X ₂	extra positions
	pl.	plural		

Chapter I

Nouns

I.1 Introduction

I.1.1 *Different types of noun*

Proper nouns: **Esbjerg**; **Kirsten**; **Politiken** (newspaper); **Tyskland**, Germany

Common nouns: **hus**, house; **kat**, cat; **pige**, girl; **stol**, chair

Types of common noun are:

Count nouns, i.e. concrete things and creatures: **kage**, cake; **lærer**, teacher; **træ**, tree

- Some abstracts are count nouns: **farve**, colour; **glæde**, joy; **sygdom**, illness

Non-count nouns, i.e. substances: **benzin**, petrol; **luft**, air; **vand**, water

- Some abstracts are non-count nouns: **hvidhed**, whiteness; **lykke**, happiness; **musik**, music

I.1.2 *Genders*

Danish nouns have two genders, common and neuter (some grammars use the term ‘non-neuter’ for common gender). Common gender nouns take the indefinite article **en** and the definite article (definite article) **-(e)n** (see 1.9):

en hånd, a hand **hånden**, the hand

en pige, a girl **pigen**, the girl

Neuter nouns take the indefinite article **et** and the end article **–(e)t**:

et hus , a house	huset , the house
et æble , an apple	æblet , the apple

1.1.3 Indefinite plural forms

Danish nouns form their indefinite plural in three main ways, by adding the endings **–(e)r**, **–e** or **–zero** (i.e. no plural ending) (see 1.4.1–1.4.6 below):

en by – byer, town – towns; **en krone – kroner**, crown – crowns;
en stol – stole, chair – chairs; **et sprog – sprog**, language – languages

For plurals of foreign nouns see 1.4.7–1.4.10.

1.1.4 Cases

There are two cases for Danish nouns: a basic (unmarked) case, and a genitive ending in **–s** (see 1.8):

en pige , a girl	en piges hånd , a girl's hand
pigen , the girl	pigens hånd , the girl's hand
piger , girls	pigers hænder , girls' hands
pigerne , the girls	pigernes hænder , the girls' hands

1.2 Gender rules

1.2.1 Introduction

About 75 per cent of all nouns are common gender. Whilst it is clearly advisable to learn each noun with its gender, the following guidelines should provide some help in predicting gender (for the gender of loan words see 1.3.2). In many cases either the meaning of the noun or its suffix may provide a clue to its gender.

Gender also determines the form of the adjective and of some pronouns, as these agree in gender and number with nouns (see 2.3.1, 4.1):

en stor bil **et stort hus**
a big car a big house

bilen er stor **huset er stort**
the car is big the house is big

Note – Old Danish had masculine, feminine and neuter gender, and remnants of this system are occasionally found in poetry and hymns:

dagen – han, the day – he **natten – hun**, the night – she

månen – han, the moon – he **solen – hun**, the sun – she

1.2.2 Common gender by meaning

The following types of noun are generally common gender by meaning:

1.2.2.1 Personal names and nouns describing human beings

en dreng, a boy; **en far**, a father; **en kone**, a woman/wife; **en lærer**, a teacher; **en svensker**, a Swede; **en søster**, a sister; **en udlænding**, a foreigner

Læreren er ung endnu. The teacher is still young.

Note 1 – Exceptions: **et barn**, a child; **et bud**, a messenger; **et geni**, a genius; **et individ**, an individual; **et medlem**, a member; **et menneske**, a human being; **et vidne**, a witness

When referring to these neuter nouns the applicable masculine or feminine pronoun is, however, generally used of individuals:

Klubben har fået et nyt medlem. Han/Hun hedder Søren/Marie.
The club has gained a new member. He/She is called Søren/Marie.

Barnet holdt op med at lege. Han/Hun begyndte at græde.
The child stopped playing. He/She began to cry.

But when referring to these nouns in a general sense or when the gender is unknown, **det** is used:

Selv når barnet er uartig, bør man ikke slå det.
Even when the child has misbehaved one should not smack it.

With nouns of common gender describing people, the masculine or feminine pronoun is used rather than the common gender pronoun **den** when referring to an individual:

en agent, an agent; **en baptist**, a baptist; **en fætter**, a male cousin;
en gæst, a guest; **en læge**, a doctor; **en person**, a person; etc.

Lægen var meget sympatisk. Hun var god til at lytte.

The doctor was very understanding. She was a good listener.

Note 2 – Nouns of neuter gender do not alter their gender when used to depict a human being:

Han æder som et svin. He eats like a pig.

Han er et dyr. He is a brute.

1.2.2.2 Words describing animals

en gås, a goose; **en hund**, a dog; **en kat**, a cat; **en ko**, a cow;
en laks, a salmon

Note 1 – Exceptions: **et bæst**, a beast; **et dyr**, an animal, and others in **–dyr**: **et pattedyr**, a mammal, etc.; **et egern**, a squirrel; **et føl**, a foal; **et får**, a sheep; **et insekt**, an insect; **et kid**, a kid; **et kreatur**, a cow; **kvæget**, cattle; **et lam**, a lamb; **et møl**, a moth; **et svin**, a pig, and others in **–svin**: **et marsvin**, a guinea pig, etc.; **et æsel**, a donkey.

When referring to family pets, owners often use **han** or **hun** whilst strangers may use **den**.

Note 2 – In fairy tales and children's stories in which animals are given human characteristics they may be referred to as **han** or **hun**.

1.2.2.3 Words for plants, trees and fruit

en birk, a birch; **en blomst**, a flower; **en eg**, an oak; **en nød**, a nut;
en plante, a plant; **en pære**, a pear; **en rose**, a rose

Note – Exceptions: **et bær**, a berry; **et frø**, a seed; **græsset**, the grass; **et løg**, an onion; **et træ**, a tree; **et æble**, an apple; compounds in **–frø**, **–træ**: **et sesamfrø**, a sesame seed; **et grantræ**, a fir tree. Nouns in **–bær** are neuter when denoting the fruit but common gender when denoting the tree or shrub.

1.2.2.4 Festivals and months

i julen at Christmas

i påsken at Easter

Det var en kold januar. It was a cold January.

Note – The seasons vary, however: **sommeren/vinteren**, the summer/winter.
But: **foråret/efteråret**, the spring/autumn; since **år**, year, is neuter.

1.2.2.5 Lakes and rivers

en flod, a river; **en strøm**, a stream; **en å**, a river; **Rhinen**, the Rhine;
den Blå Nil, the Blue Nile

1.2.2.6 Nouns derived from cardinal numbers (see also 3.2.1)

en toer, a two; **en tier**, a ten

Note – Exceptions: **et ettal**, a one; **et hundred(e)**, a hundred; **et tusind(e)**, a thousand

1.2.2.7 Fractions ending in **-del** (see also 3.4.1)

en fjerdedel, a quarter; **en femtedel**, a fifth

1.2.3 Common gender by form

Nouns with the following suffixes are common gender by form:

-ance **en ambulance**, an ambulance; **en balance**, a balance; **en chance**, a chance; **en elegance**, an elegance; **en leverance**, a delivery

-ans **en instans**, an authority; **en substans**, a substance

-ant **en debutant**, a debutante; **en protestant**, a protestant; **en repræsentant**, a representative; **en variant**, a variant

-de **bredden**, the breadth; **dybden**, the depth; **højden**, the height; **længden**, the length

-dom **en ejendom**, a property; **en sygdom**, an illness; **ungdommen**, youth

-é en allé, an avenue; en armé, an army; en attaché, an attaché; en café, a café; en idé, an idea; en orkidé, an orchid

Note 1 – Exceptions: **et communiqué**, a communiqué; **et resumé**, a resumé

-else en bevægelse, a movement; en foreteelse, a phenomenon; en forsinkelse, a delay; en overraskelse, a surprise; skabelsen, the creation; en skuffelse, a disappointment; en tilladelse, permission

Note 2 – Exceptions: **ragelset**, the junk; **et spøgelse**, a ghost; **et værelse**, a room; but some compounds in which **-værelse** does not mean 'room' have common gender: **en fraværelse**, an absence; **en nærværelse**, a presence; **en tilværelse**, a life

-en Verbal nouns: **Jeg er træt af al den løben**, I'm tired of all this dashing about; **Hold op med den hosten!**, Stop that coughing!; **en uophørlig skraben penge sammen**, a ceaseless scraping together of money; **denne skiften standpunkter**, this shifting of viewpoint; **en bæven**, a trembling; **en formåen**, an ability; **en hilsen**, a greeting; **en hoben**, a heap; **en hvisken**, a whisper; **en indgriben**, an intervention

-ence en kompetence, a competence; en konference, a conference; en konkurrence, a competition; en reference, a reference

-ens en abstinens, an abstinence; en frekvens, a frequency; kongruensen, the congruence

-er Occupations: en bager, a baker; en lærer, a teacher

Others: en alder, an age; en fiber, a fibre

-hed ensomheden, the loneliness; en hastighed, a speed; kærligheden, the love; en lejlighed, a flat; en nyhed, a piece of news; en tavshed, a silence; trætheden, the fatigue

-ik etikken, ethics; en grammatik, a grammar; komikken, the comedy; en kritik, a criticism; musikken, the music; trafikken, the traffic

-ing, -ling en parkering, a car park; en stilling, a position; en yngling

-ning a young person; en bygning, a building; en slægtning, a relative

-isme fascismen, fascism; kommunismen, communism; socialismen, socialism; vegetarianismen, vegetarianism

- ist** **en ateist**, an atheist; **en idealist**, an idealist; **en kapitalist**, a capitalist; **en metodist**, a Methodist; **en realist**, a realist
- sion**, **en diskussion**, a discussion; **en pension**, a pension; **en situation**, a situation
- tion**
- tet** **elektriciteten**, the electricity; **en identitet**, an identity; **en lokalitet**, a locality; **en popularitet**, a popularity; **en solidaritet**, a solidarity

Note 3 – Exceptions: **et fakultet**, a faculty; **et universitet**, a university

