

Guessing plurals

You can guess the plurals of most German nouns with anywhere from 75% to 99% accuracy if you know a few simple facts. Of course, you shouldn't have to guess. You learned the article and plural when you learned the noun, right?

For those occasions when memory fails you:

Regardless of gender:

1. Nouns in -el, -er, -en usually form the plural by adding umlaut or by adding nothing at all:
der Garten, die Gärten; der Computer, die Computer; der Löffel, die Löffel

2. Foreign nouns and abbreviations normally add -s:
das Auto, die Autos; die Uni, die Unis; der Kuli, die Kulis

(NB: Otherwise, -s is a very rare plural ending)

Gender specific:

1. Masculine nouns usually form the plural by adding -e or -e with umlaut:
der Tisch, die Tische; der Stuhl, die Stühle

2. Feminine nouns usually form the plural by adding -n or -en:
die Kirche, die Kirchen; die Tür, die Türen

3. Neuter nouns can form the plural in two different ways:

a. by adding -er or -er with umlaut:
das Buch, die Bücher; das Bild, die Bilder

b. by behaving like a masculine:
das Heft, die Hefte; das Filzstift, die Filzstifte

(NB: Unlike real masculines, neuters almost never have umlaut when they form the plural in -e)