

"Dos and Don'ts" or "Do's and Don'ts"?



We're happy to introduce the first in a series of tips on usage and style from Grammar Girl, a.k.a. Mignon Fogarty. First up: how do you punctuate *do* and *don't* when the words are pluralized?

What's the Trouble? The spelling of *do's* and *don'ts* is inconsistent.

Generally, you don't use apostrophes to make words or abbreviations plural (e.g., *CDs*, *1970s*, *hats*), but English has a few exceptions. For example, you can use apostrophes when they help eliminate confusion, which happens most often with single letters. *Mind your p's and q's* is the typical spelling, and we write that the word *aardvark* has 3 *a's*, not 3 *as*.

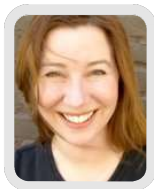
Dos and *don'ts* is an especially unusual exception. The apostrophe in the contraction *doesn't* seems to make people want to use an apostrophe to make *do* plural (*do's* and *don'ts*), but then to be consistent, you'd also have to use an apostrophe to make *don't* plural, which becomes downright ugly (*do's* and *don't's*).

Style guides and usage books don't agree.

- The *Chicago Manual of Style* and others recommend *dos* and *don'ts*.
- The Associated Press and others recommend *do's* and *don'ts*.
- *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* recommends *do's* and *don't's*.

What Should You Do? Unless your editor wishes otherwise, if you write books, spell it *dos* and *don'ts*; and if you write for newspapers, magazines, or the Web, spell it *do's* and *don'ts*. If you're writing for yourself, spell it any way you want. Just be consistent.

For more on using the apostrophe in plurals, see Erin Brenner's "[Punctuation Point: The Apostrophe, Beyond the Basics](#)."



Mignon Fogarty is better known as [Grammar Girl](#). She is the founder of the Quick and Dirty Tips network, author of [Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing](#), and the creator of the iOS game [Grammar Pop](#). She is also the Donald W. Reynolds Chair of Media Entrepreneurship in the [Reynolds School of Journalism and Advanced Media Studies](#) at the University of Nevada, Reno.

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