

Gender of Spanish Nouns and the Words Modify Them

Nouns in Spanish have gender, either masculine or feminine. The gender of a noun must be learned when you learn the noun, but usually:

Nouns ending in **o** are masculine and nouns ending in **a** are feminine. There are some other nouns that end in another vowel or consonant and those have to be learned.

When you are presented with a new noun in these lessons you are also given the **"definite article"** (the word 'the') that indicates in Spanish whether it is a masculine or feminine noun. **"Indefinite Articles"** also indicate gender. An indefinite article is the word "a" or "an" or "some" in English.

Masculine Nouns	Feminine Nouns
"the" for singular = el / plural = los	"the" for singular = la / plural = las
"a, an" = un / "some" = unos	"a, an" = una / "some" = unas

Adjectives also have gender. An adjective is a word that describes a noun. In the sentence "I have a red car" the word "car" is a noun and the word "red" is an adjective. It describes the noun.

Spanish adjectives must agree in number and gender with the noun they describe. This means that a masculine singular noun must have a masculine singular adjective. A plural feminine noun must have a plural feminine adjective, and so on. Most adjectives are made masculine by the ending **o**, and are made feminine by the ending **a**. Some adjectives end in **e** or a consonant (such as the letter "l" in **"fenomenal"**) and can describe either a masculine or feminine noun. To make an adjective plural, just add an **s** if it ends with a vowel and **es** if it ends with a consonant.

Masculine Adjectives	Feminine Adjectives	"e" or consonant Adjectives
Singular: el carro rojo	la blusa roja	Singular: la blusa verde
Plural: los carros rojos	las blusas rojas	Plural: los carros verdes
		los chicos fenomenales

Asking What Someone or Something is Like (physical description or personality description)

To ask what someone is like, use: ¿Cómo + ser + noun?

¿Cómo es Paco? ¿Cómo es Ana? Answer: Él es guapo y ella es bonita.

¿Cómo son los chicos? Answer: Ellos son cómicos.

GENDER OF NOUNS:

A noun is a word used to denote a person, place, thing, or idea.

Person: John, girl, dentist

Place: garden, university, Venezuela

Thing: book, car, tomato

Idea: liberty, despair, intelligence

In Spanish, all nouns are either masculine or feminine.

Masculine	Feminine
el chico	la chica
boy	girl
el jardín	la universidad
garden	university
el libro	la revista
book	magazine
el miedo	la libertad

fear

liberty

The idea that nouns have gender seems perfectly natural when the noun stands for a living creature. This is because in English, living creatures often have different names, depending upon whether they are male or female.

Masculine

Feminine

man

woman

tiger

tigress

aviator

aviatrix

The following Spanish nouns all denote living creatures.

el gato

male cat

la gata

female cat

el perro

male dog

la perra

female dog

el chico

boy

la chica

girl

el abuelo

grandfather

la abuela

grandmother

How are all of these masculine nouns alike?

el gato
el perro
el chico
el abuelo

Hint: look at both the beginning and the ending of each line.

How are all of these feminine nouns alike?

la gata
la perra
la chica
la abuela

Hint: look at both the beginning and the ending of each line.

“El” and “la” both mean “the.”

el chico (the boy)
la chica (the girl)

el perro (the male dog)
la gata (the female cat)

Note: These two words (el, la) are called “definite articles.” You will learn more about them in a later lesson.

What do you notice about the last letter of these nouns?

Masculine	Feminine
gato	gata
perro	perra
chico	chica

abuelo

abuela

Nouns that end in -o are usually masculine. Nouns that end in -a are usually feminine. Notice the word **usually**! There are exceptions to these two rules and you will soon be learning them.

One cannot predict the gender of a noun that stands for a non-living thing. Try to predict whether the Spanish words for the following things are masculine or feminine:

Masculine or feminine?

book

house

money

window

One cannot predict the gender of a noun, except in the case of living creatures. Do not try to analyze the nature of the object, looking for some inherent masculinity or femininity. It won't work!

Take a guess. Do you think the Spanish word for "dress" is masculine or feminine? You might expect it to be feminine, since a dress is an article of clothing worn by females.

