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-ess

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-ess

suff.

Female: [lioness](#).

[Middle English -esse, from Old French, from Late Latin -issa, from Greek.]

Usage Note: When used in occupational terms like *waitress*, *stewardess*, and *sculptress*, the feminine suffix -ess is sometimes considered sexist and demeaning because it gratuitously calls attention to gender. With some nouns, like *poetess* or *sculptress*, the feminine form may be taken to imply that the task somehow differs when performed by a wo or that it is by default the realm of men. With others, such as *seamstress*, the feminine form may be taken to suggest occupation is characteristically feminine. In some cases, such as *sculptor*, the term with masculine gender has become effectively neuter, applying naturally to either sex. In other cases, gender-neutral terms like *server* and *flight attendant* have been created, finessing the problem of using an originally masculine noun to refer to either sex. A few specialized exan persist in fields in which the sex of the referent is relevant, sometimes for historical reasons, including *chiefess* in anthropology, *goddess* in history and literature, and *lioness* in biology. Other cases, like *webmistress*, represent arch reclaimings of the -ess suffix, but these are whimsical or ironic exceptions. Many nouns ending in -or or -er are commr used of women now and should be considered standard. In our 1997 survey, 95 percent of the Usage Panel approved *T gallery is exhibiting work of sculptor Barbara Hepworth*, and in our 2016 survey, 88 percent accepted *Meryl Streep was one of five actors to receive an Oscar nomination for leading woman this year*. It should be noted that 85 percent of the panelists also accepted a similar sentence with *actresses*, indicating that in some cases, despite the prevalence of ge neutral terms like *actor*, the -ess form maintains its acceptability. However, when discussing mixed-sex groups, *actors preferred over actors and actresses*: Ninety-three percent of the panelists accepted *Meryl Streep was one of four actors presented with honorary doctorates yesterday, together with Robert Duvall, Helen Mirren, and Javier Bardem*, whereas only 67 percent accepted a similar sentence with *actors and actresses* in place of *actors*. See Usage Note at [man](#).

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-ess

suffix forming nouns

indicating a female: [waitress](#); [lioness](#).

[via Old French from Late Latin -issa, from Greek]

Usage: The suffix -ess in such words as *poetess*, *authoress* is now almost invariably regarded as disparaging or extremely old-fashioned; a gender-neutral term *poet*, *author* is preferred

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ess (es)

n.

- the letter *S*, *s*.
- something shaped like an *S*.

[1530–40]

-ess

a suffix forming distinctively feminine nouns: [countess](#); [goddess](#); [lioness](#).

[Middle English -esse < Old French < Late Latin -issa < Greek]

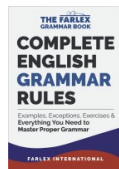
usage: Since at least the 14th century, English has borrowed nouns with this feminine suffix from French (French -esse) and also applied that ending to existing words, most frequently agent nouns in -or or -er. Some of the earliest borrowings - noble or religious titles - still flourish, as *princess*, *duchess*, *abbess*, and *prioress*. The use of -ess words has declined sharply in the latter half of the 20th century. Among those words that are rarely used or are either rejected discouraged in modern American English are *ambassadress*, *ancestress*, *authoress*, *poetess*, *sculptress*, and *stewardess*. Some nouns in -ess are still current: *actress* (but some women prefer *actor*); *adventuress*; *enchantedress*; *governess* (only in its child-care sense); *heiress* (largely in journalistic writing); *hostess* (but women who conduct radio television programs are *hosts*); *millionairess*; *mistress* (except in the sense of expert); *murderess*; *postmistress* (not in official U.S. government use); *seamstress*; *seductress*; *sorceress*; *temptress*; and *waitress*. *Jewess* and *Negress* are rarely used today and are generally considered offensive. See also -*enne*, -*ette*, -*trix*.

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