

Chapter 3

The plural

The plural of nouns in Dutch is roughly divided up into three groups: plural ending *-en*, plural ending *-s* and other plurals.

3.1 The plural in *-en*

The regular sign of the plural is *-en*.

3.1.1 Note

The spelling rules given in the preceding chapter are applied.

krant	kranten	newspapers	(no change)
boer	boeren	farmers	(no change)
woord	woorden	words	(no change)
fles	flessen	bottles	(double consonant after short vowel)
boot	boten	boats	(single vowel in open syllable)
prijs	prijzen	prices	(s replaced by z)
bos	bossen	forests	(double consonant after short vowel)
mens	mensen	people	(no change)
brief	brieven	letters	(f replaced by v)
fotograaf	fotografen	photographers	(single vowel in open syllable)

3.1.2 Irregularities

- 1 A small number of very frequently occurring words do have a different vowel quality in the plural. A short vowel in the singular becomes a long vowel in the plural, marked by the single consonant following it:

bad	baden	baths
dag	dagen	days
dak	daken	roofs
gat	gaten	holes
glas	glazen	glasses
weg	wegen	ways
oorlog	oorlogen	wars
god	goden	gods
bedrag	bedragen	amount
verdrag	verdragen	treaties

Within this type there are three exceptions:

stad	steden	cities
schip	schepen	ships
lid	leden	members

Note: The change in vowel is still from short vowel in the singular to long vowel in the plural.

- 2 Another small group forms the plural by adding **-eren**:

been	beenderen	bones	but: been	benen	legs
blad	bladeren	leaves	but: blad	bladen	trays, sheets
ei	eieren	eggs			
kind	kinderen	children			
lied	liederen	songs			
volk	volkeren	peoples			

3.2 The plural in -s

Another common sign of the plural is -s, used with a considerable number of words. There are three main groups:

- 1 Most words ending in unstressed -el, -em, -en, -er, -aar, -erd, -e:

tafel	tafels	tables
bezem	bezems	brooms
deken	dekens	blankets
bakker	bakkers	bakers
leraar	leraren (leraars)	teachers
engerd	engerds	creeps
tante	tantes	aunts
studente	studentes	(female) students

- 2 All diminutives, marked by their ending -je (see Chapter 22):

huisje	huisjes	little houses
dubbeltje	dubbeltjes	10-cent coins
meisje	meisjes	girls

- 3 Many words originally of foreign origin, often ending in a vowel. When the vowel is a, i, o, u or y, an apostrophe is inserted:

firma	firma's	firms
paprika	paprika's	sweet peppers
taxi	taxi's	taxicabs
auto	auto's	cars
foto	foto's	pictures
paraplu	paraplu's	umbrellas
baby	baby's	babies
hobby	hobby's	hobbies

microfoon	microfoons	microphones
garage	garages	garage
hotel	hotels	hotels
restaurant	restaurants	restaurants
computer	computers	computers
tram	trams	streetcars
roman	romans	novels

Three of the common native Dutch words also in this category are:

oom	ooms	uncles
broer	broers	brothers
zoon	zoons	sons (zonen is an older form, still used for company names: Ballegeer en Zonen)

3.3 Other plurals

- 1 Words from a more or less intellectual sphere often form their plural in the Latin way with -i or -a:

catalogus	catalogi	catalogs
historicus	historici	historians
musicus	musici	musicians
museum	musea (museums)	museums

- 2 Most words in -or form the plural in -en and shift the stress one syllable to the right. Many of them have an alternative plural form in -s:

professor	professoren/professors	professors
motor	motoren/motors	motors

- 3 Words in -heid form the plural in -heden:

mogelijkheid	mogelijkheden	possibilities
gelegenheid	gelegenheden	opportunities

3.3.1 *Let's try it*

Put the following nouns into the plural.

broodje	krant	hobby	dag	banaan
stad	foto	professor	docente	moeilijkheid
leraar	bakker	tomaat	ei	weg
fles	zoon	druif	tafel	politicus
menu	jongen	sufferd	prijs	kind
printer	glas	les	hoofdstuk	restaurant
taxi	brood	pen	oorlog	hotel
kamer	collega	appel	film	motor