- ør** Occupations: **en direktør**, a director; **en frisør**, a hairdresser; **en konduktør**, a guard; **en massør**, a masseur

Note 4 – Nouns in **-ør** which are not occupations are neuter: **et eksteriør**, an exterior; **et interiør**, an interior; **et humør**, a mood

Feminines with the suffixes **-esse**, **-inde**, **-ske**, **-øse**, (see also 1.3.4.2f):

- en baronesse**, a baroness; **en veninde**, a girl friend;
en husholderske, a housekeeper; **en massøse**, a masseuse

1.2.4 Neuter by meaning

The following types of noun are generally neuter by meaning:

1.2.4.1 Words for many substances (but see also 1.3.6)

- brød**, bread; **glas**, glass; **guld**, gold; **jern**, iron; **kød**, meat; **papir**, paper;
snavs, dirt; **sølv**, silver; **vand**, water

Note – Exceptions: **jorden**, the earth; **luften**, the air; **regnen**, the rain; **sneen**, the snow; **ulden**, the wool; **vinen**, the wine

1.2.4.2 Areas and localities

- et amt**, a county; **et distrikt**, a district; **et kontinent**, a continent;
et land, a country; **et område**, an area; **et sogn**, a parish; **et torv**, a square

Note 1 – Exceptions: **en by**, a town; **en gård**, a farm; **en verden**, a world; **en ø**, an island

This rule also applies to proper nouns for geographical locations found in a definite noun phrase:

det lille Danmark, little Denmark; **det gamle Rom**, ancient Rome;
det nye København, the new Copenhagen; **det økonomisk
succesrige Kina**, the economically successful China

When adjectives qualify proper nouns for countries, and pronouns are used to refer back to the names of countries, the latter have neuter form, as the word (et) **land** is understood:

Vi bor i England. Det er grønt. We live in England. It is green.
(Cf. **Landet er grønt.** The country is green.)

Vi bor i Amerika. Det er stort. We live in America. It is big.

When adjectives qualify proper nouns for mountains and oceans, and when pronouns are used to refer back to the names of mountains and oceans, the latter have neuter form, as the words (et) **bjerg** and (et) **hav** are understood:

Vi så det sneklædte Eiger. We saw the snow-covered Eiger.

Det var smukt. It was beautiful.
(Cf. **det sneklædte bjerg**)

Snowdon er kun 1100 m højt. Snowdon is only 1,100 metres high.

Note 2 – When pronouns and adjectives are used to refer back to the names of towns and islands there is a tendency to use the common gender form, as (en) **by**, (en) **ø** are understood and the noun is regarded as common gender:

København er stor. Copenhagen is big. (Cf. **Byen er stor.**)

But: det store København

Odense – Aldersmæssigt kan den måle sig med Ålborg.
Odense – In age it can compete with Ålborg.

Note 3 – In the names of seas, lakes and rivers there is a tendency to use the common gender form, as (en) **sø**, (en) **flod**, (en) **å** are either explicit or understood, and the noun is treated as common gender:

den smukke Bodensø, beautiful Lake Constance; **den lange
Donau**, the long Danube; **Gudenåen**, the River Gudenå; **Nilen**,
the Nile; **Themsen**, the Thames

1.2.4.3

Names of letters of the alphabet (the noun **(et) bogstav**, a letter, is understood)

et langt u, a long u

1.2.4.4 Other word classes used as nouns

et hvorfor, a why; **jeget**, the ego; **et nej**, a no

Note – When the infinitive is used as a noun, a predicative adjective is inflected as if the infinitive has neuter gender. (See 5.3.1.3.)

1.2.4.5 Many collective nouns

et folk, a people; **et følge**, a company; **et hold**, a team; **et selskab**, a society

Note – Exceptions: **en forsamling**, an assembly; **en gruppe**, a group

1.2.4.6 Languages derived from adjectives (the noun **(et) sprog**, a language, is understood)

Jeg har glemt mit engelsk, I have forgotten my English; **det ældste dansk**, the oldest Danish

Note – A few of these take the end article **–en**:

dansken, the Danish language; **tysken**, the German language

1.2.5 *Neuter by form*

Nouns with the following suffixes are neuter gender by form:

–dømme **et herredømme**, a mastery; **et hertugdømme**, a duchy; **et omdømme**, a reputation

–ed **et hoved**, a head; **et marked**, a market; **linnedet**, the linen; **lærredet**, the canvas

Note 1 – Exceptions: **en foged**, a bailiff; **en fælled**, a common; **en måned**, a month; **en ørred**, a trout

–*em* et diadem, a diadem; et fonem, a phoneme; et system, a system

–*ende* et udseende, an appearance; et velbefindende, a well-being

Note 2 – Exceptions: Words for persons: **en gående**, a pedestrian; **en logerende**, a lodger; **en studerende**, a student; and also: **en ende**, an end; **en legende**, a legend. See also 5.3.2.2(b).

–*ri* et bageri, a bakery; et batteri, a battery; et havari, a shipwreck; et tyveri, a theft

–(t)*iv* et direktiv, a directive; et stativ, a stand

Note 3 – Exception: **en kursiv**, an italic. Grammatical terms in –*iv* vary: Cases are common gender: **en akkusativ**, an accusative; **en genitiv**, a genitive; word classes are neuter gender: **et adjektiv**, an adjective; **et substantiv**, a noun

–*um* et gymnasium, an Upper Secondary School; et laboratorium, a laboratory; et museum, a museum

1.3 Miscellaneous points of gender

1.3.1 Particularly difficult suffixes

It is best to check in a good dictionary the gender of dubious nouns such as the following.

1.3.1.1

Nouns ending in the following suffixes are usually common gender but there are a number of exceptions:

–*al* en filial, a branch; en kapital, capital; en lineal, a ruler; en original, an original/an eccentric

But: et areal, an area; et ideal, an ideal; et interval, an interval; et signal, a signal

–*ar* People: en aktuar, an actuary; en antikvar, an antique dealer; en bibliotekar, a librarian; en notar, a notary

Others: **en hangar**, a hangar; **en hektar**, a hectare; **en katar**, catarrh

But: **et eksemplar**, a copy; **et honorar**, an honorarium; **et inventar**, an inventory; **et virvar**, a mess

–**el** **en bagatel**, a trifle; **en model**, a model; **en propel**, a propeller

But: **et hotel**, a hotel; **et kapel**, a chapel; **materiellet**, the equipment; **personnellet**, the personnel

–**ent** People: **en agent**, an agent; **en docent**, a lecturer; **en klient**, a client; **en konsulent**, a consultant; **en konsument**, a consumer; **en patient**, a patient; **en student**, a student

Others: **en accent**, an accent; **cementen**, the cement

But: (Mostly in –**ment**) **et argument**, an argument; **et departement**, a department; **et dokument**, a document; **et eksperiment**, an experiment; **et element**, an element; **et instrument**, an instrument; **et kontinent**, a continent; **et moment**, a factor; **et ornament**, an ornament; **et patent**, a patent

–**i** **en epidemi**, an epidemic; **en fantasi**, an imagination; **en filosofi**, a philosophy; **fotografien**, photography; **en industri**, an industry; (en) **sympati**, sympathy

But: **et demokrati**, a democracy; **et fotografi**, a photograph; **et geni**, a genius; **et konditori**, a café; **et parti**, a political party; **politiet**, the police

1.3.1.2

Nouns ending in –**at** are usually neuter but there are a number of exceptions:

et antikvariat, a second-hand bookshop; **et certifikat**, a certificate; **et format**, a format; **et koncentrat**, a concentrate; **et konsulat**, a consulate

But: Some words for people: **en advokat**, a lawyer; **en delegat**, a delegate; **en demokrat**, a democrat

Some words for plants, etc.: **en salat**, a salad; **en tomat**, a tomato

Some others: **en automat**, a vending machine; **en undulat**, a budgerigar

1.3.1.3

Nouns with the following suffixes may have either gender:

- sel* Concrete: **et bidsel**, a bridle; **brænds(e)let**, the fuel; **et fængsel**, a prison; **et gidsel**, a hostage; **et hængsel**, a hinge
Abstract: **en advarsel**, a warning; **kørs(e)len**, driving; **en rædsel**, a terror; **en tilførsel**, a supply; **en trussel**, a threat
- skab* Neuter: **et forfatterskab**, an authorship; **et fællesskab**, a community; **et medlemskab**, a membership; **et mesterskab**, a championship; **et redskab**, an implement; **et selskab**, a society; **et slægtskab**, a relationship; **et venskab**, a friendship; **et ægteskab**, a marriage
- Common: **en dårskab**, a madness; **en egenskab**, a quality; **en galskab**, a madness; **en klogskab**, a wisdom; **en lidenskab**, a passion; **en troskab**, a loyalty; **en videnskab**, a science

1.3.2 Gender of abbreviations and nouns of foreign origin

1.3.2.1

There are no hard and fast rules for genders of abbreviations in Danish. For indigenous words and words treated as indigenous the gender is often the same as for the unabbreviated noun:

en bh (**en brystholder/busteholder**), a bra; **et tv** (**et fjernsyn**), a TV; **et wc** (cf. **et kloset**), a WC

When the original is no longer obvious there is a tendency to treat the abbreviation as a neuter singular concept:

det statsdrevne DSB (cf. **Danske Statsbaner**), the state-run Danish Railways

Foreign abbreviations, especially English ones, are often treated as neuter singular:

det britiske BBC, the British BBC
det magtesløse FN, the powerless United Nations
det store USA, the big United States of America

Most recent loans into Danish are from English, which, unlike for example Latin, Greek or German, possesses no grammatical gender or formal clues, and is thus not able to guide Danes in the choice of gender. The following general principles apply to the gender of loans:

(a) People and animals

Most nouns for persons and animals are common gender in line with indigenous nouns (cf. 1.2.2.1f):

en bodyguard; en fan; en kænguru, a kangaroo; **en orangutang; en playboy; en stand-in**

(b) Form

In some cases the final syllable of a noun determines the gender.

