

SERIES EDITOR JAVIER MUÑOZ-BASOLS

SPEED UP YOUR GERMAN

STRATEGIES TO AVOID COMMON ERRORS

ANNEMARIE KÜNZL-SNODGRASS
AND SILKE MENTCHEN



Speed Up Your German

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Suitable both for classroom use or self-study, *Speed Up Your German* is the ideal resource for all intermediate learners of German wishing to refine their language skills.

Annemarie Künzl-Snodgrass and **Silke Mentchen** are both Senior Language Teaching Officers at the University of Cambridge, UK.

SPEED UP YOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS

SERIES EDITOR: Javier Muñoz-Basols, *University of Oxford, UK*

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Speed Up Your German

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Silke Mentchen

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Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	viii
1 Nouns: genders, plurals, cases	1
2 Adjectival endings	14
3 Verb forms	29
4 Pronouns	55
5 Word order	70
6 Tenses	98
7 The passive	110
8 Prepositions and cases	123
9 Agreement	145
10 Negation	156
11 False friends	166
12 Spelling and punctuation	178

Answer key to exercises	192
List of abbreviations	218
Bibliography	219
Index	221

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Introduction

Speed Up Your German aims to help learners of German at an intermediate level (A2–B2) to eradicate common errors speedily and efficiently in their use of the German language, as well as encourage those students at a higher level wishing to refine further their skills. The chosen grammar and vocabulary points are those that, in our extensive experience as language teaching professionals, tend to cause most difficulties for English-speaking learners of German as a foreign language. Some of these difficulties are caused by interference from the language structures in the learners' own native language, others by learners' knowledge of other foreign languages, their previous experiences with language learning or their general understanding of language structures, and not least by the context in and for which the language is being learned.

This book will make the perfect companion for learners who want to improve their German language skills in those areas where they themselves have identified frequent errors. It is meant as an accompaniment to German language course-books or German grammars. German course-books often do not go into the level of detail we are using to explain those grammatical features which, in our experience, cause the most persistent errors. It is ideal for revision, can also be used as a reference book and will help learners overcome typical mistakes through an accessible, systematized approach. Learners can of course also work their way through the chapters and use the frequent internal references as a built-in revision tool.

The book contains specific references to German grammar, to vocabulary points and to language structures as a means of pointing out the contrasts between German and English usage. We have aimed to explain these in such a way that they can also be understood by English-speaking students of German whose native language is not English.

At the beginning of each section, the key difficulty for each of the grammar areas selected is clearly identified ("Where's the difficulty?"). Each chapter features exercises illustrating the basics (the root cause of the error) as well

as explanations and exercises that go a little deeper into the grammar, with all tailor-made exercises checkable in an answer key at the back of the book. Most chapters also contain easy-to-remember acronyms and other memory aides.

We have covered a broad range of grammatical points because we think that if you wish to speed up your language learning and make your language use less prone to errors, then concentrating on known problem points is a more efficient way to do so, rather than trying to learn everything comprehensively. We hope this will prove a successful strategy to many learners.

Chapter 1 deals with nouns: genders, plurals and cases. In German sentences, these three factors interplay at every stage. The fact that every noun has a gender in German seems at first a strange concept for English-speaking learners. After all, in English only persons and pets and a few exceptions like ships have gender. The chapter explains gender by meaning and form; it also deals with the variety of plural forms in German and sums up the most important principles behind them, so that learners can take informed decisions when faced with uncertainty. The principles of indicating case through case endings and determiners are also set out in this chapter, as well as strategies for avoiding common error sources in the interplay of genders, plurals and cases.

Chapter 2 focuses on adjectival endings. Learners are guided to take a statistical approach: which are the most frequent adjectival endings? Knowing the correct adjectival endings, whether weak, strong or mixed, helps reduce mistakes drastically. When to use which ending is explained clearly in order to boost learners' confidence in this particular area of German grammar. The chapter also looks at adjectival nouns: knowing these can help to double up the vocabulary effortlessly. Comparisons, and how to get all endings right, are also addressed.

