Forming Plurals

Plurals let readers know if words refer to a single object or many objects.

General Rules

Adding -s
Most words are made plural simply by adding -s to the end of the word.

EXAMPLES:  
girl → girls  
apple → apples

Words Ending in -sh, -s, -ch, -x, or -z
When a word ends in -ch, -s, -sh, -x, or -z, its plural is formed by adding -es to the word.

EXAMPLES:  
iris → irises  
ash → ashes

Plurals Formed by Internal Changes
Some words do not use -s or -es to form plurals. They change into new words as plurals.

EXAMPLES:  
child → children  
man → men  
person → people

Plurals that Retain their Singular Form
Some plurals retain their singular form. Such nouns are spelled the same whether they are being used in a singular or plural sense. Often, they are names of animals or grains.

EXAMPLES:  
corn → corn  
fish → fish

Compound Words
Plurals of compound words use an -s or -es at the end of the entire compound word.

Examples:  
checkbook → checkbooks  
warm-up → warm-ups

However, when the main word in the compound word is the first word, add the -s or -es to the first word.

EXAMPLES:  
mile-per-hour → miles per hour  
sister-in-law → sisters-in-law

Words Ending in -o

Adding -s
Most words ending in -o are made plural with the addition of -s.

EXAMPLES:  
zoos → zoos  
radios

adding -es
A few words ending in -o are made plural with the addition of -es. These words have a consonant before the final -o.

EXAMPLES:  
tomatoes → tomatoes  
heroes
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Adding Either -s or -es
A few words ending in an -o that is preceded by a consonant may be made plural by adding either -s or -es. Always be consistent in the form you use.

**EXAMPLES:**
- tornado → tornados
- tornado → tornadoes
- zero → zeros
- zero → zeroes

Words Ending in -f or -fe
Adding -s or -es
Words ending in -f or -fe become plural with the addition of -s or -es. Generally, when forming these plurals, the -f is changed to a -v before adding the -s or -es.

**EXAMPLES:**
- leaf → leaves
- wife → wives

Exceptions to this rule appear often. In these cases, the -f is not replaced with a -v when the plural ending is added. Generally, these exceptions exist to avoid confusion. For example, the exceptions below prevent confusion with the singular verbs believes and saves and with the plural noun motives.

**EXAMPLES:**
- belief → beliefs
- safe → safes
- motif → motifs

Latin Words Ending in -um
Adding -a
For some Latin words ending in -um, the plural is formed by changing the -um to -a. However, not all words ending in -um follow this rule. When in doubt, check a dictionary.

**EXAMPLES:**
- curriculum → curricula

Latin Words Ending in -us
Adding -i
Latin words ending in -us are made plural by changing the -us to -i. Again, not all words ending in -us follow this pattern.

**EXAMPLES:**
- syllabus → syllabi
- cactus → cacti