Articles and demonstratives

4.1 The definite article

4.1.1 Singular

The definite article is either **het** or **de**. **De** is used as the singular definite article with roughly two-thirds of Dutch nouns, which are of “common” gender, including masculine and feminine genders:

de man	the man	de straat	the street
de vrouw	the woman	de bloem	the flower

Het is the singular definite article used with the remaining nouns. It is neuter in gender. **'t** is the unstressed form of **het**, used mainly in informal writing:

het boek	the book	het kind	the child
het raam	the window	het meisje	the girl

Few rules can be given that will help a beginner in telling whether a noun is common or neuter in gender, with one exception: all diminutives are neuter.

de jongen	the boy	het jongetje	the little boy
het huis	the house	het huisje	the little house

Note: The neuter nouns must be learned by memorizing the definite article with the noun. In the Dutch–English vocabulary all nouns are preceded by the appropriate article.

4.1.2 Plural

The definite article for all nouns in the plural is **de**:

de kat	de katten	the cats
de straat	de straten	the streets
het huis	de huizen	the houses
het huisje	de huisjes	the little houses

	Singular	Plural
Common gender	de tuin	de tuinen
Neuter	het huis	de huizen

4.1.3 Let's try it

Fill in the right article: **de** or **het**. Use a dictionary if necessary.

___ huis	___ krant	___ ziekenhuis	___ dag	___ woordenboek
___ fiets	___ boek	___ meisje	___ pen	___ straat
___ stad	___ restaurant	___ professor	___ boekje	___ moeilijkheid
___ fles	___ muziek	___ hoofdstuk	___ kamer	___ president
___ tuin	___ bibliotheek	___ gebouw	___ kat	___ kind

4.2 The indefinite article

The indefinite article “a, an” is **een** for both genders, always unstressed and pronounced in about the same way as the “an-” in English “another.” As in English, there is no plural.

	Singular	Plural
Common gender	een tuin	tuinen
Neuter	een huis	huizen

The same word stressed and spelled as **één**, means “one.”

4.3 Demonstratives

Demonstratives follow the same pattern, except that they make a distinction based on whether the noun they modify is close by or far away.

	Singular		Plural	
	<i>Close</i> (= <i>this</i>)	<i>Far</i> (= <i>that</i>)	<i>Close</i> (= <i>these</i>)	<i>Far</i> (= <i>those</i>)
Common gender	deze tuin	die school	deze tuinen	die scholen
Neuter	dit huis	dat gebouw	deze huizen	die gebouwen

Demonstratives can be used in Dutch without a noun. The noun is implied, however, usually because the speaker is pointing to the noun or has mentioned it earlier in the context, so that it is clear what the speaker is talking about:

Nederlandse boeken zijn duur. Dit (boek) hier, bijvoorbeeld, kost een derde meer dan in de VS.

Dutch books are expensive. This one here, for example, costs a third more than in the U.S.A.

When the demonstrative points out but does not directly modify, it is always in the neuter form and is situated at the beginning of the sentence:

Dit is de bibliotheek.

This is the library.

Dit is mijn oudste zus. (showing pictures) Zij studeert aan de universiteit van Delft.

This is my oldest sister. She is studying at the university of Delft.

Dutch often uses a neuter article or demonstrative with a plural verb form when the plural noun referred to is thought of as a group rather than as individuals:

Dat zijn mijn kinderen.

Those are my children.

Zij houden van harde muziek.

They love loud music.

Dit zijn haar boeken.

