

USE OF ARTICLES GERMAN LANGUAGE

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11083369>

Abstract. German would be a heckuva lot easier to learn if we didn't have to worry about tricky little topics such as articles, am I right? But we couldn't say anything without the words the and a, for example.

Key words: article, definite articles, indefinite articles, determiners, pronouns, adjectives.

ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ АРТИКЛЕЙ НЕМЕЦКОГО ЯЗЫКА

Аннотация. Немецкий язык было бы намного проще изучать, если бы нам не приходилось беспокоиться о маленьких сложных темах, таких как статьи, я прав? Но мы не могли ничего сказать без слов *the* и *a*, например.

Ключевые слова: артикль, определенный артикль, неопределенный артикль, определители, местоимения, прилагательные.

So articles are a must! The good news is that there is an *efficient, effective* way to learn all these German articles. It doesn't have to be tedious, overwhelming, or even very time-consuming.

Intrigued? Generally speaking, what we can say for sure is that the categorization “articles” will always refer to *definite articles* (the 6 ways of saying ‘the’ in German) and to *indefinite articles* (the 6 ways of saying ‘a’ in German). Beyond that, the waters get murky. Some people use the same term ‘articles’ to refer to other words come in front of nouns (e.g. *this, that, some, all*, etc.). But you'll also see the terms *determiners, pronouns*, and even *adjectives* coming up in discussion, with all the lines of definition between them very frustratingly blurred. Personally, I advocate for ditching the term *articles* altogether (read more below!). Instead, I refer to *determiners* AND *pronouns* AND *adjectives* all as very clearly different types of words. More on these useful distinctions in a bit!

Definite articles (der, die, das, etc.)

When a German learner looks for ‘articles’, one of the first things you'll be introduced to is a chart like this:

Either way, we have a chart that tells us specifically how to say ‘the’ in German — six different ways!

How do you pick out the correct variant of ‘the’? In order to pick out the version of *the* that you need, you have to know two things:

1. What is the [gender of the noun](#)?
2. What is the [case of the noun](#)?

For example, if you want to say *the book* in German, you have to know that *book* (*Buch*) is a *neuter noun*. Not masculine or feminine (and plural would obviously be *books*, and that’s different). With this much information, you know that you need the *das*, *dem*, or *des* version of the neuter ‘the’. Figuring out *which case Buch needs to be in* is the 2nd step that then whittles these three options ^^ down to just one!

I walk you through [determining noun case](#) in the *Digging Deeper* section below.

Indefinite articles (ein, eine, einen, etc.)

It’s all well-and-good to learn how to say *the* in German. And maybe you’re thinking that one chart wasn’t so bad. But there’s more!

Now you have to learn how to say *a* (and ‘not a/any’) in German, which is also obviously pretty important. Of course, in conventional German-learning, there’s *another chart* for that: Here you have the same uber-traditional version and a somewhat improved, more ‘modern’ version of the chart. But it’s a lot of tedious memorization either way.

Demonstratives (der-words)

At this point, you might already be feeling a bit overwhelmed. But we’ve barely even gotten started! Now you need to learn about a 3rd type of articles called *demonstratives* or *der-words*, which are words such as *every*, *this*, *that*, *many*, etc. as in *every mouse*, *this cat*, *that dog*, *many snakes*.

Most common *der-words*:

all- (all)

welch- (which)

dies- (this)

jed- (every),

jen- (that)

einig- (some)

wenig- (few)

manch- (many

a,

some)

solch(-) (such

[a])

and *all other determiners*!

TIP: if the determiner is not an ein-word (<- defined later), it's a der-word by default. Der-word declensions Hang on, now! What are declensions?

You've already seen them in the *definite article* and *indefinite article* charts. But here's a definition for you:

Declensions are endings that get put onto words (including, but not limited to, articles) so that they reflect the gender & case of the noun the follows.

