



ESPERANTO LESSON

Esperanto Grammar 1 · Chapter 2

· Roots, Endings and Nouns

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Roots, Endings and Nouns — Radikoj, finaĵoj kaj substantivoj

*An Esperanto word is built from a **root**, which carries the meaning, and an **ending**, which tells you the word's job. This chapter introduces that idea and then uses it for the noun: the ending **-o**, the plural **-j**, the one article **la**, and the accusative **-n** that marks the object and lets word order be free. Gender is nowhere in the system.*

THE RULE IN ONE BOX

A noun ends in **-o**. Add **-j** for more than one. Add **-n** for the object of the verb, or for movement towards a place. There is one article, **la** ("the"), and no word for "a". Nothing else changes.

Root + ending

Take the root **am-**, which means *love*. By itself it is not a word. Add an ending and it becomes one, and the ending says which kind:

ROOT	ENDING	WORD	JOB	ENGLISH
am-	-o	am o	noun	love (the thing)
am-	-a	am a	adjective	of love, loving
am-	-e	am e	adverb	lovingly
am-	-i	am i	verb (infinitive)	to love
am-	-as	am as	verb (present)	love, loves

The same trick works for almost every root. Chapters 3 and 4 cover the other endings; this chapter is about **-o**. Compare Hungarian, where a single stem takes many suffixes, but in

Hungarian the suffix must match the vowels of the stem. In Esperanto the endings never change shape.

Nouns end in -o

ESPERANTO	ENGLISH	ESPERANTO	ENGLISH
libro	book	hundo	dog
domo	house	kato	cat
ĝardeno	garden	floro	flower
tablo	table	amiko	friend
teo	tea	kafo	coffee

Names of people and places are nouns too, and keep a capital letter. Many names take **-o**: **Filipo** (Philip), **Edinburgo**, **Skotlando** (check the spellings of names). Words for peoples and nationalities are written with a small letter: **skoto** (a Scot), **angla** (English), while the country keeps its capital: **Skotlando** (check).

The article: only la

Esperanto has **one** article, **la**, meaning *the*. It never changes for singular or plural, case or gender: **la libro**, **la libroj**, **la libron**. There is **no word for "a" or "an"**. A bare noun is simply "a book" or "books":

ESPERANTO	COULD MEAN
libro	a book · book
la libro	the book
libroj	books · some books
la libroj	the books

Watch out: la is used like English "the"

Do not use **la** before a person's name (**Filipo**, not **la Filipino**), and do not translate "a" with **unu**, which means *one* as a number. Compare French *le/la/les* and German *der/die/das*: Esperanto has one form where they have many, and Hungarian *a/az* where you chose by the next sound.

The plural: add -j

Add **-j** to the noun. The article stays the same.

SINGULAR	PLURAL	ENGLISH
libro	libroj	books
la hundo	la hundoj	the dogs
amiko	amikoj	friends
la ĝardeno	la ĝardenoj	the gardens

The **-oj** is one syllable, said "oy", and the stress does not move: **LI-bro**, **LI-broj** (Chapter 1).

The accusative: add -n

The subject of a sentence (the one that does the action) is in the plain form. The object (the one the action is done to) takes **-n**. Compare these two sentences, which have the same words and opposite meanings:

ESPERANTO	ENGLISH
La hundo vidas la katon.	The dog sees the cat.
La kato vidas la hundon.	The cat sees the dog.

The four forms of one noun:

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
Subject (nominative)	libro	libroj
Object (accusative)	libron	librojn

The order is always **-j before -n: librojn**. The article **la** does not take **-n**; only the noun (and, as you will see in Chapter 3, its adjectives) does.

Word order is free

Because **-n** marks the object, the three sentences below all mean the same thing:

ESPERANTO	MEANING
La hundo vidas la katon.	The dog sees the cat. (normal order)
La katon vidas la hundo.	The dog sees the cat. (the cat is stressed)
La hundo la katon vidas.	The dog sees the cat. (the verb comes last)

The normal order is subject, verb, object, as in English, and it is the safe choice while you learn. The other orders are for emphasis and are covered in Chapter 8. This is the same idea as the Hungarian accusative *-t (házat)*, the German accusative (*den Hund*) and the English pronouns *he* and *him*, but Esperanto marks every noun the same way.

The -n of direction

The same **-n** shows movement *towards* a place. Compare being in a place with moving into it:

ESPERANTO	ENGLISH
Mi estas en la ĝardeno.	I am in the garden. (location)
Mi iras en la ĝardenon.	I am going into the garden. (direction)
Mi iras Edinburgon.	I am going to Edinburgh.