Nouns in **-um**: The Latin neuter has long been established in Danish:

et faktum, a fact; **et gymnasium**, an Upper Secondary School

Nouns in **-ment** (see 1.3.1.1):

et fundament, a foundation; **et regiment**, a regiment

Nouns in **-erie**: The Greek feminine determines the Danish gender:

en arterie, an artery; **en materie**, a substance

Sometimes this system is disturbed.

Nouns in **-tek**: A Greek feminine ending, but neuter in Danish:

et apotek, a chemist's shop; **et bibliotek**, a library; thus by analogy new words in **-tek** are neuter: **et diskotek**, a discotheque; **et videotek**, a videotheque

New nouns in **-er, -ing, -or, -tion** tend to be of common gender:

en computer, en sightseeing, en editor, en sales promotion

These two principles are paramount, but there are some other tendencies that operate in specific cases ((c)-(f) below):

(c) Formal similarity to a Danish noun

If a loan clearly resembles an indigenous noun there is a strong tendency to adopt the gender of that noun by analogy:

By analogy with:

et college	et kollegium , a student hall of residence
et mart	et marked , a market
et party (social gathering)	et parti , a (political) party
et showroom	et rum , a space

(d) By analogy with a group of Danish words of similar meaning
(cf. 1.2.4.2, notes 2, 3)

- Clothes are often common gender: **en cardigan**, **en jumper**, **en sweater** (cf. **en bluse**, **en trøje**)
- Boats are often common gender: **en brig**, **en skonnert**, a schooner (cf. **en båd**)
- Types of dance and music are often common gender: **en blues**, **jazzen** (cf. **en dans**, **musikken**)
- Types of car are often common gender: **en BMW**, **en jeep** (cf. **en bil**)
- Types of dog are often common gender: **en bulldog**, **en collie** (cf. **en hund**)

(e) Actions

Nouns that indicate actions or events and are derived from verb stems tend to be neuter in Danish:

at råb/e → **et råb**, a shout; **at løb/e** → **et løb**, a run

In the same way, most nouns borrowed from English verb stems are neuter:

et check (but: **en (bank)check**); **et ræs**, a race

(f) The closest translation

The gender of the closest Danish synonym appears to play a role in determining gender in some cases:

et band	cf. et orkester
en suitcase	cf. en kuffert
et team	cf. et hold

1.3.3 Compound nouns

See also 11.3.2–11.3.4

Compound nouns nearly always take the gender of the second element of the compound, as it is onto this that the inflectional endings are added:

en skole + et køkken → **et skolekøkken**, a school kitchen
et køkken + en maskine → **en køkkenmaskine**, a kitchen
 appliance

Exceptions are often found when the second element loses its original meaning:

et bogstav, a letter of the alphabet cf. **en stav**, a stave
en gråskæg, a grey-beard cf. **et skæg**, a beard
et måltid, a meal cf. **en tid**, a time

Some plants:

en okseøje, an oxeye daisy cf. **et øje**, an eye
en tornblad, a gorse bush cf. **et blad**, a leaf

1.3.4 Masculines and feminines

See also 1.2.2.1.

1.3.4.1

Generally speaking, lexical distinctions are sometimes employed to distinguish male and female:

andrik , drake	and , duck
dreng , boy	pige , girl
enkemand , widower	enke , widow
fætter , male cousin	kusine , female cousin
hane , cock	høne , hen
hingst , stallion	hoppe , mare
konge , king	dronning , queen
tyr , bull	ko , cow

1.3.4.2

Until the twentieth century matrimonial feminines were common, and were indicated by a feminine suffix, but they are now rarely encountered:

amtmand , prefect of a county	amtmandinde , prefect's wife
bisp , bishop	bispinde , bishop's wife
general , general	generalinde , general's wife
oberst , colonel	oberstinde , colonel's wife
pastor , pastor	pastorinde , pastor's wife
professor , professor	professorinde , professor's wife
rektor , headteacher	rektorinde , headteacher's wife

A few are still current, however:

baron , baron	baronesse , baroness
greve , count	grevinde , countess
hertug , duke	hertuginde , duchess
prins , prince	prinsesse , princess

Without any matrimonial link:

abbed , abbot	abbedisse , abbess
----------------------	---------------------------

1.3.4.3 Functional titles

(a) Functional feminines in **-inde**, **-ske**, **-trice**, etc., have been severely curtailed in recent decades, and nowadays men and women often have the same titles:

lærer and lærerinde	→ lærer , teacher
forretningsindehaver and forretningsindehaverske	→ forretningsindehaver , proprietor (of a business)
nabo and naboerske	→ nabo , neighbour
direktør and direktrice	→ direktør , director

This also applies to some nationality words:

englænder and **englænderinde** → **englænder**, Englishman,
Englishwoman

Note 1 – **En nordmand**, Norwegian (of either gender); **en franskmand**, Frenchman or French woman.

A few titles considered ‘sexist’ have been provided with feminine equivalents:

formand → **forkvinde**, chairwoman

Some new neutral titles have also appeared in recent years to avoid using ‘sexist’ titles:

folketingsmand → **folketingsmedlem**, MP

tillidsmand → **tillidsrepræsentant**, shop
steward

However, some feminine job titles have not been masculinized:

sygeplejerske, nurse (both male and female) and others in
–plejerske

Note 2 – **En sygeplejer** is a nursing auxiliary of either gender.

Some job titles in **–mand** still apply equally to women, where necessary with the word **kvindelig** (female, woman) in front:

amtsrådsformand, chairman of county council; **brandmand**,
firefighter; **ombudsmand**, ombudsman; **styrmand**, first officer;
vognmand, haulier

(b) In some cases forms with the feminine suffix are retained where the gender of the person is significant:

elsker	elskerinde	lover/mistress
helt	heltinde	hero(ine)
samlever	samleverske	live-in partner
ven	veninde	(boy/girl) friend
vært	værtinde	host(ess)

- (c) In a few cases forms with the feminine suffix are sometimes seen in titles:

husholderske, housekeeper; **sangerinde**, singer; **skuespillerinde**, actress; **tiggerske**, beggar

Note 3 – The animal names: **løvinde**, lioness; **ulvinde**, female wolf

1.3.5 Double forms

A number of nouns possess double forms. In the examples below the more usual gender is given first. There are a number of different reasons for this vagueness as to gender.

1.3.5.1

The noun is generally used in a form without the article:

(et) besvær, trouble

Jeg ville ikke volde dig besvær. I didn't want to cause you any trouble.

Det er ikke meget besvær. It's not much trouble.

al den/alt det besvær all this trouble

sigt –en, sight, may be either gender in phrases: **på lang(t) sigt**, in the long term

Other indigenous nouns that have double gender are: **djævelskab**, nuisance; **efterskrift**, postscript; **gavn**, benefit; **men**, injury; **sjov**, fun; **tant**, vanity; **tidsfordriv**, pastime; **urede**, mess; **vemod**, sadness

This especially applies to words for substances, otherwise often neuter (cf. 1.2.4.1). See also 1.3.6.

1.3.5.2

The noun **en slags** is partitive and unstressed and often acquires the gender of the noun following:

en slags abe, a kind of ape

cf. **en abe**

et slags menneske, a kind of human being

cf. **et menneske**

But:

Den slags mennesker afskyr jeg. I detest that kind of person.

1.3.5.3

Some foreign loans may vary in gender:

approach –en (–et); en (et) hardware, indeks –en (–et)

Others: bacon; carte blanche; cirkus; city; domino; enfant terrible; fokus; fond, fund; game; harakiri; katalog; kitsch; patois; sample; software; species; swing; understatement

1.3.5.4

A few nouns have a different gender when used in set phrases:

et gab, a gap **Døren står på vid gab.** The door stands wide open.

et minut, a minute **på minuttet/minuttet**, precisely

Notice also:

ensporet, single-track cf. **et spor**, a track

enøjet, one-eyed cf. **et øje**, an eye

But:

enbenet/etbenet, one-legged cf. **et ben**, a leg

en etårig kontrakt, a one-year contract

Notice also:

et enetages hus, a one-storey building cf. **en etage**

Colloquially **et etetages hus**

en etværelses lejlighed, a one-room flat cf. **et værelse**

Colloquially **en enværelses lejlighed**

See also 3.1.2.

1.3.6 Gender and substances

See also 1.2.4.1, 2.3.2.1.

1.3.6.1

Many nouns denoting substances are neuter:

brødet, the bread; **jernet**, the iron; **papiret**, the paper; **saltet**, the salt

Some are common gender:

cementen, the cement; **jorden**, the soil; **stenen**, the rock; **ulden**, the wool; **vinen**, the wine

Some, however, have double gender:

gummi-en (-et), the rubber; **jod-et (-en)**, the iodine; **kanel-en (-et)**, the cinnamon; **klister-et (-en)**, the glue; **klor-et (-en)**, the chlorine

Others include: **flødeskum**, whipped cream; **koffein**, caffeine; **kokain**, cocaine; **lak**, lacquer; **malt**, malt; **nylon**, nylon; **plast**, plastic; **polystyren**, polystyrene; **svovl**, sulphur; **zink**, zinc

1.3.6.2

Notice the possible use of a neuter article or adjective with a common gender noun when denoting type or selection:

fedfattig(t) mælk, low fat milk cf. **mælk-en**

det/den bedste mad, the best food cf. **mad-en**

det/den bedste landbrugsjord,
the best agricultural soil cf. **jord-en**

Note 1 – Some common gender nouns for substances are used with the neuter form of the pronoun:

Vi får noget sne. We'll get some snow.

Alt det regn vi fik ... All the rain we got ...

Han har meget fantasi. He has a lot of imagination.

Vil du tørre det mælk op! Will you mop up that milk!

