

Spanish Nouns Have a Gender

Every noun is either masculine or feminine.
The article tells you which!

MOST NOUNS ARE EASY!

-o = usually masculine

- el** libro the book
- el** carro the car
- el** escritorio the desk

-a = usually feminine

- la** casa the house
- la** mesa the table
- la** ventana the window

Don't learn casa.
Learn la casa!

Everything Agrees With the Noun

Singular	Plural
la chica guapa the pretty girl	las chicas guapas the pretty girls
el chico guapo the handsome boy	los chicos guapos the handsome boys

Common Exceptions

Some -a nouns are masculine.

- el** problema the problem
- el** idioma the language
- el** día the day
- el** mapa the map

Some -o nouns are feminine.

- la** mano the hand
- la** foto the photo

One word, two genders.

- el** artista the male artist
- la** artista the female artist

Feminine nouns with stressed a- use "el" in the singular.
This avoids two strong a sounds together.

- el** agua fría the cold water
- el** águila blanca the white eagle
- el** alma pura the pure soul
- el** hacha afilada the sharp axe

They are still feminine!
Adjectives stay feminine.

Plural? Use "las".

- las** aguas frías the cold waters

Helpful Endings - Usually Feminine

Words ending in -ción, -sión, -dad, -tad, -tud, or -umbre are usually feminine.

la nación the nation	la ciudad the city
la televisión television	la juventud youth
la libertad liberty	la costumbre the custom

THE TAKEAWAY: Learn the article with the noun. Over time, gender will feel natural!

Spanish Nouns Have a Gender — Even Tables and Desks

One of the first surprises for English speakers learning Spanish is that **every Spanish noun has a grammatical gender**. A noun is either masculine or feminine.

That doesn't mean Spanish speakers think a table is female or a desk is male. Grammatical gender is simply a way the language classifies words.

For example:

- **la pierna** — the leg (feminine)
- **el brazo** — the arm (masculine)
- **la mesa** — the table (feminine)
- **el escritorio** — the desk (masculine)

Don't look for logic in the objects themselves. There usually isn't any.

Start With O and A

Here's the easiest rule of thumb:

Nouns ending in **-o** are usually masculine.

- **el libro** — the book
- **el carro** — the car
- **el escritorio** — the desk

Nouns ending in **-a** are usually feminine.

- **la casa** — the house
- **la mesa** — the table

la ventana — the window

Notice the word **usually**. Spanish has exceptions, and we'll get to those shortly.

Don't Learn "Mesa." Learn "La Mesa."

Probably the best habit you can develop is to learn the article along with the noun.

Instead of memorizing:

- **mesa = table**

learn:

- **la mesa = the table**

Instead of:

- **libro = book**

learn:

- **el libro = the book**

The little words **el** and **la** immediately tell you the noun's gender. Spanish dictionaries also normally identify nouns as masculine or feminine.

Think of the article as part of the noun's identity.

Why Does Gender Matter?

Because other words often have to agree with the noun.

Consider:

- **la chica guapa** — the pretty girl
- Both **chica** and **guapa** are feminine.
- Make it plural and both words change:

- **las chicas guapas — the pretty girls**

Now compare:

- **el chico guapo — the handsome boy**
- **los chicos guapos — the handsome boys**

Once you know the noun's gender and whether it is singular or plural, the surrounding words begin falling into place.

Unfortunately, O and A Don't Always Cooperate

Some very common nouns break the usual pattern.

These end in **-a** but are masculine:

- **el problema — the problem**
- **el idioma — the language**
- **el día — the day**
- **el mapa — the map**

And a famous exception going the other direction is:

- **la mano — the hand**

It ends in **-o**, but it is feminine.

You don't need to memorize hundreds of exceptions at once. When you encounter one, simply learn it together with its article: **la mano**, not merely *mano*.

Some Endings Give You Excellent Clues

Several common endings are strongly associated with feminine nouns. Words ending in **-ción**, **-sión**, **-dad**, **-tad**, **-tud** and **-umbre** are generally feminine.

- **la nación — the nation**
- **la televisión — television**
- **la ciudad — the city**
- **la libertad — liberty**
- **la juventud — youth**
- **la costumbre — the custom**

Recognizing these endings can save you a great deal of memorization.

One Word Can Describe a Man or a Woman

Some nouns don't change their spelling according to the person's sex. The article tells you whom we're talking about.

- **el artista** — the male artist
- **la artista** — the female artist
- **The same thing happens with words such as:**
- **el estudiante / la estudiante** — male/female student
- **el cantante / la cantante** — male/female singer

The noun stays put. The article does the work.

The Strange Case of "El Agua"

Here's a Spanish quirk worth knowing.

Some **feminine** nouns beginning with a stressed **a-** or **ha-** sound use **el** rather than **la** in the singular. This avoids the awkward sound of two stressed *a* sounds together.

- **el agua fría** — the cold water
- **el águila blanca** — the white eagle
- **el alma pura** — the pure soul
- **el hacha afilada** — the sharp axe

Here's the important part: **these words are still feminine.**

That's why we say **agua fría**, not *agua frío*.

And when they become plural, the regular feminine article returns:

- **las aguas frías**
- **las águilas blancas**

So don't let that **el** fool you.

The Rule Worth Remembering

You can spend a lot of time memorizing gender rules and their exceptions, but there's an easier approach:

Learn the article when you learn the noun.

Don't learn *casa*. Learn **la casa**.

Don't learn *problema*. Learn **el problema**.

Don't learn *mano*. Learn **la mano**.

Do that consistently, and Spanish gender gradually stops being something you have to figure out. It simply becomes part of the word you already know.