Watch out: -n is not "to a person"

The accusative marks the direct object and the direction of movement. The person who receives something is introduced with the preposition **al** (to), and the noun stays plain: **Mi donas la libron al la knabo.** (I give the book to the boy.) Another common error is to put **-n** after every preposition. Prepositions of place take the plain form, as in **en la ĝardeno**; only movement towards adds **-n**.

No gender

Esperanto nouns have no grammatical gender, so there are no masculine and feminine forms to learn, and no agreement. A noun is male or female only when it names a person or animal and the sex matters. In that case, **-in-** before the **-o** marks female:

BASIC WORD	WITH -IN-
patro father	patrino mother
frato brother	fratino sister
knabo boy	knabino girl
viro man	virino woman
kato cat	katino female cat

An honest note

In practice the basic words for people (**patro**, **frato**, **knabo**) are usually understood as male, and **-in-** is needed to make them female. Some Esperantists find this unfair, and have suggested alternatives. The standard language has not changed, but you may see new forms online; Chapter 4 mentions the best-known one (check).



In Use — En uzo

Read each exchange aloud. Look for **-n**, **-j** and **la**.

① Pets

② What are you reading?

A:

Ĉu vi havas hundon?

Do you have a dog?

B:

Jes, mi havas hundon kaj katon.

Yes, I have a dog and a cat.

A:

Kion vi legas?

What are you reading?

B:

Mi legas libron. Kaj vi, kion vi trinkas?

I'm reading a book. And you, what are you drinking?

A:

Mi trinkas teon.

I'm drinking tea.

③ Where? and Where to?

A:

Kie vi estas?

Where are you?

B:

Mi estas en la ĝardeno. Kaj vi, kien vi iras?

I'm in the garden. And you, where are you going?

A:

Mi iras en la domon.

I'm going into the house.

Spot the pattern: **kion** ("what", as the object) ends in **-n** just like **libron**, and **kien** ("where to") takes the direction **-n** just like **domon**. Chapter 6 shows that the question words follow the same rules.



Quick Reference — Rapida referenco

ITEM	RULE	EXAMPLE
Noun	root + -o	libro
Article	la only; no "a"	la domo · domo
Plural	-j	domoj
Object	-n (after -j if plural)	domon · domojn
Direction	-n shows movement towards	en la domon
Person who receives	al + plain noun	al la knabo
Female	-in- before -o	patrino

Try It Yourself — Ekzercoj

Say the answer first, then click to check.

1. Make *hundo* plural.

▼ Show answer

hundoj.

2. Put *kato* into the accusative singular.

▼ Show answer

katon.

3. Put *libro* into the accusative plural.

▼ Show answer

librojn. The *-j* comes before the *-n*.

4. How do you say "a flower"?

▼ Show answer

floro. There is no word for "a".

5. Translate "The dog sees the cat" and then say who sees whom in *La hundon vidas la kato*.

▼ Show answer

La hundo vidas la katon. In the second sentence, *hundon* is the object, so the cat sees the dog.

6. What is the difference between *Mi estas en la domo* and *Mi iras en la domon*?

▼ Show answer

The first says where I am (location, no *-n*). The second says I am going into the house (direction, with *-n*).

7. Make the female forms of *knabo* and *patro*.

▼ Show answer

knabino (girl) and **patrino** (mother).

8. Correct the sentence: *Mi vidas la hundoj*.

▼ Show answer

Mi vidas la hundojn. The object needs *-n*, and the plural *-j* stays.

9. Correct the sentence: *Mi donas la libron la knabo*. (I give the book to the boy.)

▼ Show answer

Mi donas la libron al la knabo. The person who receives takes *al*, not *-n*.

10. Write "I am reading the books" in Esperanto.

▼ Show answer

Mi legas la librojn. (*legas* = reads; the verb is covered in Chapter 4.)

Words used in this chapter

libro book · **domo** house · **ĝardeno** garden · **tablo** table · **floro** flower · **hundo** dog · **kato** cat · **amiko** friend · **patro** father · **frato** brother · **knabo** boy · **viro** man · **teo** tea · **kafo** coffee · **la** the · **al** to · **en** in · **kie** where · **kien** where to · **kion** what (object) · **estas** is, am · **iras** goes · **vidas** sees · **havas** has · **legas** reads · **trinkas** drinks · **donas** gives

Coming up in Chapter 3: Adjectives, Adverbs and Comparison. How **bona libro** becomes **bonajn librojn**, and how to say "better", "best" and "as good as".