Chapter 3 looks at verb forms. Verbs are a crucial building block when it comes to making sentences, and it is important to understand that in German there are endings for every person in the verb, unlike English, where there is only one: the '-s' in the third person singular: 'he sings'. Although this chapter doesn't give a comprehensive overview of the verb forms in each tense, it does deal with specifics and exceptions in regular/non-regular verbs, separable verbs, reflexive verbs and modal verbs. The auxiliary verbs *haben* and *sein* are components of the perfect and pluperfect tenses in German. Choosing the correct auxiliary verb depends on which type of verb they go with, for example, transitive verbs (verbs which take a direct object) use *haben*, whereas certain intransitive verbs (which don't take a direct object) use *sein*. There are also verbs which take either *haben* or *sein*, depending on their meaning. This chapter explains the relevant categories and which of the two verbs is the default option.

Chapter 4 deals with a whole range of different types of pronouns; personal pronouns, reflexive pronouns (including information on the dative and the accusative cases, and reciprocal pronouns), possessive pronouns and relative pronouns. Pronouns are used to replace nouns, mostly to avoid repetition. Knowing

how to use them correctly will also make learners' writing style more varied, succinct and ultimately more idiomatic. It is a useful chapter for revising coherence in German sentences. The chapter's main objective is to make learners aware of typical pitfalls in terms of grammatical agreement between nouns and pronouns.

Chapter 5 is a comprehensive chapter on word order in German sentences. It deals with certain principles: the verb in second position in a main clause, the verbal bracket, the order of noun and pronoun objects and the order of adverbial expressions (time – reason – manner – place). It also explains the variety of elements that can stand in first position, in contrast to English, where the order of subject – verb – object is more or less fixed. When linking German main clauses the co-ordinating conjunctions, also sometimes called ADUSO words (*aber, denn, und, sondern, oder*) come into play. Main clause word order is explained, and so are the rules for omitting the subject if it's the same in both main clauses. The use of adverbs and adverbial conjunctions in first position as linking words, and the combination of ADUSO words with such adverbs are also dealt with. Finally, the principles for linking German main and subordinate (dependent) clauses are made clear by setting out the rules for word order after subordinating conjunctions, such as *weil, dass, wenn* etc. The so-called 'verb-comma-verb' rule is explained, and there are tips on how to avoid word order problems arising from a 'clash of conjunctions' (using two subordinating conjunctions straight after each other, for example, 'that although' or 'because if').

Chapter 6 focuses on tenses. The chapter's main learning objective is to promote the understanding that use of tenses in German is guided by principles like context, formality and modality. The chapter offers exercises on when to use the present, past and future tenses in German. The past tenses covered include the simple past tense, the perfect tense and the pluperfect tense. Special attention is paid to methods for translating English progressive tense forms and to the contrasts between English and German usage. The chapter also covers the German *Konjunktiv* forms used for conditionals and reported speech. Typical pitfalls in the use of *Konjunktiv* forms are highlighted, and there are handy tips on how to get it right.

Chapter 7 explains the use of the passive. This chapter takes a practical approach: learners will look at how to form the passive, paying special attention to the cases for subjects and objects. Learners are made aware through exercises that dative objects in active sentences will remain dative objects in passive sentences – a grammatical feature of German which leads to many mistakes by English speakers. The chapter also looks at passive constructions involving modal verbs. There are sections looking at the so-called *sein*-passive in contrast to the *werden*-passive. As there are verbs which cannot form the passive in German, one section is also dedicated to alternative forms for the passive.

Chapter 8 covers prepositions. Prepositions are notoriously difficult to learn, possibly because they bridge the areas of vocabulary and grammar. For German

prepositions, it is important to know which cases they take: dative, accusative or genitive. Some prepositions take two cases. The chapter's objective is to demonstrate methods which can help to recall all this information in a step-by-step approach. How to express where one comes from and where one is going using prepositions is also explained, as are prepositional adverbs. A contrastive approach serves as an additional aide for English-speaking learners of German: focusing on the counter-intuitive use of prepositions will help eliminate hardy errors. As using the dative case correctly is often seen as particularly difficult, a whole section is dedicated to this special case. Chapter 8 also works as a revision tool for the chapters on nouns, the passive and verbs.

Chapter 9 illustrates the importance of agreement in German. This chapter doubles up as a revision chapter for a number of grammatical features, like subject and verb agreement, cases after prepositions, adjectives and verbs, and apposition. Other areas include: personal pronouns, possessive pronouns and relative pronouns, and in particular how they have to agree in terms of gender. This is a useful chapter for anybody wanting to brush up on a whole range of error-prone grammatical features.

