

Gender of Serbian Nouns

Serbian distinguishes three genders: masculine, neuter and feminine genders in both singular and plural.

These are grammatical, as opposed to natural genders, since non-animate objects can be masculine and feminine, and even for animate entities, there is no a perfect correspondence to male and female persons.

For example: *devojka* 'girl' is a feminine noun, but its diminutive counterpart *devoičurak* 'girl' is a masculine noun!

How do you determine the gender of nouns?

Basically, by the phonological ending of the noun. And this classification is closely related to a [declensional class](#) of nouns.

Follow these basic rules for classifying nouns in declension classes:

- i) If a noun ends in a **consonant**, most probably it's a **Class I masculine noun** (e.g. prozor 'window', kompjuter 'computer', Jovan 'John').
- ii) If the noun ends in vowels **-o**, or **-e** in singular nominative case (or dictionary form), it's a **Class I neuter noun** (e.g. sel-o 'village', mleko 'milk', polj-e 'field', prase 'piglet'). However, there are some male proper names that end in these vowels, and are classified as **Class I masculine noun** (e.g. Marko, Đorđe, Rade), not neuter nouns. So, semantics wins!
- iii) If the noun ends in **-a** in singular nominative case, it's a **Class II noun**, and these nouns are feminine. There is a small group of male-denoting nouns that also end in **-a**, (e.g. sudija 'judge', Steva – male name, gazda 'master, landlord', gospoda 'gentlemen'). But grammatically, these nouns act as feminine. So, forget about their semantics and decline them as feminine.
- iv) The **Class III nouns** are all feminine and end in a **consonant**, just like Class I nouns. How then to distinguish Class I masculine nouns from Class III feminine nouns? **Class III nouns typically denote abstract objects** (e. g. ljubav 'love', smrt 'death', bolest 'illness', mladost 'youth'). This class of nouns is not productive, i.e. when a new noun that ends in a consonant is imported into the language, it goes into Class I (masculine nouns), not into Class III (feminine nouns). For example, the loan noun **stres** (from the English 'stress') is classified as a Class I masculine noun. For this class of nouns, most cases end in **-i**, so it's easy to memorize.

Adjective Agreement with Nouns

The elements that modify the noun, such as adjectives, demonstratives, usually agree with the noun in gender, number and case.

Example: ova dobra devojka 'this good girl' vs. ove dobre devojke 'these good girls'

So, these modifiers will change their form depending on the form of the noun. In linguistics, we call this agreement or concord.