Note 2 – In some Jutland dialects all non-count nouns consistently have neuter gender and all count nouns common gender:

det sne, the snow; **det regn**, the rain; but: **den æg**, the egg
 cf. **det træ er bedst til møbler**, that wood is best for furniture
den træ er stor, the tree is big

1.3.6.3

Rather more unusually, and often in technical or trade jargon, some neuter nouns denoting substances can be common gender when used of a specific type or quantity:

en billig lærred, a cheap (type of) canvas cf. **lærredet**

den danske salt, Danish salt cf. **saltet**

This also applies to some nouns with double gender under 1.3.6.1 above.

1.3.6.4

Some neuter nouns that may be regarded as either non-count or count may be common gender when used as countables:

en øl, a (bottle or glass of) beer cf. **øllet**

en vand, a (bottle or glass of) soft drink cf. **vandet**

en rugbrød med leverpostej cf. **brødet**
 a slice of rye bread with liver pâté

1.4 Plural noun forms

1.4.1 Plural of indigenous nouns

1.4.1.1

Danish has three indigenous ways of forming the plural of nouns, and Danish nouns are divided into declensions according to the way in which the plural is formed:

First Declension		Second Declension		Third Declension	
Ending in -(e)r		Ending in -e		Zero ending (no plural form)	
en by a town	to byer two towns	en krig a war	to krige two wars	en fejl a mistake	to fejl two mistakes
et menneske a human being	to mennesker two human beings	et land a country	to lande two countries	et flag a flag	to flag two flags

1.4.1.2

These declensions are outlined in 1.4.3–1.4.5. There are also some irregular plural forms detailed in these paragraphs. Some nouns in current usage loaned from foreign languages have retained their own foreign plural endings, and these are dealt with in 1.4.7–1.4.10. For some clues as to how to predict the plural forms of nouns see 1.4.2.

1.4.1.3

It is worth noting the general orthographical rule (explained in 13.2.2) that Danish consonants are doubled between two vowels when the first of these is a short stressed vowel. This affects the plural and definite forms of some nouns:

en bus a bus	bussen the bus	busser buses	busserne the buses
et bær a berry	bærret the berry	bær berries	bærrene the berries

This also applies to the following consonants after unstressed vowels: **-p**, **-t**, **-k**, **-g** (pronounced [g]), and the suffix **-dom**:

sennep	senneppen	sennepper	sennepperne , mustard
idræt	idrætten	idrætter	idrætterne , sport
sygdom	sygdommen	sygdomme	sygdommene , illness

1.4.2 Nouns – plural indefinite forms: predictability

1.4.2.1

Although it is impossible to provide hard and fast rules, the plural forms of Danish nouns are to some extent predictable. Approximately 60 per cent of indigenous nouns have plurals in **-(e)r**, and 25 per cent in **-e**, while 15 per cent have a zero plural (i.e. have the same form in the plural as they do in the singular). The decisive factors in the choice of a plural ending are listed below, but note that these only represent general rules and that there are some exceptions.

1.4.2.2 Complexity:

Monosyllables that are common gender and end in a consonant add **-e**:

en vej – veje, road

Monosyllables that are neuter and end in a consonant have zero plural:

et æg – æg, egg

Polysyllabic nouns ending in **-e** take **-r**:

en rose – roser, rose

Polysyllabic nouns that are not compounds (and do not end in **-e**) take **-er**:

et køkken – køkkener, kitchen

1.4.2.3 Stress:

Polysyllabic nouns with stress on the last syllable (often loan words) take **-(e)r**:

en a'vis – aviser, newspaper

Nouns ending in a stressed vowel take **-(e)r**:

en by – byer, town

Nouns with stress shift (loans) take **-er**:

en 'lektor – lek'torer, lecturer

Nouns ending in unstressed **-er** take **-e**:

en lærer – lærere, teacher

1.4.2.4 Origin:

Foreign loans often take **-er**:

en eksport – eksporter, export

1.4.2.5 Derivatives with certain endings:

Nouns ending in **-dom** take **-e** (with doubling of the **m**, cf. 1.4.1.3):

en sygdom – sygdomme, illness

Nouns ending in **-hed** take **-er**:

en svaghed – svagheder, weakness

Nouns ending in **-i** take **-er**:

et bageri – bagerier, bakery

Nouns ending in **-ion** take **-er**:

en station – stationer, station

Nouns ending in **-skab** take **-er**:

et venskab – venskaber, friendship

1.4.2.6

Proper nouns and words from other word classes used as nouns take **-(e)r** (cf. 1.4.3.1(c), but see also 1.8.3.3):

to Sørener og tre Marianner, two Sørensen and three Mariannes

alle men'er og hvis'er, all the ifs and buts

1.4.3 *The first declension: plural in -(e)r*

1.4.3.1

The first declension includes:

(a) Almost all nouns ending in a vowel. These are of two types.

- 1 Nouns ending in unstressed –e take –r:

en krone – kroner, a crown; **en lampe – lamper**, a lamp;
et billede – billeder, a picture; **et menneske – mennesker**,
a human being; **et vindue – vinduer**, a window

- 2 Nouns ending in a stressed vowel (or unstressed –a) take –er:

en by – byer, a town; **et drama – dramaer**, a drama; **en kollega – kolleg(a)er**, a colleague; **en ske – skeer**, a spoon;
en sky – skyer, a cloud; **et tema – temaer**, a theme; **en villa – villaer**, a detached house; **en å – åer**, a small river; **en ø – øer**,
an island

Note – Exceptions: The following have zero plural: **et frø – frø**, a seed;
en sko – sko, a shoe; **et strå – strå**, a straw. See 1.4.5.

- (b) Most polysyllabic nouns, especially derivatives and loan words.
Many of these have end stress:

en a'vis – aviser, a newspaper; **et biblio'tek – biblioteker**,
a library; **et kon'tor – kontorer**, an office; **et pa'pir – papirer**,
a piece of paper; **en para'ply – paraplyer**, an umbrella;
en ro'man – romaner, a novel; **en sol'dat – soldater**,
a soldier; **en sta'tion – stationer**, a station; **en tele'fon – telefoner**, a telephone; **en tu'rist – turister**, a tourist;
et universi'tet – universiteter, a university

This group includes all nouns ending in –hed, –skab (cf. 1.3.1.3):

berømtheder, celebrities; **dumheder**, idiocies; **dårskaber**, follies;
enheder, units; **landskaber**, landscapes; **selskaber**, societies;
skønheder, beauties; **venskaber**, friendships; **videnskaber**, sciences;
vittigheder, jokes

- (c) Personal names and place names (see 1.8.3.3):

Der var flere Marier og Larser.

There were several Maries and Larses.

Hvor mange Nykøbinge er der i Danmark?

How many Nykøbings are there in Denmark?

i de to Amerikaer

in the two Americas

1.4.3.2

Basic rules:

First declension nouns add the plural ending **–er** to the stem:

en blomst flower **blomster** **et sted** place **steder**

en by town **byer** **et træ** tree **træer**

This group includes all nouns ending in **–ed** and most bisyllabic nouns ending in an unstressed syllable:

en fælded common **fællede** **en 'bolig** home **boliger**

et marked market **markeder** **et 'bryllup** wedding **bryllupper**
(cf. 1.4.1.3)

First declension nouns ending in unstressed **–e** add **–r** to the stem:

en kvinde woman **kvinder** **et menneske** human being **mennesker**

Others include: **en dame**, a lady; **et frimærke**, a postage stamp; **en færge**, a ferry; **en kirke**, a church; **en myre**, an ant; **en pige**, a girl; **en rejse**, a journey; **en skole**, a school; **en uge**, a week; **en vare**, a product; **en åre**, an oar

1.4.3.3

Nouns ending in unstressed **–el** often drop the **–e–** of the stem before adding the plural ending in **–er**:

en cykel cycle **cykler**

Common gender: **en aksel**, an axle; **en artikel**, an article; **en bibel**, a bible; **en cirkel**, a circle; **en fabel**, a fable; **en kedel**, a kettle; **en længsel**, a longing; **en onkel**, an uncle; **en regel**, a rule; **en snabel**, a snout; **en titel**, a title

Neuter: **et eksempel**, an example; **et fængsel**, a prison; **et kabel**, a cable; **et mirakel**, a miracle; **et møbel**, a piece of furniture; **et spektakel**, a commotion; **et stempel**, a stamp; **et tempel**, a temple; **et varsel**, a warning; **et æsel**, an ass

Some nouns drop a consonant, as a double consonant cannot precede **–l**, **–n**, **–r**: **en gaffel** – **gafler**, fork; **en kartoffel** – **kartofler**, potato; **et middel**

– midler, means; **en pukkel – pukler**, hump; **en seddel – sedler**, note; **en skammel – skamler**, footstool

See also 1.4.4.3.

Note 1 – Exceptions that do not drop the stem –e– include:

en kennel – kenneler, a kennel; **en tunnel – tunneler**, a tunnel

Note 2 – Nouns in stressed –el do not drop the stem –e–:

et hotel – hoteller, hotel; **en propel – propeller**, propeller

Note 3 – A few nouns for religious concepts ending in unstressed –el take a plural in –e:

en apostel – apostle, apostle; **en discipel – disciple**, disciple; **en djævel – djævle**, devil; **en engel – engle**, angel; **en himmel – himle**, heaven, sky

1.4.3.4

Most nouns in –en do not drop the stem –e– before adding the plural ending –er:

en eksamen – eksamener (or **eksaminer**), examination;
en helgen – helgener, saint; **et køkken – køkkener**, kitchen;
et pronomener – pronomener (or **pronominer**), pronoun;
en prædiken – prædikener, sermon; **verden – verd(e)ner**, world

See also 1.4.3.3.

