MASCULINE AND FEMININE IN SPANISH (EL & LA): THE RULES & THEIR MANY EXCEPTIONS

Learn all about the Spanish gender roles below – Feminine (la) vs Masculine (el). With these rules below, you'll know which to use with every word "el" or "la".

The standard rules are here on the top of the page, but you shouldn't trust them fully. As you can see, below that chart, you'll then see the "el" & "la" exceptions for Spanish words. For example, la mano (hand) & el día (day). According to the standard rules, you would think the opposite, but as you'll see in the exceptions below, you'll learn the nuances with the Spanish language.

Here we will explain the rules, and then the 3 categories of exceptions:

- **Singular vs Plural** – For example "el alma" (the soul) vs "las almas" (the souls). Instead of "los almas" – incorrect, it is "las almas" – correct.
- In some words, the use of **"el" or "la" changes with the same word**, and **it changes the meaning of the word** whether "el" or "la" is used. For example, "el naranja" (color) vs "la naranja" (fruit).

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Feminine (la)		Masculine (el)	
Words ending in…		**Words ending in…**	
Rule	**Example**	**Rule**	**Example**
- a	la vida (life)	- o	el vaso (glass)

Feminine (la)		Masculine (el)	
- on	la acción (action)	- l	el metal (metal)
- ion	la visión (vision)	- n	el plan (plan)
- ad	la verdad (truth)	- e	el elefante (elephant)
- ud	la salud (health)	- r	el bar (bar)
- z	la voz (voice)	- s	el mes (month)
- is	la crisis (crisis)	- aje	el viaje (journey)
- ie	la especie (species)	- or	el vapor (steam)
- umbre	la cumbre (summit)		

98 Exceptions to the Gender Rules Above:

Below are a number of words you would think should be “la” according to the rules above, but they are “el”, as they are exceptions to the el/la rules. The same thing in the other direction – the rules say it should be el, but the word is actually “la”. Below you’ll find a list of words and be able to find out for yourself if it is masculine (el) or feminine (la).

Feminine (la)	Masculine (el)
la mano (hand)	el día (day)
la foto (photo)	el alquimista (alchemist)
la moto (motorcycle)	el sofá (couch)
la radio (radio)	el tranvía (tramway)
la cárcel (jail)	el monarca (monarch)
la piel (skin)	el sillón (armchair)

Feminine (la)	Masculine (el)
la imagen (picture)	el corazón (heart)
la tesis (thesis)	el cajón (drawer)
la unión (union)	el camión (truck)
la reunión (meeting)	el lápiz (pencil)
la red (network)	el país (country)
la carne (meat)	el análisis (analysis)
la gente (people)	el aroma (fragance)
la noche (night)	el carisma (charisma)
la parte (part)	el clima (weather)
la nieve (snow)	el dilema (dilemma)
la clase (class)	el diploma (diploma)
la calle (street)	el drama (drama)
la leche (milk)	el emblema (emblem)
la peste (plague)	el enigma (enigma)
la llave (key)	el esquema (scheme)
la fiebre (fever)	el estigma (stigma)
la nube (cloud)	el fantasma (ghost)
la sangre (blood)	el idioma (language)
la suerte (luck)	el lema (motto)

Feminine (la)	Masculine (el)
la tarde (afternoon)	el poema (poem)
la muerte (death)	el problema (problem)
la base (base)	el programa (program)
la clave (key)	el tema (topic)
la fuente (fountain)	el síntoma (symptom)
la sede (headquarters)	el sistema (system)
la corriente (current)	el telegrama (telegram)
la flor (flower)	el cometa (comet)
la coliflor (cauliflower)	el planeta (planet)
la labor (work)	el mapa (map)
la mujer (woman)	el avión (plane)

The following words are feminine when plural, but when they are singular, these words are masculine:

Singular (masculine)	Plural (feminine)
el agua (water)	las aguas (waters)
el arma (weapon)	las armas (weapons)
el alma (soul)	las almas (souls)
el águila (eagle)	las águilas (eagles)
el área (area)	las áreas (areas)

Singular (masculine)	Plural (feminine)
el ala (wing)	las alas (wings)
el hada (fairy)	las hadas (fairies)

Another exception is that the “el” or “la” can change the context of the word:

(Masculine - el)	(Feminine - la)
el capital (money)	la capital (capital of the state)
el cura (priest)	la cura (cure)
el naranja (color)	la naranja (fruit)
el colera (cholera)	la colera (anger)
el coma (coma)	la coma (comma)
el guardia (policeman)	la guardia (protection/guard)