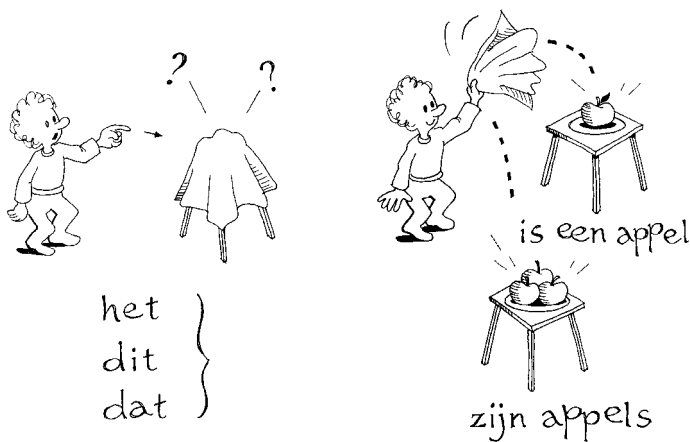
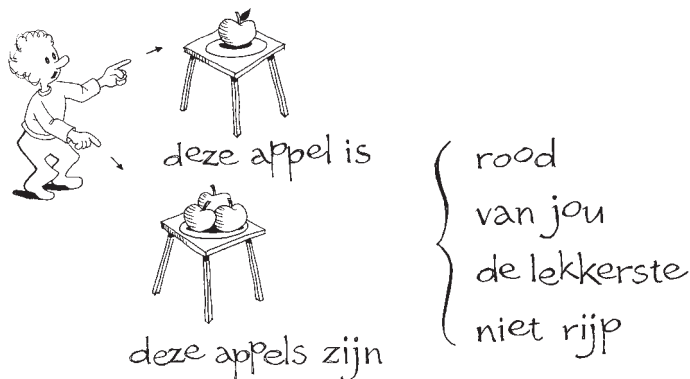
These are her books.

This is the same for articles:

Wie is dat? Het zijn de burens.

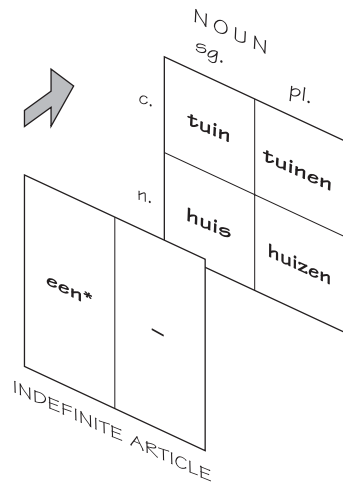
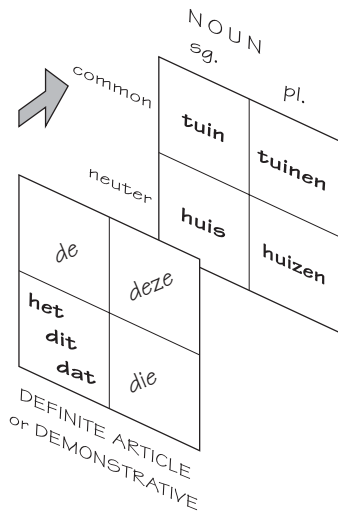
Who is that? It's the neighbors.

Here is how to remember it.



The unspecified thing (demonstrative) is modified by noun and verb.

4
Articles
and demon-
stratives



* may be missing in sing.: "mass" nouns

"count" nouns: *tuin-tuinen, huis-huizen, dag-dagen, reis-reizen* ...

"mass" nouns: *water, melk, bier, zand, verkeer, schoonheid* ...

4.3.1 Let's try it

de, het, een, deze, die, dat, dit or nothing?

Er loopt _____ kat in onze tuin. _____ kat is pikzwart.

Gebruik je _____ melk en _____ suiker in je koffie?

Daar loopt _____ politieagent. _____ politieagent kan ons vast wel helpen.

Onze computer is kapot. Morgen gaan wij _____ nieuwe computer kopen.

In _____ klas zitten vijf jongens en een meisje. _____ jongens komen uit _____ Verenigde Staten en _____ meisje komt uit Canada.

Dit is mijn oudste broer. _____ woont in Frankrijk.

Wat is _____ Lange Voorhout? _____ is _____ straat in Den Haag. _____ is _____ straat waar veel ambassades gevestigd zijn.