Note – Exceptions: A few may, however, optionally drop the stem –e– in the plural like nouns in –el:

en figen – fig(e)ner, fig; **en frøken – frøk(e)ner**, unmarried woman;
en hilsen – hils(e)ner, greeting; **et lagen – lag(e)ner**, sheet

1.4.3.5

Some nouns modify the root vowel before adding the plural ending –(e)r:

Vowel change:

A > Æ: **and – ænder**, duck; **kraft – kræfter**, power;
 nat – nætter, night; **stang – stænger**, pole;
 tand – tænder, tooth; **tang – tænger**, pair of tongs

A > Æ with vowel lengthening: stad – stæder, city

O > Ø: bog – bøger, book; bonde – bønder, farmer;
klo – kløer, claw; ko – køer, cow; so – søer, sow

O > Ø with vowel shortening: fod – fødder, foot; rod – rødder, root

Å > Æ: hånd – hænder, hand; rå – ræer, yard (on ship);
tå – tæer, toe

1.4.3.6

Some neuter nouns ending in **-ium** drop the **-um** before adding the plural ending **-er**:

et gymnasium gymnasier upper secondary school

Like **gymnasium** are: **akvarium**, aquarium; **evangelium**, gospel; **kollegium**, hall of residence; **kompedium**, compendium; **kriterium**, criterion; **laboratorium**, laboratory; **medium** (or **medie**), medium; **ministerium**, ministry; **privilegium**, privilege; **seminarium**, teachers' training college; **stadium**, stage; **studium**, study; **terrarium**, terrarium

Note – The Danish Language Council has plans to allow an optional alternative singular form in **-ie** for all of the above, e.g. **gymnasie/gymnasium**

Notice also some nouns in **-(e)um** that drop **-um**:

et museum museer museum

et verbum verber verb

1.4.3.7

Some nouns in **-um**, **-us** have two alternative forms, the Latin plural in **-a** and the Danish plural in **-er** (cf. 1.4.9):

et forum forummer/fora forum

et femininum feminina/femininer feminine

en/et virus virusser/virus/vira virus

Notice also:

et kursus kursus/kurser course

1.4.3.8

Some nouns ending in **-a** either add the **-er** to the original singular form or alternatively drop the **-a** and add **-er** (cf. 1.4.9):

en kollega **kollegaer/kolleger** colleague

But:

et firma **firmaer** firm

1.4.3.9

Most nouns in **-or** with plurals in **-er** have stress shift:

en 'motor **mo'torer** engine

en 'pastor **pa'storer** pastor

Like **motor** are: **elevator**, lift; **faktor**, factor; **junior**, junior; **professor**, professor; **rektor**, headteacher; **senior**, senior; **traktor**, tractor

Note 1 – **En kon'ditor** – **kon'ditorer**, baker, does not have stress shift.

Note 2 – In colloquial Danish some of these nouns do not have stress shift in the plural:

'motorer, 'traktorer

Note 3 – The English loans **bachelor**, **tutor**, among some academic titles, conform to this pattern.

1.4.3.10

Vowel lengthening occurs in some monosyllabic nouns ending in a short vowel plus **-d**:

en gud **guder** god

en rad **rader** line

en stad **stæder** city

et sted **steder** place

1.4.3.11

The 'stød' (here marked '), i.e. a Danish version of the glottal stop, is generally retained in the plural of nouns, but is lost in the plural of some nouns, including:

(a) those ending in -l-, -n-, -r- plus a consonant:

byl't	bylter	bundle
prin's	prinser	prince
sor'g	sorger	grief

(b) those ending in -l, -n, and -nd, -rd where the d is silent:

træv'l	trævler	thread
bøn'	bønner	prayer
stund'	stunder	while
jord'	jorder	land

1.4.3.12

The 'stød' is added before the plural ending of all foreign loans with a plural in -er and of other word classes used as nouns:

et drama	drama'er	drama
et ja	ja'er	yes

1.4.4 The second declension: plural in -e

1.4.4.1 The second declension includes:

(a) Many monosyllabic common gender nouns ending in a consonant:

en del – dele, part; **en dreng – drenge**, boy; **en fugl – fugle**, bird;
en krig – krige, war; **en løgn – løgne**, lie; **en stol – stole**,
 chair; **en vej – veje**, road

(b) Some monosyllabic neuter nouns:

et bord – borde, table; **et brev – breve**, letter; **et hus – huse**,
 house; **et land – lande**, country

(c) All nouns ending in unstressed **-er** (see also 1.4.4.3 below):

en arbejder – arbejdere, worker; **en kunstner – kunstnere**, artist; **en lærer – lærere**; teacher; **en russer – russere**, Russian; **en svensker – svenskere**, Swede; **en århusianer – århusianere**, inhabitant of Århus

(d) All nouns ending in **-dom**:

These double the **-m** in the plural: **en ejendom – ejendomme**, property; **en sygdom – sygdomme**, illness (cf. 1.4.1.3).

1.4.4.2 Basic rule

Second declension nouns add the plural ending **-e** to the stem:

et bord	a table	borde	tables
et brev	a letter	breve	letters
en kat	a cat	katte	cats
en sang	a song	sange	songs

1.4.4.3

Nouns in **-er** often keep (or can keep) the **-e** of the stem in the plural:

en bager – bagere, baker; **en kælder – kæld(e)re**, basement;
en køber – købere, buyer; **en revolver – revolvere**, revolver

But many drop the stem **-e** in the plural (common gender except where indicated):

brødre, brothers (cf. **en bro(de)r**); **fibre**, fibres; **filtre** (n.), filters;
fingre, fingers; **fædre**, fathers (cf. **en fa(de)r**); **hylstre** (n.), cases;
klostre (n.), convents; **ministre**, ministers; **orkestre** (n.), orchestras;
skuldre, shoulders; **svogre**, brothers-in-law; **søstre**, sisters;
teatre (n.), theatres; **vintre**, winters

Where two identical consonants would otherwise be followed by another consonant, one of them is dropped:

en datter	døtre	daughter
et nummer	numre	number
et offer	ofre	victim
en sommer	somre	summer

See also 1.4.3.3.

1.4.4.4

This declension includes some common gender nouns denoting people and ending in **-ing**:

flygtninge, refugees; **islændinge**, Icelanders; **lærlinge**, apprentices;
nævninge, jury members; **oldinge**, old men; **slægtninge**, relatives;
udlændinge, foreigners; **yinglinge**, youngsters

The following nouns have alternative forms: **dødninge(r)**, ghosts; **hedninge(r)**, heathens; **høvdinge(r)**, chieftains; **opkomlinge(r)**, parvenus; **uslinge(r)**, wretches

Note – Exceptions: Many other words ending in **-ing**, **-ling** take **-er**:

forretninger, businesses; **indledninger**, introductions; **meninger**, opinions; **muslinger**, mussels

This is also true of some words for people:

arvinger, heirs; **dronninger**, queens; **kællinger**, old women;
tvillinger, twins

It is also true of the names of some types of fish:

brislinger, sprats; **fjæsinger**, greater weever fish; **hvillinger**, whiting

1.4.4.5

This declension includes some nouns denoting family relationships that change the stem vowel before adding the plural in **-e**:

en bror (broder)	brødre	brother
en datter	døtre	daughter
en far (fader)	fædre	father
en mor (moder)	mødre	mother

1.4.4.6

Notice the following irregular plural:

et øje øjne eye

1.4.4.7

Vowel lengthening occurs in the plurals of monosyllabic nouns ending in a short vowel plus **-d** or **-v** (cf. 1.10.2.7):

et blad	bl<u>a</u>de	leaf
et hav	h<u>a</u>ve	ocean
en lov	l<u>o</u>ve	law

1.4.4.8

Nouns with a 'stød' (marked ') usually lose this in the plural form in **-e**:

en de'l	dele	part
en fu'gl	fugle	bird
et hu's	huse	house
en skov'	skove	wood
en sto'l	stole	chair

1.4.5 *The third declension: zero plural*

These nouns do not add a plural ending.

1.4.5.1 The third declension includes:

(a) Many monosyllabic neuter nouns:

et brød – brød, (loaf of) bread; **et bær – bær**, berry; **et dyr – dyr**, animal; **et flag – flag**, flag; **et folk – folk**, people;
et glas – glas, glass; **et hjem – hjem**, home; **et kort – kort**, card;

et liv – liv, life; **et lys** – lys, light; **et mål** – mål, goal; **et par** – par, pair; **et pas** – pas, passport; **et skæg** – skæg, beard; **et sprog** – sprog, language; **et tal** – tal, number; **et uvejr** – uvejr, storm; **et æg** – æg, egg; **et år** – år, year

Note – Et tog, a train, has two possible plural forms: tog/toge.

- (b) Some polysyllabic nouns ending in a consonant:

et fjernsyn – fjernsyn, television; **et forhold** – forhold, relationship; **et forsøg** – forsøg, attempt; **et spørgsmål** – spørgsmål, question

- (c) Some monosyllabic common gender nouns:

en fejl – fejl, mistake; **en fisk** – fisk, fish; **en mus** – mus, mouse; **en sko** – sko, shoe; **en sten** – sten, stone; **en ting** – ting, thing; **en tvivl** – tvivl, doubt

- (d) Some nouns ending in **–ende** (many of them denoting temporary occupations and formed from the present participles of verbs):

en gående – gående, pedestrian; **en rejsende** – rejsende, traveller; **en studerende** – studerende, student; **en troende** – troende, believer

- (e) The noun **et tilfælde**, pl. **tilfælde** (coincidence) fits into no pattern.

1.4.5.2 Basic rule

Third declension nouns add no plural ending:

en sko	a shoe	sko	shoes
et æg	an egg	æg	eggs

1.4.5.3

Some nouns show plural by changing the stem vowel in the plural:

et barn	a child	børn	children
en gås	a goose	gæs	geese
en mand	a man	mænd	men

For plural definite forms see 1.10.3.