Chapter 10 deals with negation. The basic rules for negation in German are explained, and the manner in which they differ from English convention, as well as the use of German *kein* ('not a'). The chapter also deals with double negation and the role and effect of the use of specific particles in negation, such as *überhaupt*, *etwa* and *nicht einmal*. Knowing some of these "little" words will make all the difference.

Chapter 11 looks at false cognates, also known as 'false friends'. These are words that have the same or similar spelling in German and English, but which have very different meanings, for example, *Gift* in German means poison, whereas 'gift' in English of course is a 'present'. There are also confusing word pairs, that is, the same noun can have different genders and consequently different meanings, for example, *die Band* is a 'music band', but *das Band* is a 'ribbon'. And there are words that are both 'cognates', words that have similar spelling and meaning in German and English, and 'false friends' at the same time; for example, *arm* means 'poor', but *der Arm* is an 'arm'. This chapter will help you deal with such complexities.

The final chapter, **Chapter 12**, focuses on spelling and punctuation. Key issues here are the differences between English and German conventions, notably in the capitalization of nouns and adjectives, in the usage of *ß* versus *ss*, and of *das* and *dass*. Some important differences are pointed out between the English and German use of quotation marks and of the comma. Knowing these simple rules can help avoid common pitfalls and put the finishing touches to writing in German.

All chapters' examples and exercises are translated so that an obvious bonus effect will be the expansion of learners' passive and active vocabulary.



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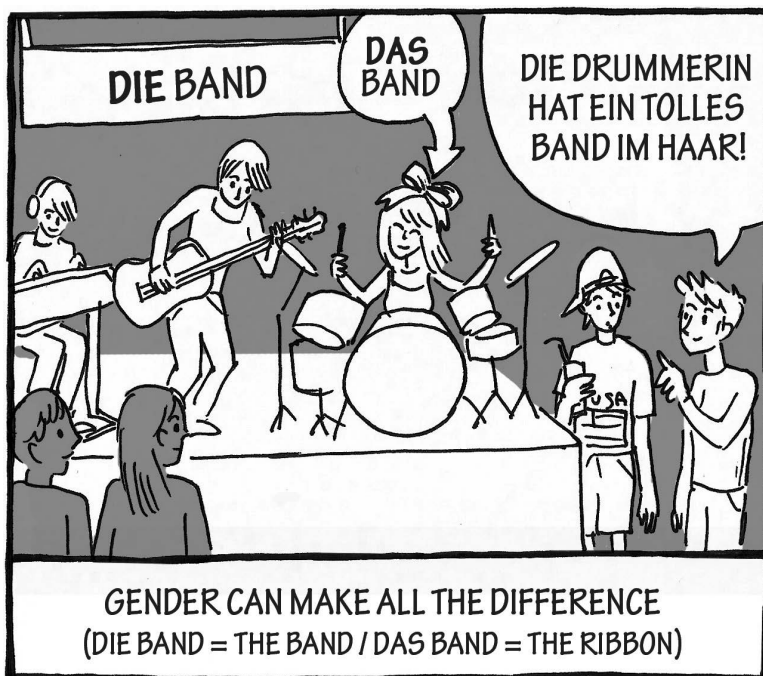
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1

Nouns: genders, plurals, cases

1 Genders	2
1.1 Gender assignation by meaning and form	2
1.2 Weak masculine nouns	6
2 Plurals	9
3 Cases	10
3.1 Case endings in nouns	11
3.2 Case confusion	12



Introduction

In German, genders, plural forms and cases are intricately connected with each other. You will know that every German noun has a gender (it's either masculine or feminine or neuter), that it has a distinct plural form, and that the noun phrase (= the noun and its determiner, for example, a definite or indefinite article) indicates case, that is, it tells us whether the noun is the subject of the sentence or an object. Look at the noun declension table and you will see that these three factors interplay at every stage:

	Masculine		Weak masculine		Feminine		Neuter	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Nom.	der Mann	die Männer	der Junge	die Jungen	die Frau	die Frauen	das Kind	die Kinder
Acc.	den Mann	die Männer	den Jungen	die Jungen	die Frau	die Frauen	das Kind	die Kinder
Gen.	des Mann(e)s	der Männer	des Jungen	der Jungen	der Frau	der Frauen	des Kind(e)s	der Kinder
Dat.	dem Mann	den Männern	dem Jungen	den Jungen	der Frau	den Frauen	dem Kind	den Kindern

1 Genders

In English, only natural genders occur (for persons or animals) and although there are a few exceptions (for example, ships are feminine), inanimate objects have no gender in English. Although genders in German make sense when referring to people or animals, it often isn't obvious at all which gender group an unknown noun belongs to. Why should 'der Tisch' (table) be masculine and 'das Buch' (book) neuter – after all, both are objects! Many minor errors arise from wrong gender assignation, and although communication isn't normally hindered, it does make the language sound wrong in a particular way, so it pays to give this some attention.