Actually, the word for "dress" is a masculine word:

el vestido

Take another guess. Do you think the Spanish word for "necktie" is masculine or feminine? You might expect it to be masculine, since a necktie is an article of clothing worn by males.

Actually, the word for "necktie" is a feminine word:

la corbata

When you learn a new noun, you should also learn its definite article (el, la). There are several reasons for this:

- Because you cannot predict the gender of most nouns.
- Because not every noun that ends in -o is masculine, and not every noun that ends in -a is feminine.
- Because many nouns end in letters other than o or a.
- Because the definite article (el, la) is your clue as to whether a noun is masculine or feminine.

Why do you care whether a noun is masculine or feminine?

Good question! As you shall see in upcoming lessons, Spanish places a great deal more emphasis on gender than does English.

PLURAL FORMS OF NOUNS

If a noun ends in a vowel, make it plural by adding -s.

libro: libros

(libro + s)

pluma: plumas

(pluma + s)

chico: chicos

(chico + s)

señora: señoras

(señora + s)

The definite articles (el, la) also change in the plural form. They become “los” and “las.” The definite articles will be covered in depth in the next lesson.

*el libro: **los libros***

*la pluma: **las plumas***

*el chico: **los chicos***

*la señora: **las señoras***

If a noun ends in a consonant, make it plural by adding -es.

el borrador: los borradores

(borrador + es)

la universidad: las universidades

(universidad + es)

el profesor: los profesores

(profesor + es)

la ciudad: las ciudades

(ciudad + es)

If a noun ends in -ión, add -es and drop the written accent.

*el avión: **los aviones***

*la conversación: **las conversaciones***

*la sección: **las secciones***

*la televisión: **las televisiones***

Note: You may wonder why “avión” isn’t feminine. Notice that it doesn’t qualify for our rule which says that all nouns ending in **-ción** and **sión** are feminine.

If a noun ends in -z, add -es and change the z to c.

*el lápiz: **los lápices***

*la voz: **las voces***

*el tapiz: **los tapices***

*la actriz: **las actrices***

When the plural refers to two or more nouns of different genders, the masculine plural is used.

2 perros + 6 perras = 8 perros (not perras)

1 gato + 8 gatas = 9 gatos (not gatas)

A few nouns are “compound nouns,” that is, they are formed by combining two words into one.

(Example: abre + latas = abrelatas / open + cans = can opener)

These compound nouns are always masculine, and the plural is formed by changing the “el” to “los.”

el abrelatas
los abrelatas

el paraguas
los paraguas

Let’s review the rules for making nouns plural.

- If a noun ends in a vowel, simply add -s.
- If a noun ends in a consonant, simply add -es.
- If a noun ends in a -z, change the z to c before adding -es.
- If a noun ends in *ión*, drop the written accent before adding -es.
- If the plural refers to a mixed group, use the masculine.
- For compound nouns, change “el” to “los”.

DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLES:

The difference between definite articles and indefinite articles can be observed in the following two sentences:

Give me the chocolate chip cookie.
Give me a cookie, please.

Imagine a plate full of cookies. There are peanut butter cookies, sugar cookies, gingerbread cookies, and one chocolate chip cookie.

The first sentence speaks of a particular (or definite) cookie:

*Give me **the** chocolate chip cookie.*

The second sentence speaks of any of a number of cookies (or an indefinite cookie):

*Give me **a** cookie, please.*

The difference between the definite and indefinite articles is the difference between talking about a specific cookie, or any old cookie at all.

the cookie

a cookie

In English, the definite article is the word “the” regardless of whether the noun it introduces is singular or plural.

the cookie

the cookies

In Spanish, the definite article has 4 forms, depending on whether the noun is masculine, feminine, singular or plural.

el gato

the male cat

los gatos

the male cats

la gata

the female cat

las gatas

the female cats

Note: The masculine plural definite and indefinite articles (los, unos) are also used to indicate a group of mixed sex. Thus, “los gatos” could refer to a group of 10 male cats, or it could refer to a group of 9 female cats and one male cat.

