

When to Use Female Nouns by Mignon Fogarty Today's topic is the use of feminine nouns such as "actress" and «comediienne:' These days, people often see such terms as sexist, but it's also common to hear at least some of them. So what exactly are the modern rules for using such terms? Actually, this isn't a matter of s grammar. It's about writing to minimize the potential for readers to draw conclusions¹ you don't want to convey. Other Languages Have More Feminine Nouns It could be worse. In some languages, most nouns have different forms for different sexes. For example, in Spanish, a male lawyer is an abogado, ¹⁰ and a female lawyer is an abogada. Furthermore, in some languages, even verbs can have different forms, depending on the sex of their subject. In Hebrew, raa means "saw" for masculine subjects, while raata means "saw" for feminine subjects. In Mandarin Chinese, a man can "marry" a woman, but a woman can only "be married to" a man. ¹⁵ Even in English, there used to be more female-specific nouns than there are now. Centuries ago, people used now-obsolete² nouns such as "teacheress:' "soldieress;' and "mistress:' The fact that English has mostly abandoned female-specific nouns like these is probably part of the reason that the remaining ones tend to attract attention.