There's no way around it: the best way to avoid gender errors is to learn new words with their gender (and plural forms) right from the start. But if you are stuck, the following rules of thumb will help. What follows is not exhaustive by any standard, but it does include useful pointers that should make grappling with this challenging part of the German language easier.

1.1 Gender assignation by meaning and form

First of all, there are two categories of gender assignation: gender by meaning and gender by form. You will find long lists of nouns in each category in any grammar book, including some exceptions.



Error alert: where's the difficulty?

Quite obviously, many errors arise from learners either using wrong genders when writing in German, or from wrong gender identification of unknown nouns in a German text.

Therefore, it makes sense to look at endings indicating gender as well as gender assignment by meaning.

1.1.1 Gender by form

Endings indicating gender:

Masculine: -ant, -ast, -e, -er, -el, -ent, -ich, -ig, -ismus, -ist, -ling

For example:

‘der **Musikant**’ (musician), ‘der **Kontrast**’ (contrast), ‘der **Junge**’ (boy), ‘der **Lehrer**’ (teacher), ‘der **Mantel**’ (coat), ‘der **Student**’ (male student), ‘der **Teppich**’ (carpet), ‘der **Käfig**’ (cage) ‘der **Kapitalismus**’ (capitalism), ‘der **Kommunist**’ (communist), ‘der **Lehrling**’ (apprentice)

Feminine: -a, -anz, -e, -ei, -enz, -heit, -in, -ion, -ik, -keit, -ung, -schaft, -tät

For example:

‘die **Kamera**’ (camera), ‘die **Eleganz**’ (elegance), ‘die **Blume**’ (flower), ‘die **Brauerei**’ (brewery), ‘die **Referenz**’ (reference), ‘die **Freiheit**’ (liberty), ‘die **Freundin**’ (female friend), ‘die **Nation**’ (nation), ‘die **Musik**’ (music), ‘die **Einigkeit**’ (unity), ‘die **Kreuzung**’ (crossroads), ‘die **Freundschaft**’ (friendship), ‘die **Fakultät**’ (faculty)

Neuter: -al, -ar, -at, -ma, -ment, -tel, -um, -chen, -lein, -nis

For example:

‘das **Lineal**’ (ruler), ‘das **Inventar**’ (inventory), ‘das **Format**’ (format), ‘das **Thema**’ (theme), ‘das **Fundament**’ (basis), ‘das **Drittel**’ (third), ‘das **Referendum**’ (referendum), ‘das **Blümchen**’ (little flower), ‘das **Dörflein**’ (little village), ‘das **Ereignis**’ (event)

Note that these endings can only ever be useful pointers towards the gender of a noun, but no more. They are not failsafe, as there are always exceptions, for example, ‘die **Finsternis**’ (darkness) or ‘die **Schachtel**’ (box). The following points are particularly noteworthy:

- A large percentage of nouns ending in **-e** are feminine, but there’s a group of them that are masculine (see below, point 1.2), and one noun ending in **-e** always causes problems because it is (unexpectedly) neuter: ‘das **Interesse**’ (interest).
- As we have seen, the endings **-chen** and **-lein** indicate neuter. They make a little thing out of a big one, so to speak: ‘der **Tisch**’ (table) – ‘das **Tischchen**’ (little table), ‘das **Buch**’ (book) – ‘das **Büchlein**’ (little book), ‘die **Kanne**’ (jug) – ‘das **Kännchen**’ (little jug). Famously, these endings change the gender of

4 Nouns: genders, plurals, cases

what should be naturally feminine nouns: 'das Fräulein' (young woman), 'das Mädchen' (girl).