The 4 forms of the definite article are:

el

masculine singular

la

feminine singular

los

masculine plural

las
feminine plural

In English, the indefinite article is the word “a,” “an,” or “some.”

a cookie
an apple
some books

In Spanish, the indefinite article has 4 forms, depending on whether the noun is masculine, feminine, singular or plural.

un gato
a male cat

unos gatos
some male cats

una gata
a female cat

unas gatas
some female cats

Note: Remember, as long as the group of creatures has at least one male member, the masculine plural article is used. Thus, “unos gatos” could refer to a group of 10 male cats, or it could refer to a group of 9 female cats and one male cat.

The 4 forms of the indefinite article are:

un
masculine singular

una
feminine singular

unos
masculine plural

unas
feminine plural

Here are the definite and indefinite articles together:

el, un
masculine singular

la, una
feminine singular

los, unos
masculine plural

las, unas
feminine plural

Each of the following has a different meaning:

el gato
the male cat

los gatos
the male cats (or a mixed group)

la gata
the female cat

las gatas
the female cats

un gato
a male cat

unos gatos
some male cats (or a mixed group)

una gata
a female cat

unas gatas
some female cats

“Un” and “una” can mean “one,” “a,” or “an.”

un libro
one book, a book

una pluma
one pen, a pen

una manzana
one apple, an Apple

Using Adjectives to Describe Gender p. 59

In Spanish, adjectives must agree with the noun (or pronoun) they describe in gender and in number. This means that if the noun an adjective describes is feminine, the adjective must be feminine, and if that same noun is also plural, the adjective will be feminine AND plural as well.

For example, the noun **las faldas** (*the skirts*) is plural and feminine, so any adjectives used to describe it must also be plural and feminine. For example:

Spanish	English
las faldas bonitas	<i>the pretty skirts</i>
las faldas caras	<i>the expensive skirts</i>
las faldas rayadas	<i>the striped skirts</i>

Descriptive Adjectives

Spanish adjectives are usually listed in their masculine singular form in dictionaries, so it is important to know how to match these masculine singular adjectives to whatever noun you happen to be describing. Most adjectives end in **o**, **e**, or a consonant in their singular masculine forms. Below you will find the rules for matching these adjectives to their respective nouns in gender and number.

Adjectives that End in **o**

Adjectives that end in **o** in the masculine singular form have four possible endings, one each for masculine, feminine, singular, and plural. These types of adjectives make up the majority of adjectives in Spanish.

o Adjective Endings

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
Masculine	o	-os
Feminine	a	-as

- To change the masculine singular form of an adjective to match a feminine noun, replace the **-o** ending with an **a**.

Es un perro negro.
It's a black dog.

Es una camisa negra.
It's a black shirt.

- To make an **o** adjective plural in the masculine or feminine form, add an **s** to the singular ending.

El hombre es alto.
The man is tall.

Los hombres son altos.
The men are tall.

Soy delgada.
I'm thin.

Somos delgadas.
We're thin.

Adjectives that End in **e** or **-ista**

Adjectives that end in **e** or **-ista** do not change according to gender. They agree with both masculine and feminine nouns in the singular form, though they do change for number.

Example	Gender of Noun and Adjective
Tengo un abuelo interesante.	Masculine
Mi abuela es interesante.	Feminine
Mi profesor es muy idealista.	Masculine
Mi profesora es muy idealista.	Feminine

- To make an **e** adjective plural, add an **s** to the singular ending.

e Adjective Endings

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
Masculine	e	-es
Feminine	e	-es

-ista Adjective Endings

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
Masculine	-ista	-istas
Feminine	-ista	-istas

Los árboles son verdes.
The trees are green.

Allí están las niñas grandes.
There are the big girls.

Adjectives that End in a Consonant

Most adjectives that end in a consonant do not change according to gender, but do change for number, just like adjectives that end in **-e**.

El coche es azul.
The car is blue.

La moto es azul.
The motorcycle is blue.

El gato feliz está en la sala.
The happy cat is in the living room.

La gata feliz está en la sala.
The happy cat is in the living room.

- To make an adjective that ends in a consonant plural, add **-es** to the singular ending.

El enigma es fácil.
The riddle is easy.

Los enigmas son fáciles.

Riddles are easy.

A la mujer joven le gusta este café.

The young woman likes this cafe.

A las mujeres jóvenes les gusta este café.

Young women like this cafe.

Exception: For adjectives that end in **z** in the singular, change the **z** to a **c** before adding the plural ending.

