

Forming Plurals

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

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. Instead, they change into new words.

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: zoo → zoos
 radio → 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: tomato → tomatoes
 hero → 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