- The ending **-in** is a classic indicator of feminine gender, for example: 'die Lehrerin', 'die Tänzerin' (female dancer), 'die Polizistin' (policewoman).
- Some endings in **-el** can be feminine: 'die Regel' (rule) or neuter: 'das Segel' (sail).
- Many nouns ending in **-er** are masculine if they are derived from verbs: 'der Lehrer' (teacher), 'der Leser' (reader), 'der Arbeiter' (worker). But if you weren't aware of this and going by ending only, you would probably be surprised by the genders of the following very common nouns, as they all end in **-er**, but are neuter, not masculine: 'das Wetter' (weather), 'das Gewitter' (thunderstorm), 'das Fenster' (window), 'das Zimmer' (room), 'das Ungeheuer' (monster), 'das Abenteuer' (adventure).

1.1.2 Gender by meaning

Masculine by meaning

- **male persons and animals:** 'der Mann' (man), 'der Bruder' (brother), 'der Onkel' (uncle), 'der Hund' (dog), 'der Kater' (tomcat), 'der Hahn' (cockerel)
- **days of the week:** 'der Montag', 'der Dienstag' etc. (but: 'die Woche' – 'week')
- **times of the day:** 'der Morgen' (morning), 'der Mittag' (midday), 'der Abend' (evening)
- **months:** 'der Januar' (January), 'der Februar' (February) etc.
- **the weather:** 'der Regen' (rain), 'der Sturm' (storm), 'der Schnee' (snow), 'der Frost' (frost), (but see above: 'das Wetter' – weather)
- **the points of the compass:** 'der Norden' (the North), 'der Süden' (the South) etc.

You could remember these by thinking that these are all nouns that refer to **the basic rhythms of life** (but: 'das Jahr' – 'year').

There is also a group of nouns which are called '**weak masculine**' nouns or **n-nouns**. They can be identified by form (certain endings). More on them later.

Feminine by meaning

- **female persons and animals:** 'die Frau' (woman), 'die Dame' (lady), 'die Tante' (aunt), 'die Kuh' (cow), 'die Hündin' (bitch), 'die Katze' (female cat)
- nouns that denote **abstract concepts**, such as 'Freiheit, Gleichheit, Brüderlichkeit' (the slogan of the French Revolution: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity) or 'die Bildung' (education), 'die Gesellschaft' (society), 'die Realität' (reality) –

note that these examples also represent nouns with endings indicating feminine nouns.

- **names of numerals:** 'die Eins', 'die Zwei', 'die Drei', etc.

Neuter by meaning:

- **young persons and animals:** 'das Baby' (baby), 'das Kind' (child), 'das Küken' (chick), 'das Fohlen' (foal), 'das Ferkel' (piglet)
- **nouns derived from verbs and adjectives:** 'das Essen' (food), 'das Singen' (singing), 'das Gute' (that which is good), 'das Wunderbare' (that which is wonderful)



Exercise 1

Bearing in mind the pointers you have just read, assign gender to the following nouns:

1. ___ Vater (father), ___ Freundin (friend), ___ Gemeinschaft (community)
2. ___ Universität (university), ___ Westen (the West), ___ Wind (wind)
3. ___ Wetter (weather), ___ Mittwoch (Wednesday), ___ Gesundheit (health)
4. ___ Böse (that which is bad), ___ Lehrerin (teacher), ___ Stühlchen (little chair)
5. ___ Richtung (direction), ___ Kind (child), ___ Regen (rain)
6. ___ Osten (the East), ___ Katze (cat), ___ Tante (aunt)
7. ___ Informatiker (IT specialist), ___ Tänzerin (dancer), ___ Einheit (unity)
8. ___ Fenster (window), ___ Pluralität (plurality), ___ Einkäufer (buyer)
9. ___ Million (million), ___ Tanzen (dancing), ___ Hagel (hail)
10. ___ Tänzer (male dancer), ___ Kalb (calf), ___ Abenteuer (adventure)



Exercise 2

In the following list of 15 nouns, five have been given the wrong gender. Identify them and write the correct definite article behind them. Leave the other spaces blank.

1. das Katze (cat): ____
2. der Schnee (snow): ____
3. der Tiger (tiger): ____
4. das Osten (the East): ____
5. das Fenster (window): ____
6. der Freund (friend): ____
7. der Gesundheit (health): ____

6 Nouns: genders, plurals, cases

8. das April (April): ____
9. der Glaube (faith): ____
10. die Lampe (lamp): ____
11. das Sieben (seven): ____
12. das Mäuschen (little mouse): ____
13. das Viertel (quarter): ____
14. der Sozialist (socialist): ____
15. der Mittwoch (Wednesday): ____

There are also a number of nouns which have more than one gender, and therefore more than one meaning. You will come across this at the end of this book, in Chapter 11, False friends.