Der-words all take what are called *strong declensions* <- rather implies that there's at least one other type of declensions ... possibly *weak declensions*. For example, if you want to talk about *this book* ('this' is a *der-word*), you'd have these options:

nominative: *dieses Buch*

accusative: *dieses Buch*

dative: *diesem Buch*

genitive: *dieses Buchs*

NERD ALERT: *Demonstratives are also called der-words (<- a term we will continue to use!) because of the similarities of these strong declensions (that der-words use) to the different ways of saying 'the'. Hint: it's all about the very last letter (regardless of what different vowels might precede it!).*

Possessives If you're thinking that this topic of articles is getting progressively harder, you're right — it sure is.

When it comes to possessives, we have a two-fold problem:

1. There are two different types (keep reading)
2. There are inconsistent labeling systems (pronouns? adjectives? determiners? articles?)

Possessives indicate possession, of course, as in *that's MY book*. But, we can also say *that book is MINE*.

My and mine. What *is* the deal with that?

- The one type — *my* — comes *in front of a noun*.
- The other type — *mine* — stands by itself, *not* in front of a noun.

German has the same two types! And YES, there are different charts for that. You start with the same 'root' word, for example: *mein* (my/mine).

'Root' Form of Possessives

mein- (my/mine)

dein- (your/yours)

sein- (his)

ihr- (her/hers, also their/theirs, also Your/Yours [formal]) → I know! Yikes!
unser- (our/ours)
euer/eur- (y'all, y'alls)

But if you want the 'my' version, you need to use the *declensions* (or *endings*) from this chart, which is for *ein-words* (vs. *der-words* –more on this soon!):

If you want the *mine* version, you'd use the same *strong declensions* chart from the *demonstratives* above, or maybe you'd see it all spelled out like this: If all these charts (and these are just *some* of them!!!) aren't making you feel even the slightest bit burnt out on German, that *amazes me*. I speak German fluently (and so don't need to use any charts anymore), but just talking about all of this makes my head ache.

One way to wrestle with German noun gender is to simply memorize every noun connected with either *der*, *die*, or *das* so that you (hopefully) remember what gender that noun has:

<i>der</i>	<i>Hund</i> (the	dog	[masculine])
<i>die</i>	<i>Katze</i> (the	cat	[feminine])
<i>das</i>	<i>Pferd</i> (the horse		[neuter])

BUT there is actually a lot of *pattern* behind the German noun gender system — and knowing those patterns can save you a lot of time, guesswork, and mistakes.

We can categorize German nouns according to *group* or *form*.

Masculine (*der*):

- Male persons and animals
- rocks and minerals
- monetary units

Feminine (*die*):

- Female persons and animals
- Rivers within German, Austria, Switzerland
- Trees, fruits, and flowers

Neuter (*das*):

- Young persons and baby animals
- names of continents, cities, provinces, and most countries
- letters of the alphabet and music notes

The *end* of nouns, or, the *suffix* frequently determines the gender of the noun. There are certain suffixes that are almost exclusively masculine, feminine, and neuter.

Masculine: -ant, -ast, -ich, -ig, -ismus, -ling, -or, -us

Feminine: -a, -anz, -enz, -ei, -ie, -heit, -keit, -ik, -sion, -tion, -sis, -tät, -ung, -ur, schaft

Neuter: -chen, -lein, -icht, -il, -it, -ma, -ment, -tel, -tum, -um

The *case* of each noun in a sentence indicates *what role* it is playing in the sentence and therefore also shows its *relationship* to (i.e. how it's *interacting with*) the other nouns in the sentence. The general rules of thumb are:

1. Always fill up the [nominative](#) 'slot' first — every sentence needs a subject! (And every subject [needs a verb!](#))
2. *Default to filling up the [accusative](#) 'slot' next unless...*
3. If you're using a [dative](#) verb, preposition, or adjective: the associated noun must be in the dative 'slot', not the accusative.
4. You can pretty much forget about the [genitive](#) case.

Basic Declension Patterns

In this guide, we are focusing on determiners (we talk about adjectives here). All you need to know about the declension's determiners need is this:

ALL determiners will ALWAYS take the strong declension...

Except ... if you're using an *ein-word determiner* ([do you remember this distinction from above?](#)) with a noun in the:

- masculine nominative
- neuter nominative
- neuter accusative

Only ein-words only in these 3 spots behave differently by taking no declension.

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