El gato es feliz.

The cat is happy.

Los gatos son felices.

The cats are happy.

Exception: Adjectives that end in **-or**, **-ón**, or **-ín** do have feminine forms. Simply add **a** or **-as** to the masculine singular form and delete the written accent if necessary.

Mi hermano es trabajador.

My brother is hardworking.

Mi hermana es trabajadora.

My sister is hardworking.

Mis hermanos son trabajadores.

My brothers are hardworking.

Mis hermanas son trabajadoras.

My sisters are hardworking.

Pablo es cabezón.

Pablo is stubborn.

Paula es cabezona.

Paula is stubborn.

Exception: Adjectives ending in **-errior** do not have a feminine form.

Está en el patio exterior del edificio.

He's in the back patio of the building.

Está en la parte posterior del edificio.

He's in the back part of the building.

Now, check out this fancy summary table of Spanish adjective endings!

Summary

Masculine		Feminine	
Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
-o	-os	-a	-as
-e	-es	-e	-es
-ista	-istas	-ista	-istas
-z	-ces	-z	-ces
-or	-ores	-ora	-oras
-ón	-ones	-ona	-onas
-ín	-ines	-ina	-inas

Spanish 1 Unidad 1 Etapa 2	English
¿Cómo es?	What is he/she like?
alto(a)	tall
bajo(a)	short in height
bonito(a)	pretty
castaño(a)	brown hair
corto(a)	short in length
delgado(a)	thin
feo(a)	ugly
fuerte	strong
gordo(a)	fat
grande	big, large; great
guapo(a)	good-looking
largo(a)	long
moreno(a)	dark hair and skin

pelirrojo(a)	red-haired
pequeño(a)	small
rubio(a)	blond
Tiene	He/she has...
los ojos (verdes, azules)	(green, blue) eyes
el pelo (rubio, castaño)	(blond, brown) hair
aburrido(a)	boring
bueno(a)	good
cómico(a)	funny, comical
divertido(a)	enjoyable, fun
inteligente	intelligent
interesante	interesting
malo(a)	bad
paciente	patient
perezoso(a)	lazy
serio(a)	serious
simpático(a)	nice
trabajador(a)	hard-working
¿De qué color?	What color?
Llevo...	I wear...
Lleva...	He/she wears...
¿Qué lleva?	What is he/she wearing?
la blusa	blouse
el calcetín	sock
la camisa	shirt
la camiseta	t-shirt
la chaqueta	jacket
la falda	skirt
los jeans	jeans
los pantalones	pants
la ropa	clothing
el sombrero	hat
el suéter	sweater
el vestido	dress
el zapato	shoe
amarillo(a)	yellow
anaranjado(a)	orange
azul	blue
blanco(a)	white
marrón	brown
morado(a)	purple
negro(a)	black
rojo(a)	red
rosado(a)	pink

verde	green
la bolsa	bag
el (la) gato(a)	cat
el (la) perro(a)	dog
nuevo(a)	new
otro(a)	other, another
pues...	well...
¡No digas eso!	Don't say that!
¡Qué divertido!	How fun!
Es verdad	It's true

Self-check Quizzes

Click on the answer that best completes the sentence. Then check your answer!

http://www.classzone.com/books/en_espanol_1/page_build.cfm?id=quiz_e1&u=2

The following site contains activities that will help you practice and improve on what you learned in Unidad 1 Etapa 1.

To begin go to:

http://www.classzone.com/books/en_espanol_1/unidad1.cfm

- 1). Select the Unidad 1 Etapa 2.
- 2). Select the section with the content you would like to practice.
- 3). Select average or challenge for grammar and vocabulary practice
- 4). Select activities 2 and 3 for listening practice
- 4). Check your answers

NOTES:

- Homework done during class time will not be accepted.
- Homework will only be accepted on the day it is due unless the student has a legitimate excused reason.
- The missed assignment deadline for a legitimate absence is 2 days.
- Homework may be collected and graded from time to time.
- Homework assignments may often be material for a quiz the next day.
- The missed exam/quiz deadline is 5 days from the date of the exam/quiz and is given by appointment.
- The quiz grades will be based on announced and unannounced quizzes.