1.2 Weak masculine nouns



Error alert: where's the difficulty?

As indicated above, there are a number of 'weak masculine' nouns. They form part of the nouns declension table above. Look at the table in the introduction to this chapter. What can you say about the endings for the weak masculine nouns? Tick the right answer:



Exercise 3

- a) They have different endings for all cases.
- b) They have the same endings for all cases.
- c) They have the same endings for all cases bar one.



Exercise 4

It's important to know about weak masculine nouns, as they tend to cause difficulty. Any grammar book will have a list of them, and it makes sense to familiarize yourself with them – the list isn't all that long. Naturally, they refer to male persons and animals, and often have to do with profession, nationality or religion. Most weak masculine nouns are recognizable by a distinct ending, and there are a number of different ones. Identify them by analysing this group of weak masculine nouns:

der Student (student), der Polizist (policeman), der Held (hero), der Fabrikant (industrialist), der Affe (monkey), der Graf (Count), der Psychologe (psychologist), der Dirigent (conductor), der Mensch (human being), der Diamant (diamond), der Nachbar (neighbour), der Bauer (farmer), der

Jude (Jew), der Fotograf (photographer), der Russe (Russian), der Komponist (composer), der Christ (Christian), der Franzose (Frenchman), der Paragraf (paragraph), der Herr (master)

We have already given you two categories of endings (1, 2). Write the others down together with the nouns that exemplify them.

1. **No ending** in nom. sing.: der Held, der Graf, der Mensch, der Christ
2. **-(e)r**: der Nachbar*, der Bauer*, der Herr*
3. ____: _____
4. ____: _____
5. ____: _____
6. ____: _____
7. ____: _____

* Note that these have ‘-n’ endings for the singular, but ‘-en’ endings for the plural.

There’s a group of nouns which is very closely related to weak masculine nouns, and it is a good strategy to be aware of them. They are sometimes called **‘almost’ weak masculine nouns**.



Error alert: where’s the difficulty?

These nouns look like weak masculine nouns, and they almost are, but for one ending which singles them out. It pays off to be aware of them, as they are quite important and much-used words. Below we have listed the eight most important ones.



Exercise 5

Here is the declension of one of them, ‘der Gedanke’ (thought):

	Masculine	
	Singular	Plural
Nom.	der Gedanke	die Gedanken
Acc.	den Gedanken	die Gedanken
Gen.	des Gedankens	der Gedanken
Dat.	dem Gedanken	den Gedanken

How does this differ from the declension of ‘pure’ weak masculine nouns?

Write your answer here: _____ and check your answer in the answer key.

8 Nouns: genders, plurals, cases

The other seven almost weak masculine nouns are: 'der Name' (name), 'der Buchstabe' (letter), 'der Wille' (will), 'der Friede' (peace), 'der Glaube' (belief), 'der Funke' (spark), 'der Same' (seed).

You could try and remember them by this memory-aid: the first letters of the six most important of the eight could make up a (rather funny) name:



Mnemonic device

WilleFriedeNameBuchstabeGedankeGlaube: Wilfried Nabugegla... or Glabunabu... or Genabugla... or...?



Exercise 6

Here is the German term for 'heart'. What's odd about its declension?

	Singular	Plural
Nom.	das Herz	die Herzen
Acc.	das Herz	die Herzen
Gen.	des Herzens	der Herzen
Dat.	dem Herzen	den Herzen

Make observations about

1. its gender: _____
2. its declension in the singular: _____
3. its declension in the plural: _____

Check your answers in the answer key and keep this word close to your heart!



Exercise 7

Fill in the endings. Mind that these phrases have a mixture of weak masculine nouns and 'almost weak' masculine nouns in them.

1. um des lieben Frieden____ willen
for the sake of blessed peace
2. "Triumph des Willen ____"
"Triumph of the Will" – title of a Nazi film
3. mit den Worten des Journalist____
in the journalist's words

4. viele Funke ____, aber kein Feuer
many sparks, but no fire
5. nach den Buchstabe ____ des Gesetzes
in the letter of the law
6. in gutem Glaube ____
in good faith
7. in deinem guten Name ____
in your good name
8. trotz seines Glauben ____
despite his faith
9. "Hab Sonne im Herz ____!"
"Have sunshine in your heart!" – beginning of a popular German children's poem
10. die Ausstellung des Fotograf ____
the photographer's exhibition

2 Plurals

As with genders, the best strategy is to learn new nouns together with their plural forms. All grammar books will give you lists of types of plural, together with examples and we suggest you consult one of these every time you are unsure.



