

SCHWACHES MASKULINUM

(Weak Masculine “N” Nouns)

In the German language, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of nouns that take a special set of declensional endings. These nouns are called “weak” nouns (in German “schwaches Maskulinum”).

The trait of “schwaches Maskulinum” only ever occurs among masculine nouns. Feminine and neuter nouns never decline in German. Keep in mind that the majority of masculine nouns in German are not weak. It’s only a small group of masculine nouns that fall under the classification of “weak.”

It’s not possible for the beginning student of German to identify which nouns are weak. Although there are some hints that help indicate which nouns are weak, it’s easier for the beginner to simply memorize several of these nouns. As the student develops awareness of the German grammar, these nouns and their declensional endings should be committed to memory.

Some nouns belonging to the category of “schwaches Maskulinum”:

Student (*student*)

Nachbar (*neighbor*)

Junge (*boy*)

Herr (*man, mister, lord*)

Mensch (*person, human*)

Kapitalist (*capitalist*)

Paragraf (*paragraph*)

Planet (*planet*)

Soldat (*soldier*)

The declensional endings are consistent among all weak nouns. There is no declension in the nominative singular. All other cases decline with an “n” or “en.” All cases in the plural, including nominative, take the same declensional pattern as in the singular.

The declensional pattern for “Schwaches Maskulinum”:

	Singular	Plural	
Nominative	der Nachbar	die Nachbarn	<i>(the neighbor / the neighbors)</i>
Accusative	den Nachbarn	die Nachbarn	
Dative	dem Nachbarn	den Nachbarn	
Genitive	des Nachbarn	der Nachbarn	
Nominative	der Mensch	die Menschen	<i>(the person / the people)</i>
Accusative	den Menschen	die Menschen	
Dative	dem Menschen	den Menschen	
Genitive	des Menschen	der Menschen	

The distinction between “n” or “en” is based on the ease of pronunciation as the Germans perceive it. The one exception is “Herr.” This noun declines in the singular as “Herrn” and in all plural forms as “Herren.”

Example sentences with “Nachbar”:

Der Nachbar gegenüber ist sehr alt.

Ich kenne **den Nachbarn** nicht besonders gut.

Wir geben **dem Nachbarn** unsere alten Zeitungen.

Die Frau **des Nachbarn** spricht Arabisch.

Die Nachbarn sind sehr nett.

subj. / nom.

dir. obj. / acc.

bene. / dat.

poss. / gen.

(plur) subj. / nom.

The neighbor across the street is very old.

I don't know the neighbor especially well.

We give our old newspapers to the neighbor.

The wife of the neighbor speaks Arabic.

The neighbors are very nice.