

Episode 011 – Grammar

1. Plural forms of nouns

Most nouns can be either singular or plural. The plural indicates that you're talking about several units of the same thing.

Example:

*Ist **das Bett** zu hart? – Sind **die Betten** zu hart?*

The definite article in the nominative and the accusative is always "die" in all three genders: masculine, feminine and neuter. The indefinite article is omitted.

Example:

*Ich mache **einen Test**. – Ich mache **_ Tests**.*

The negative article in the nominative and the accusative is "keine".

Example:

*Haben Sie **ein Zimmer**? – Nein, wir haben **keine Zimmer**.*

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There are altogether five different endings to form the plural:

	Singular	Plural
-n oder -en:	das Bett	die Betten
	der Name	die Namen
-e:	der Arm	die Arme
-er:	das Kind	die Kinder
-s:	das Sofa	die Sofas

Some nouns stay the same in both the plural and the singular.

Example:

das Zimmer – die Zimmer (*endungslos*)

In such cases, the definite article "die" or the use of a determiner indicating number or amount - such as "zwei" (two), "viele" (many), or "mehrere" (several) - help to identify the plural.

Example:

*Wir haben **ein Zimmer**. – Wir haben **viele Zimmer** im Hotel.*

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Memorize it!

It is very hard to list all the rules that determine which plural endings go with which nouns - and it's even harder to remember them all and use them. The best way is to always learn the nouns along with their article and plural form.

The vocabulary list will also help you. Each noun is listed along with its article and plural ending. The entries look like this:

Bett (das); -en

So the plural of "Bett" is formed with the ending **-en**: *die Betten*.

Fernseher (der); -

The plural of "Fernseher" is formed without an ending (**-**): *die Fernseher*.

More:

In many cases, turning a noun into the plural requires not only adding an ending, but also changing a stem vowel to an umlaut: a becomes ä, o becomes ö or u becomes ü. Sometimes an umlaut change is the only indication of the plural.

Singular

die Hand

der Fuß

die Tochter

Plural

die Hände

die Füße

die Töchter

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Note that with some words, the final consonant is doubled before the plural ending is attached. This doesn't happen often and affects mainly words that end with **-nis** and **-in**. But it applies to most female forms of describing people because they often have **-in** at the end:

Masculine

der Freund
der Verkäufer

Plural

die Freunde
die Verkäufer

Feminine

die Freundin
die Verkäuferin

Plural

die Freundin-n-en
die Verkäuferin-n-en

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2. The modal verbs "möchten", "können", "müssen"

Modal verbs usually accompany another verb in a sentence. They not only modify the main verb, they change the nature of the sentence. Modal verbs describe the subject in relation to the action expressed by the main verb.

The modal verbs "möchten", "können" and "müssen" have the following basic meanings:

"möchten" - would like - to indicate a wish or desire:

*Harry **möchte** in die Stadt fahren.*

= Harry would like to go to the city.

"können" - can, be able - to describe an ability or option:

*Harry **kann** Deutsch sprechen.*

= Harry can speak German.

*Sie **können** gerne ein anderes Zimmer haben.*

= Harry has the option of getting a different room.

"müssen" - must, have to - indicates a necessity:

*Harry **muss** in die Stadt fahren.*

= It is absolutely necessary for Harry to get to the city.

Placement of modal verbs in a sentence

In a sentence, the modal verb is conjugated, meaning its form is an indication of the person, number and tense. It is placed in the usual position for conjugated verbs: 2nd position in simple declarative sentences and "W" questions. The main verb is placed at the end of the sentence in its basic form, the infinitive.

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	Modal verb		Main verb
<i>Harry</i>	möchte		fahren.
<i>Warum</i>	möchten	<i>Sie</i>	fahren?

Conjugation of modal verbs

The verbs "können" and "müssen" are irregular. The verbs "möchten", "können" and "müssen" are conjugated as follows:

		<i>möchten</i>	<i>können</i>	<i>müssen</i>
Singular	ich	möchte	kann	muss
	du	möchtest	kannst	musst
	er/sie/es	möchte	kann	muss
Plural	wir	möchten	können	müssen
	ihr	möchtet	könnt	müsst
	sie	möchten	können	müssen

More:

Strictly speaking, "möchten" isn't a verb; it's a verb form of "mögen". But it is used as a modal verb. "möchten" has a similar meaning to "wollen", which is another modal verb. It's simply more polite.