1.4.6 Plurals and compound nouns

Normally only the second element in a noun compound takes the plural ending:

en skolepige – skolepiger	en pigeskole – pigeskoler
a schoolgirl	a girls' school

There are some compounds with **barne-**, however, in which both elements take (or may take) the plural form:

et barnebarn – børnebørn	a grandchild
en barnefødsel – barnefødsler/børnefødsler	childbirth

Like **en barnefødsel** are:

barnehoved, child's head; **barneseng**, child's bed; **barnesko**, child's shoe; **barneskole**, children's school; **barnestol**, child's chair

Note 1 – Some compounds with **barne-** have an alternative singular form in **børne-**:

barncykel/børncykel – barnecykler/børnecykler, child's bicycle

In new formations there is a tendency only to use **børne-** as the first element:

et børnebibliotek, children's library; **børnebegrænsning**, family planning; **en børnehave**, a kindergarten; **en børnelæge**, a paediatrician; **børnepenge**, child maintenance

Note 2 – When the compound only refers to one child, however, the first element is **barne-**:

barnestørrelse, child's size; **barnetro**, childhood faith

This also applies to some fixed cases:

barnedåb, infant baptism; **barnepige**, nanny; **barnevogn**, pram

Some compounds with **bonde-** have alternative plural forms:

en bondedreng – bondedrenge or bønderdrenge	country boy
en bondepige – bondepiger or bønderpiger	country girl

Some other compound nouns have a plural form in the first element:

mødrehjem, home for mothers; **mødrerum**, room for nursing mothers; **Mødrehjælpen**, the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child; **Brødremenigheden**, The Moravian Brethren

1.4.7 *Plurals of loans*

Over recent years efforts have been made on the part of the Danish Language Council to encourage the replacement of foreign plural endings so as to allow the adaptation of loanwords into the Danish inflectional pattern. There is now a consistent policy for this adaptation, but in some cases foreign plurals are still in common use, not least in advertising and the media. For genders of loans see 1.3.2.

1.4.8 *English loans with original plurals in –s*

1.4.8.1

Most nouns borrowed from foreign languages, and especially those from English – many of which previously had a plural in –s – now have plural forms in –(e)r, –e or zero. The –s plural declension frequently offers a temporary refuge to loanwords which are later adapted to Danish inflectional patterns:

en baby – babyer; en bar – barer; en bus – busser; en film – film; en folder – foldere; en lift – lifte(r); et job – job; en single – singler; et trip – trip

1.4.8.2

English nouns with a stem ending in –er generally take the plural ending –e:

en bestseller – bestsellere; en computer – computere; en container – containere; en gangster – gangstere; en manager – managere; en reporter – reportere; en pullover – pullovere; en sweater – sweitere; en trailer – trailere

1.4.8.3

A few loans with –s plurals have an alternative zero ending:

et heat – heats/heat; et trick – tricks/trick

1.4.8.4

A small group of nouns with plurals in *–s* remains, including:

- (a) Nouns occurring mostly in plural or collective (non-count) forms. (These have a definite plural in *–ene*. See 1.10.3.)

cornflakes, jeans, odds, pickles, shorts

- (b) Others where the *–s* plural forms an alternative to a Danish ending:

en check – checks/check, en cocktail – cocktails/cocktail, en cowboy – cowboyer/cowboys, et foto – fotoer/fotos, en jeep – jeeper/jeeps, et show – shows/show

For plural definite forms see 1.10.3.

1.4.9 *Latin loans ending in –um, –ium, –us, –a*

1.4.9.1

Some Latin loans ending in *–um*, *–us* retain their original Latin plurals in *–a*, *–i* (see 1.4.3.6f):

et faktum	fakta	fact
et maksimum	maksimummer/maksima	maximum
et genus	genus/genera	gender
en musikus	musici	musician

1.4.9.2

A few nouns have alternative plural forms, i.e. Latin or Danish:

en/et femininum	feminina/femininer	feminine
et referendum	referendummer/referenda	referendum
et serum	serummer/sera	serum

Note – Et *medium/medie* – *medier* retains the Latin plural *media* when used of advertising.

1.4.9.3

The Danish inflection is on occasion found added to the original singular:

et drama	dramaer	drama
en farao	faraouer/faraoner	pharaoh
en kollega	kolleg(a)er	colleague
et tema	temaer	theme

1.4.9.4

Some loans in **-um** drop the **-um** and add the Danish plural ending **-er** (see also 1.4.3.6):

et amfibium	amfibier	amphibian
et centrum	centrummer/centrer	centre
et glos(s)ar/et glos(s)arium	glos(s)arier/ glos(s)sarium	glossary
et kriterium	kriterier	criterion
et museum	museer	museum
et observatorium	observatorier	observatory
et territorium	territorier	territory
et gymnasium	gymnasier	Upper Secondary School
et imperium	imperier	empire
et solarium	solarier	solarium

A number of nouns ending in **-ium** have alternative singular forms in **-ie**:

et kranium/kranie	kranier	cranium
et medium/medie	medier	medium
et ovarie/ovarium	ovarier	ovary
en/et spatium/spatie	spatier	space
et stadie/stadium	stadier	stadium
et podie/podium	podier	podium

This can be explained not only by analogy with the plural indefinite form in **-ier**, but also with the definite singular in **-iet** and the compound form in **-ie-**:

akvarier	aquaria
seminariet	the teachers' training college
kollegieværelse	student room

1.4.9.5

Notice also two nouns ending in **-en** that have plurals in **-er** with alternative plural forms where the stem changes from **-en** to **-in**:

eksamen	eksamener/eksaminer	examination
pronomen	pronomener/pronominer	pronoun

1.4.10 Loans ending in **-o**

1.4.10.1

Most loans ending in **-o**, from whatever source, have only Danish inflection in which the **-o** is retained:

en avocado/avokado	avocadoer/avokadoer
en cello	celloer

Others include: bistro, espresso, fiasko, ghetto, libretto, logo, memento, piano, radio, video.

Note 1 – Some nouns have alternative plural forms in **-os**:

cigarilloer/cigarillos, desperadoer/desperados, fotoer/fotos

These have plural definites in **-oerne**: fotoerne.

Note 2 – Two currencies ending in **-o** have no Danish plural in the indefinite form: pesos, escudos.

Note 3 – **En fresko** – **freskoer** (fresco) has a Danish alternative: **en freske** – **fresker**.

1.4.10.2

Some loans, mostly in the fields of banking and music, have both an original Italian plural and a Danish alternative where **-er** is added to the Italian singular form:

et intermezzo	intermezzoer/intermezzi	intermezzo
en konto	kontoer/konti	account
en risiko	risikoer/risici	risk
en saldo	saldoer/saldi	balance
en solo	soloer/soli	solo
et tempo	tempoer/tempi	tempo

Note – In a few cases a form in **-ier** is found:

en impresario	impresari(o)er
et scenarie/scenario	scenari(o)er

For plural definite forms see 1.10.3.

1.4.11 **Nouns – plural indefinite forms: summary chart**

Alternative forms are shown with oblique slashes. Numbers refer to paragraphs.

Para.	Singular	Plural	Plural ending	Meaning
1.4.3 FIRST DECLENSION			-er	
COMMON GENDER				
	en sky	skyer		cloud
	en motor	motorer		engine
	en artikel	artikler		article
	en måned	måneder		month
	en fod	fødder		foot
	en hånd	hænder		hand

NEUTER

et møbel	møbler	(piece of) furniture
et køkken	køkkener	kitchen
et museum	museer	museum
et drama	dramaer	drama

I.4.3 FIRST DECLENSION **-r**

COMMON GENDER

en uge	uger	week
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NEUTER

et billede	billeder	picture
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I.4.4 SECOND DECLENSION **-e**

COMMON GENDER

en dag	dage	day
en lærer	lærere	teacher
en ejendom	ejendomme (I.4.1.3)	property
en datter	døtre	daughter

NEUTER

et bord	borde	table
et hus	huse	house

I.4.5 THIRD DECLENSION **zero**

COMMON GENDER

en sko	sko	shoe
en gående	gående	pedestrian
en mand	mænd	man

NEUTER

et år	år	year
et barn	børn	child

I.4.8 ENGLISH PLURALS **-s**

et show	shows	show
en drag	drags	drag artist

1.4.9 LATIN PLURALS

–a

et faktum **fakta** fact

1.4.10 ITALIAN & SPANISH PLURALS –i/–s

en konto **kontoer/konti** account
en desperado **desperadoer/desperados**

1.5 Nouns with no plural form or no singular form, collective nouns and nouns expressing quantity

1.5.1 Nouns with no plural form

The following categories of noun generally have no plural form:

1.5.1.1 Verbal nouns describing an action

Verbal nouns in –en:

grublen, brooding; **nysen**, sneezing; **viden**, knowledge

Nouns in –en formed from a verb phrase:

fremtræden, appearance; **hensyntagen**, consideration;
indskriden, intervention; **indtræden**, commencement/entry

1.5.1.2 Abstract nouns

adel, nobility; **ansvar**, responsibility; **fattigdom**, poverty; **godhed**, goodness; **kulde**, cold; **lykke**, happiness; **sødme**, sweetness; **troskab**, loyalty

Plurals of abstract nouns express a countable quantity:

Hans døtre var skønheder. His daughters were beauties.
Hun har få glæder. She has few pleasures.
hendes længslers mål the goal of her dreams

1.5.1.3 Substances and materials (cf. 1.3.6)

garn, yarn; **guld**, gold; **kød**, meat; **kul**, coal; **luft**, air; **mad**, food;
mælk, milk; **nylon**, nylon; **olie**, oil; **sne**, snow; **tobak**, tobacco; **vand**, water; **vin**, wine; **øl**, beer

Plurals of such words are, however, used to indicate types or makes of a substance:

garner, wools; **teer**, teas; **vine**, wines

Note – Colloquially these are found as count nouns: **madder**, sandwiches; **vander**, soft drinks; **øller**, beers (i.e. glasses or bottles of beer).

1.5.1.4 Collective nouns

afkom, progeny; **folk**, people; **kvæg**, cattle

1.5.1.5

Weights and measures, which usually have a zero plural form after cardinal numbers (cf. English ‘6 foot tall’; see also 1.5.4):

tre meter lang, three metres long

1.5.1.6 Some nouns which ‘borrow’ a plural form

besvær	besværligheder	trouble
dåb	dåbshandler	baptism
død	dødsfald	death
gæld	gældsposter	debt
løn	lønninger	salary
spøg	spøgefuldheder	joke

Notice one noun with an unrelated ‘borrowed’ plural:

dåd	bedrifter	deed
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In all these cases the plural form ‘borrowed’ has a corresponding singular form, e.g. *en bedrift*, *et dødsfald*.