Error alert: where's the difficulty?

In English, there is normally just one way to form a plural: you stick an -s at the end of the word and that's it. There are some irregular forms (child – children; mouse – mice; fish – fish), but they are rare. In German, there is a lot of variation which hinders a systematic approach (just as with gender assignment).

So what's the best way of avoiding too many errors? Be aware of the most common ways of forming plurals in German. They can be summed up like this:

- A) A number of nouns don't have a distinct plural form (masculine and neuter nouns ending in '-el', '-en', '-er'; diminutives ending in '-chen' and '-lein')
- B) A number of masculine (and TWO feminine) nouns form the plural just by adding an umlaut
- C) Most feminine nouns add '-(e)n'
- D) About three quarters of neuter nouns add '-e'
- E) Foreign words normally just add an '-s'
- F) There are some unusual forms, for example, nouns ending in '-ma', '-mus' and '-um' add '-(m)en'



Exercise 8

Here are some examples. Identify the principle behind their plural forms by putting the relevant capital letter from the list above. Underline the two feminine nouns which form the plural by adding an umlaut.

Singular	Plural	Letter
1. der Apfel (apple)	die Äpfel	___
2. das Taxi (taxi)	die Taxis	___
3. das Museum (museum)	die Museen	___
4. der Onkel (uncle)	die Onkel	___
5. die Tochter (daughter)	die Töchter	___
6. der Zyklus (cycle)	die Zyklen	___
7. das Fenster (window)	die Fenster	___
8. die Rose (rose)	die Rosen	___
9. der Bruder (brother)	die Brüder	___
10. das Zimmer (room)	die Zimmer	___
11. das Bein (leg)	die Beine	___
12. das Hotel (hotel)	die Hotels	___
13. das Jahr (year)	die Jahre	___
14. das Thema (topic)	die Themen	___
15. die Mutter (mother)	die Mütter	___
16. der Rhythmus (rhythm)	die Rhythmen	___

3 Cases

German is an inflected language, which basically means that case is indicated through the endings of words. The case it's in indicates the function of a noun in a sentence, whether it's the subject (nominative) or an object (accusative, dative, genitive). This affects determiners (articles etc.), pronouns and adjectives, and, to a lesser extent, nouns. For reference, see Chapter 1, Nouns, Chapter 2, Adjectival endings and Chapter 4, Pronouns.

In English, there are no endings on nouns which indicate case except for the genitive apostrophe and '-s' in the singular and the apostrophe in the plural: 'my sister's cat', 'my parents' house'. Case is worked out through context or content and a fixed word order pattern (subject – verb – object). If I say 'He gives the waiter the money', it's pretty clear who gives what to whom although there is no indication of case in the language. In German, you have a clear indication in

the different forms of the 'determiners', in this example, the definite articles: 'Er gibt dem Kellner das Geld'. In English, case can also be indicated by 'to' for the dative or 'of' for the genitive, as in 'He gives the money to the waiter', or 'in the shadow of the tree', but generally, German is a language where case indicators really matter because, by contrast with English, it has a much more flexible word order (see Chapter 5, Word order).

3.1 Case endings in nouns



Error alert: where's the difficulty?

It is important that you know the declensions of German nouns in their three genders – see above. You need to get the articles right to indicate case and formulate meaningful sentences, so make sure you know this backwards.

But even then, errors are likely, and a common source is highlighted in bold in the noun declension table on page 2.



Exercise 9

Looking at the table on page 2, state for which case in the singular and for which in the plural an ending is added to the basic form of the noun. Also state the genders of the nouns affected and the relevant ending.

	Case	Genders	Ending
Singular	1.	2.	3.
Plural	4.	5.	6.

So far, so good – but it's easy to forget that these endings exist or where exactly they are added. So here are a couple of memory aids: MaNeSi-s and MaNePlu-n.

Can you decode them? Try to write down what you think they stand for:

7. MaNeSi-s: _____
8. MaNePlu-n: _____



Exercise 10

Here are some sentences which involve the use of genitive singular '**-n(e)s**' and of dative plural '**-n**' in the masculine nouns. Weak masculine nouns have an '**-en**' ending anyway. Your job is to put in the endings where appropriate. Put an x if