

Compound Nouns

Languages

How German builds long nouns, and how to read one.

German joins nouns into single words without spaces or hyphens. The final element carries the meaning and the gender; everything before it modifies.

GENDER FROM
the last part

MEANING
read right to left

SPACES
none

- The last noun determines the gender and the plural.
- Read right to left to understand: Handschuh = hand-shoe = glove.
- Sometimes a linking -s or -en is inserted: Arbeitszimmer.
- There is no theoretical length limit.
- Splitting one is not optional — the space would change the meaning.
- Dictionaries list the parts, not the compound.

LOOK FOR IT

Geschwindigkeitsbegrenzung: speed-limit. Geschwindigkeit + s + Begrenzung.

Die Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaft is a real word, and every part of it is doing a job.