1.5.2 Nouns with no singular form

The following nouns are usually encountered only in the plural:

Nouns with no plural form or no singular form, collective nouns and nouns expressing quantity

1.5.2.1

Many words for articles of clothing associated with two pieces:

bukser (trousers), **jeans**, **shorts**, **slacks**, **slippers**, **trusser** (knickers)

Note that **pyjamas** is regarded as singular:

en pyjamas – pyjamas(s)en – pyjamas (pyjamas(s)er)

Note – **En buks** (a trouser), **en trusse** (a pair of knickers) are used in the clothing trade.

1.5.2.2 Collectives denoting people

forældre, parents; **søskende**, brothers and sisters; **småbørn**, infants

1.5.2.3 Other collectives (see also 1.5.3)

briller, spectacles; **cinders**, furnace coke; **finanser**, finances;
grejer, things; **indvolde**, entrails; **klæder**, clothes; **penge**, money;
viktualier, victuals

Note – **En brille** (a pair of spectacles) is used in the ophthalmic trade.

1.5.2.4 Some illnesses

kopper, smallpox; **mæslinger**, measles; **røde hunde**, German measles

1.5.2.5 Some place names

Alperne, the Alps; **Færøerne**, the Faroes; **Nederlandene**, the Netherlands

1.5.2.6 Words for decades

tred(i)verne, the Thirties; **fyrrene**, the Forties

1.5.2.7 Others

fagter, gestures; **løjer**, high jinks

1.5.3 Collectives

1.5.3.1

The noun **mand** may remain in the singular form in expressions of numerical strength:

en gruppe på 20 mand a group of 20 men

en officer og ti mand one officer and ten men

en besætning på 500 mand a crew of 500 men

Notice also:

Alle mand på dæk! All hands on deck!

1.5.3.2

A small number of other nouns possess a separate collective plural form:

Singular	Collective plural	Count plural
orm worm	orm worms (infestation)	orme worms
sten stone	sten stone(s)	stene stones
øje eye	øjne eyes	øjer 'eyes'
øl beer	øl beers, i.e. types	øller beers, i.e. bottles or glasses

Note 1 – **Stene** = gemstones or gravestones.

Note 2 – **Øjer** is used only in compounds:

katteøjer, reflectors on bicycles; **koøjer**, portholes; **nåleøjer**, eyes of needles

Nouns with no plural form or no singular form, collective nouns and nouns expressing quantity

1.5.4 Nouns expressing quantity

1.5.4.1

In expressions such as those given below, the noun indicating the measure of quantity usually has a zero plural. Notice that in these cases the English 'of' has no equivalent in Danish:

en fod	one foot
to fod	two feet (or: foot)
et kilo (smør)	one kilo (of butter)
fire kilo (smør)	four kilos (of butter)
en kilometer	one kilometre
halvtreds kilometer	fifty kilometres
en liter (mælk)	one litre (of milk)
tre liter (mælk)	three litres (of milk)
en meter (tøj)	one metre (of cloth)
tre meter (tøj)	three metres (of cloth)
en mil	one Danish mile (= 4.7 Eng. miles)
to mil	two Danish miles
(det koster ikke) en øre	(it doesn't cost) an øre
(det koster) halvtreds øre	(it costs) fifty øre

Note 1 – The noun **krone** does, however, possess a separate plural form:

en krone	one crown (unit of currency)
to kroner	two crowns
Det koster ti kroner.	It costs ten crowns.

Note 2 – Less common are the following nouns for measurements:

en favn træ	one cord of wood
to favne træ	two cords of wood
en skæppe havre	one bushel of oats
to skæpper havre	two bushels of oats

1.5.4.2

Alternative plural forms of some of these nouns are occasionally encountered when the measure of quantity rather than the quantity expressed is of prime importance:

Man må regne kilometrene ud.

We have to work out the mileages.

Jeg har to halvtredsører. cf. **halvtreds øre**, 50 øre

I have two fifty øre pieces.

tusinder af mennesker cf. **flere tusind mennesker**

thousands of people

several thousand people

1.6 Differences in number between English and Danish

1.6.1 *Nouns which are singular in English but plural in Danish*

In addition to those nouns listed in 1.5.2 which have no singular form in Danish, there are a number of differences in usage between the two languages. Some Danish nouns possess a singular form while their English counterpart does not:

There was no furniture in the room.

...ingen møbler.

But: I bought a new piece of furniture.

...et nyt møbel.

I have my information from a reliable source.

Jeg har mine oplysninger fra en pålidelig kilde.

But: A piece of information ...

En oplysning ...

My income ...

Mine indtægter ...

But: He has a large income.

...en god indtægt.

My expenditure ...

Mine udgifter ...

But: He has large a expenditure ...

Han har en stor udgift ...

A good knowledge of Danish ...

Gode kundskaber i dansk ...

But: The tree of knowledge ...

Kundskabens træ ...

(NB **en kundskab** is *not* possible)

The news is on TV every night.

Nyhederne ...

But: I have got some news (a piece of news) for you.

...en nyhed ...

I did some good business.

...gode forretninger.

But: A good piece of business ...

En god forretning ...

I need some good advice.

...gode råd.

But: A good piece of advice ...

Et godt råd ...

1.6.2 *Nouns which are singular in Danish but plural in English*

1.6.2.1

Danish has a number of singular nouns which correspond to plural ideas in English:

aske	ashes
indhold	contents
løn	wages
middelalderen	the Middle Ages
middelklassen	the middle class(es)
protokol	minutes (of a meeting)
rigdom	riches
sprit	spirits
tolden	Customs
i udkanten af	on the outskirts of
udseende	looks

These cases include a number of English nouns ending in ‘-ics’:

atletik	athletics
fysik	physics
gymnastik	gymnastics
lingvistik	linguistics
matematik	mathematics
politik	politics
statistik	statistics
økonomi	economics

They also include cases where English has ‘a pair of’:

en knibtang	(a pair of) pliers
en passer	(a pair of) compasses
en pincet	(a pair of) tweezers
en saks	(a pair of) scissors
en trappestige	(a pair of) steps, a stepladder
en vægt	(a pair of) scales

Note – ‘several pairs of scissors’ = **flere sakse**, and so on.

1.6.2.2

In Danish, singular nouns are used in reciprocal constructions:

Skal vi bytte plads?	Shall we change places?
Vi gav hinanden hånden.	We shook hands.

1.6.2.3

Danish uses a singular noun in some expressions where English has a possessive pronoun with a plural noun:

Mændene mistede livet.	The men lost their lives.
De skiftede mening.	They changed their minds.
Han stod med hånden i lommen.	He was standing with his hands in his pockets.

1.6.2.4

A singular noun is used in a few expressions with numerals:

halvandet år	18 months; one and a half years
to og en halv måned	2½ months
i det 15. og 16. århundrede	in the 15th and 16th centuries
i kapitel 6 og 7	in chapters 6 and 7

1.7 Some Danish noun homonyms

1.7.1 List of Danish noun homonyms

Some Danish nouns with the same spelling have two or more very different meanings, sometimes reflected either in different genders or in different plural forms, or both. They are therefore regarded as separate words. The following is a list of the most frequent homonyms.

Singular	Plural	Meaning
en ark	arker	ark
et ark	ark	piece of paper
en bid	bidder	morsel, bite to eat
et bid	bid	bite (of a dog etc.)
en brud	brude	bride
en brud	brude	weasel
et brud	brud	break
brug-en	–	use
et brug	brug	farm

en buk	bukke	billy-goat
et buk	buk	bow
fotografi-en	–	photography
et fotografi	fotografier	photograph
en frø	frøer	frog
et frø	frø	seed
en fyr	fyrre	pine tree
en fyr	fyre	chap
et fyr	fyr	lighthouse
et fyr	fyr	furnace, boiler
en følge	følger	(con)sequence
et følge	følger	retinue
en gran	graner	spruce
et gran	gran	particle, pinch (e.g. of salt)
en jalousie	–	jealousy
et jalousie	jalousier	window blind, screen
en klap	klapper	flap
et klap	klap	pat
en kok	kokke	chef
en kok	kokke	cockerel
en lap	lapper	patch
en lap	lapper	Lapp, Sami
en led	led(d)er	side, direction
et led	led	joint
et led	led	gate
en leje	lejer	rent
et leje	lejer	couch; village (e.g. fiskerleje, fishing village)
en læg	lægge	calf, shank
et læg	læg	pleat

I
Nouns

en lod	lodder	fate, share
et lod	lodder	lead weight, lottery ticket
et mål	mål	aim, goal
et mål	mål	dialect, language
en nød	nødder	nut
nød-en	–	distress
en nøgle	nøgler	key
et nøgle	nøgler	ball of yarn
en pil	pile	willow
en pil	pile	arrow
pust-en	–	breath
et pust	pust	puff of wind
ris-en	ris	rice
et ris	ris	rod
et råd	råd	piece of advice, council
råd-det	–	rot
en sigte	sigter	sieve
et sigte	sigter	sight, aim
en skrift	skrifter	handwriting
et skrift	skrifter	publication
en søm	sømme	hem
et søm	søm	nail
en ting	ting	thing
et ting	ting	parliament, court
tryk-ken	–	print
et tryk	tryk	press, squeeze
en vår	–	spring
et vår	–	pillow case

1.8 The genitive

1.8.1 The form of the genitive

1.8.1.1 Basic rule:

To form the genitive, *-s* is added to the indefinite or definite singular or to the indefinite or definite plural form, i.e. to the basic form:

Indefinite singular

en piges, a girl's

et barns, a child's

Definite singular

pigens, the girl's

barnets, the child's

Indefinite plural

pigers, girls'

børns, children's

Definite plural

pigernes, the girls'

børnene, the children's

Proper nouns also take this ending:

Mozarts Requiem; **Svends sommerhus**, Svend's summer cottage;

Grundtvigs salmer, Grundtvig's hymns; **Carlsbergs ledelse**,

the board of Carlsberg; **Danmarks statsminister**, the Prime

Minister of Denmark

Other genitive endings are listed below, but there are also many periphrastic forms of the genitive (see 7.4).

