

4. PLURALS

When you speak or write, you regularly refer to singular and plural forms of persons, places, things, qualities or concepts. That is, you refer to either one, singular thing, or to two or more, plural things. For example, you may be speaking about one company or business where you worked during the summer holidays, or you might be writing about several companies or businesses that you have read about in the newspapers over the holidays.

In grammar, these persons, places, things, qualities, or concepts are collectively called nouns. You will also learn how to form the plural of nouns, because in your speaking and writing you must often answer the question, 'is there one person, place, thing, quality or concept, or more than one?'

A) Add -s

Regularly, the plural of nouns is formed by adding -s to the singular.

SINGULAR

report, essay
office
student
tutorial

PLURAL

reports, essays
offices
students
tutorials

B) Add -es

Singular nouns which end in -s, -ss, -x, -z, -sh, or -ch, form the plural by adding -es.

SINGULAR

class, kiss, business
tax, fax
dish, wish
church, search

PLURAL

classes, kisses, businesses
taxes, faxes
dishes, wishes
churches, searches

C) Change -y to -i and add -es.

Singular nouns ending in -y **and preceded by a consonant**, form the plural by changing the -y to -i and adding -es.

SINGULAR

company
 vanity, reality
 methodology
 exigency

PLURAL

companies
 vanities, realities
 methodologies
 exigencies

Note: Singular nouns ending in *-y* and preceded by a vowel, form the plural by adding *-s*: delay-delays; chimney-chimneys; key-keys;

D) Add -es - sometimes!

Some singular nouns ending in *-o* preceded by a consonant, form the plural by adding *-es*.

SINGULAR

hero, zero
 potato, tomato

PLURAL

heroes, zeroes
 potatoes, tomatoes

But, there are many exceptions to this: solo-solos; halo-halos; piano-pianos.

E) Add -s.

Singular nouns ending in *-o* preceded by a vowel, form the plural by adding *-s*.

SINGULAR

curio
 cuckoo

PLURAL

curios
 cuckoos

F) Change -f or -fe to -v and add -es.

Singular nouns ending in *-f* or *-fe* generally form the plural by changing the *-f* to *-v* and adding *-es*.

SINGULAR

thief, self
 life, wife, knife
 loaf, calf

PLURAL

thieves, selves
 lives, wives, knives
 loaves, calves

But there are many exceptions to the generalisation: cliff-cliffs; safe-safes; belief-beliefs.

Note: The plural of *roof* is nowadays spelt *roofs* (rather than rooves), but can be pronounced either as [rufs] or [ruves].

G) Change an inside vowel.

A few nouns form their plural by changing an inside vowel.

SINGULAR	PLURAL
man	men
woman	women
tooth	teeth
foot	feet
mouse	mice
goose	geese

H) A very few nouns form their plurals by adding *-ren* or *-en*; child-children; ox-oxen.

I) Compound nouns.

Compound nouns form their plurals by adding *-s* to the most important word of the compound.

SINGULAR	PLURAL
passer-by	passers-by
good-bye	good-byes
mother-in-law	mothers-in-law
court-martial	courts-martial
attorney-general	attorneys-general

Note: Compounds written without hyphens regularly add *-s* to form the plural: pickpocket-pickpockets; spoonful-spoonfuls; stepmother-stepmothers.

J) Foreign nouns - native declension

Foreign nouns, unless they have been thoroughly naturalised (see K), form their plurals according to their native declension. The following foreign nouns are used with their native plurals.

SINGULAR	PLURAL
	<i>LATIN</i>
Addendum	addenda
Alumnus	alumni
Datum	data
Erratum	errata
Appendix	appendices
Medium	media
Stratum	strata
	<i>GREEK</i>
analysis	analyses
basis	bases
crisis	crises
phenomenon	phenomena
criterion	criteria

K) Foreign nouns in frequent use - native plural and their English plural.

Foreign nouns in regular use in English generally have two plural forms - their native plural and their English -s or -es plural. These words are now accepted as English and are used with their English plurals.

SINGULAR	ENGLISH PLURAL	FOREIGN PLURAL
	<i>LATIN</i>	
apparatus	apparatuses	apparatus
aquarium	aquariums	aquaria
formula	formulas	formulae
millennium	millenniums	millennia
ultimatum	ultimatums	ultimata
	<i>GREEK</i>	
automaton	automatons	automata
gymnasium	gymnasiums	gymnasia
hippopotamus	hippopotamuses	hippopotami
octopus	octopuses	octopodes
lexicon	lexicons	lexica

L) Some nouns have two plural forms, each form with its own meaning.

SINGULAR	PLURAL
index	Books have <i>indexes</i> . Numbers have <i>indices</i> .
die	Tool machinists use <i>dies</i> . Gamblers throw the <i>dice</i> .
genius	<i>Geniuses</i> are people of exceptional ability. <i>Genii</i> in Roman mythology are guiding spirits for a person from birth to death.

M) Some nouns are used only in the plural.

alms	blues	dregs
athletics	billiards	economics
bellows	commons	forceps
glasses		

N) You can use an apostrophe to form plurals of *letters, numbers and words used as terms*.

Be aware that this is the **ONLY** time you can use apostrophes to form plurals. Nowadays this usage varies considerably, with some people opting to omit the apostrophe.

Dot your i's and cross your t's.

I can't tell his 2's from his 7's.

Mind your p's and q's.

There are no if's or but's about this.

THE FINAL ANALYSIS

If you are in doubt, as occasionally you are sure to be, as we all are, please consult your **dictionary**. It is the best reference book you can use. It is much more reliable than the spell checker on the word processor - the spell checker can mislead you because it cannot not recognise the difference between plurals and possessives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The material for this chapter was compiled from several sources:

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Collins English Dictionary (1979) William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, Oxford.