1.8.1.2

Unlike in English, there is generally no apostrophe before the genitive *-s*:

et barns ansigt a child's face

1.8.1.3

After proper names ending in *-s*, *-x* or *-z* the genitive is marked by an apostrophe alone:

Lars' lejlighed	Lars's flat
Columbus' opdagelse af Amerika	Columbus's discovery of America
ris' kogetid	the cooking time for rice
Bordeaux' gode vine	the good wines of Bordeaux
Marx' bøger	Marx's books
Schweiz' hovedstad	the capital of Switzerland

Note 1 – Until recently two other ways of expressing the genitive were to be found:

1. An apostrophe + s:

Lars's lejlighed
Columbus's opdagelse af Amerika

2. A colloquial form in –es:

Larses lejlighed
Schweizes hovedstad, etc.

Note 2 – The method with apostrophe alone is not used with nouns ending in –s + consonant(s):

Max Frischs roman Homo Faber, Max Frisch's novel *Homo Faber*

1.8.1.4

After abbreviations without a full stop, an apostrophe + s is added:

USA's hær	the US Army
DSB's problemer	DSB's problems
tv's underholdningsprogrammer	TV's entertainment programmes

When an abbreviation can be pronounced as a word, –s alone may be added as an alternative to apostrophe + s:

Natos (Nato's) generalsekretær the Secretary General of NATO

For abbreviations ending in **-s**, **-x**, **-z**, the same rules apply as above:

SAS' priser

SAS's prices

Føtex' kundekreds

Føtex's customers

Note – There is a tendency in Denmark, especially on shop signs, to adopt the English apostrophe:

Jensen's Bageri (Jensen's Bakery) should be **Jensens Bageri**

1.8.1.5

After abbreviations with a full stop, no apostrophe should be used, but this rule is often ignored:

Christian 4.s regeringstid

the reign of Christian IV

B.T.s/ B.T.'s sportsider

the sports pages of B.T.

en cand. mag.s

a graduate's employment prospects

beskæftigelsesmuligheder

1.8.1.6

In two-noun place names a first noun ending in **-havn**, **-holm** or **-land** takes a genitive **-s**:

Københavns Slot, Copenhagen Castle; **Frederiksholms Kanal**;

Holmslands Klit, Holmsland's Cliff

In some other two-noun place names this only applies when the second noun is modified (in which case it begins with a small letter):

Roskildes smukke domkirke

Roskilde's beautiful cathedral

Otherwise the first noun often does not take **-s**:

Roskilde Domkirke, Roskilde Cathedral; **Christiansborg Slot**,

Christiansborg Castle; **Odense Kommune**, Odense Local Authority;

Vejle Amt, Vejle County

1.8.1.7

Adjectival nouns may also take an –s genitive:

den gamles/de gamles sparepenge, the old man's/old people's savings; **det godes sejr**, the victory of good

1.8.1.8

There are many remnants of the older Danish genitive case after the preposition **til** (see 7.2.11):

(a) With a genitive in –s:

til alters, to the altar; **til bords**, to table; **til bys**, to town; **til fods**, on foot; **til havs**, by sea; **til lands**, by land; **til sengs**, to bed; **til skibs**, aboard; **til skovs**, to the woods; **til søs**, by sea; **til vands**, by water; **til vejrs**, aloft; **spørge til råds**, ask someone's advice

(b) With a genitive in –e:

til døde, to death; **til punkt og prikke**, to the letter; **til spilde**, to waste; **til stede**, present; **til syne**, into view; **tage til orde**, speak; **have til huse**, be housed

Note – The following have an old Danish dative case ending in –e:

ad åre, some time; **fra borde**, (go) ashore; **i drømme**, in one's dreams; **i live**, alive; **i senge**, in bed; **i søvne**, in one's sleep

1.8.1.9

Latin genitives are used in some names:

Mariæ bebudelsesdag	the feast of the Annunciation
Kristi himmelfartsdag	Ascension Day
Jesu liv	Jesus's life
Skt. Annæ Plads	St Anne's Square

1.8.1.10

In older Danish both the noun stem and the end article were inflected. A few relic forms are found in fixed expressions:

af livsens kræfter with all one's strength
på havsens bund at the bottom of the sea

1.8.2 The use of the genitive

1.8.2.1

Danish uses the genitive in –s much more often than English uses the genitive in 's or s'.

1.8.2.2

After a noun in the genitive form the noun following never appears in the definite form, i.e. it does not take an end article:

the top of the hill	bakkens top
the headteacher of the school	skolens rektor
the girls' parents	pigernes forældre

This often involves a conscious transformation from the English:

Cf. the end of summer	→	<i>lit.</i> the summer's end
		sommerens afslutning
<i>Definite article No article</i>		<i>Definite article No article</i>

Note – A rare exception is where the noun is a title or proper noun:

Jeg kan godt lide Kirks Fiskerne. I like Kirk's *The Fishermen*.

1.8.2.3

If a name comprises a group of words, the genitive is usually placed on the last word of the group, the 'group genitive':

Svend Andersens far	Svend Andersen's father
Anders Bodelsens romaner	Anders Bodelsen's novels
professor Nils Nielsens forelæsninger	Professor Nils Nielsen's lectures
firmaet Hansen & Søns fabrik	the firm of Hansen & Son's factory
Kongen af Danmarks bolsjer	the King of Denmark's sweets
en af mine venners datter	the daughter of one of my friends
This also applies to adjectival nouns:	
mange gamles største problem	the greatest problem for many old people
de tos kærlighed	the couple's love
Gorm den Gamles høj	Gorm the Old's mound

1.8.2.4

A noun in apposition often takes the same case as the noun to which it refers, in these examples the genitive:

Vi afventer universitetets rektors, professor Søndergårds, svar.

We are awaiting the University Vice-Chancellor, Professor Søndergård's, reply.

However, the group genitive is also possible here:

Vi afventer universitetets rektor, professor Søndergårds, svar.

In cases of apposition with relatively fixed expressions there is no need for agreement in case:

den nuværende dronning, Margrethes, regeringstid
the present queen, Margrethe's, reign

1.8.2.5

Particularly in spoken Danish there are many prepositional expressions involving different prepositions, which correspond to the English genitive construction with 'of'. For a detailed account of these see 7.4.

1.8.3 The –s genitive

1.8.3.1

The –s genitive is very frequent in Danish, especially in the written language, and corresponds both to English genitive constructions with 's or s' and to expressions with 'of':

the boy's father	drengens far
the boys' father	drengenes far
the King of Kings	kongernes konge
the discovery of America	Amerikas opdagelse
the life of Shakespeare	Shakespeares liv
the death of a hero	en helts død
the Queen of England	Englands dronning
the capital of Denmark	Danmarks hovedstad
the owner of the farm	gårdens ejer

Notice, however, the following special uses of the –s genitive in Danish:

1.8.3.2

The genitive of measurement:

et par timers søvn	a couple of hours' sleep
en toliters vinflaske	a two-litre wine bottle
et tietages højhus	a ten-storey high building
et fyrreminutters tv-program	a 40-minute TV programme
en tomils spadseretur	a nine-mile walk
en tidages rejse	a 10-day journey
to måneders husleje	two months' rent
en femtenårs dreng	a 15-year-old boy
et femårs fangenskab	five years' captivity
et ottekrones frimærke	an 8-kroner stamp
en fireværelses lejlighed	a four-room flat

1.8.3.3

Genitives in surnames, referring to 'family' or 'shop':

Der var ingen hjemme hos Olsens.

There was no-one at home at the Olsens'.

Jeg køber altid hos Larsens.

I always shop at Larsen's.

1.8.3.4

To indicate a quality:

Det var fandens godt gjort. That was damned well done.

et herrens vejr awful weather

tre satans kønne piger three devilishly pretty girls

en helvedes karl a devil of a chap

1.8.3.5

The -s genitive corresponding to English superlative + 'in':

Danmarks rigeste mand the richest man in Denmark

1.9 The form of the indefinite article

1.9.1 The indefinite article

The indefinite article in Danish is **en** for common gender nouns and **et** for neuter nouns:

en mand, a man **en kvinde**, a woman

et hus, a house **et æble**, an apple

See 3.1.2 for the numeral **en**.

1.10 The form of the definite article

1.10.1 Introduction

In Danish the definite article (or end article) singular is added to the end of the noun as a suffix: **-(e)n** for common gender nouns and **-(e)t** for neuter nouns. See 1.4.1.3 for doubling of the consonant before the end article.

The definite article plural is **-ne** for both common gender and neuter nouns with a plural indefinite form in **-e** or **-(e)r**, and **-ene** for nouns with a plural indefinite form in zero.

However, where the noun is preceded by an adjective, a front article (**den**, **det** or **de**) replaces the end article (see 2.4.1ff).

The form of
the definite
article

Noun alone:

<i>Singular:</i>	-EN/-ET	-N/-T
<i>Common</i>	manden , the man	kvinden , the woman
<i>Neuter</i>	huset , the house	æblet , the apple
<i>Plural:</i>	-NE	-ENE
<i>Common</i>	kvinderne , the women	mændene , the men
<i>Neuter</i>	husene , the houses	sprogene , the languages

Noun preceded by an adjective (see 2.4.1ff):

<i>Singular:</i>		
<i>Common</i>	den gamle mand the old man	den gamle kvinde the old woman
<i>Neuter</i>	det gamle hus the old house	det gamle æble the old apple
<i>Plural:</i>	de gamle kvinder the old women	de gamle æbler the old apples

1.10.2 The form of the definite singular with end article

1.10.2.1 Basic rule

Most Danish nouns add the end article **-en** or **-et** according to gender: