

Singular and plural nouns.

You probably noticed that nouns can be singular, meaning only one of them, as well as plural, meaning more than one. Most often we simply add an -s to the end of the singular noun to make it a plural noun. Book becomes books, house becomes houses, wall becomes walls and horse becomes horses.

-ES plural ending.

But, I'm sure you also noticed that a plural noun can be different depending on how it is spelt in the singular. First, if a singular noun ends in -s, -ss, -sh, -ch, -x, or -z, we add an -es to the end of the word. Again, if it ends in -s, -ss, -sh, -ch, -x, or -z, add an -es to make the word plural. Using this rule, bus becomes buses. Dress, dresses. Match, matches. Box, boxes. Blitz, blitzes.

Doubling letters.

But sometimes when a noun ends in -s or -z, you need to double those letters before adding the -es ending for the plural. For example, quiz, quizzes. Gas, gasses. Notice that we don't always do this, as bus becomes buses, so checking the spelling in a dictionary is useful.

Changing f to v.

Next, a lot of words that end with an -f or -fe in the singular, will be changed to -ves in the plural. For example, leaf, leaves. Self, selves. Like I said, a lot of words do this, but not all of them, some common ones that don't change are belief, beliefs. Chef, chefs. Chief, chiefs. Roof, roofs.

Changing -y to -ies.

When a noun has a -y ending in the singular, and the letter before the -y has a consonant sound, we erase the -y in the plural and change it to -ies.

If you didn't know, a consonant sound is the majority of sounds we make when talking. In order to make these sounds we have to stop the flow of air leaving our mouths by using our tongue or lips. Consonants are typically the letters b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y and z. As well, sometimes the letter y can sound like a consonant and sometimes it sounds like a vowel. A vowel is typically the letters a, e, i, o and u.

So using the -y to -ies rule, and remembering what a consonant is, that means sky becomes skies. K is the consonant in sky, and it comes before the -y, so we change it to -ies. Candy becomes candies, here d is the consonant. And puppy becomes puppies. P is the consonant and it comes before the -y, so we change it to -ies.

So if a singular noun ends in -y, and has a consonant sound before it, like sky, we change it to -ies. But, if the singular noun ends in -y, and has a vowel sound before it, we only add an -s to the end. For example, toy becomes toys. The letter o in toy is a vowel, so we only add an -s ending. Boy becomes boys, because again we have the letter o. And ray becomes rays, because we have the vowel a before the -y ending.

Words that end in -o.

Moving on, we have words that end in the letter o. There are two plural ending options, -s and -es, but unfortunately there are quite a few words that end in o that don't follow the two rules I'm about to teach you, so always verify with a dictionary.

But don't feel bad, because even for native speakers this can be difficult to remember, like when in 1992 the American vice president spelt potato wrong while on TV. In fact, the rest of the plural rules I'm about to teach you are often forgotten or confused by native speakers, so don't worry if they seem challenging.

Anyways, most singular words that end in o, and have a vowel before the letter o, will take the -s ending in the plural. Zoo, zoos. O is our vowel and comes before the final o in the word. Patio, patios. I is the vowel and comes before o. Cameo, cameos. E is the vowel in this word and comes before the final o.

And most singular words that end in o, and have a consonant before that final o, will take the -es ending in the plural. Potato, potatoes. T is a consonant, so we get the -es ending. Hero, heroes. R is a consonant, so we get the -es ending. And banjo, banjos. J is our consonant here.

A few exceptions to this rule, meaning they don't obey the rule, are related to music. So if music is something you'll have to be writing about in the future, make sure to memorize these, duo, duos. Solo, solos. Soprano, sopranos. Piano, pianos.

Remember, with this rule you will more often be right than wrong, but there are a lot of exceptions for words that end in o, so always check a dictionary if you can.

Words that end in -us.

Continuing, we have singular nouns that end in -us that will take the plural ending -i. For example, cactus becomes cacti. Focus, foci. Octopus, octopi.

The -i ending sounds quite academic and unnatural, and as a result is often ignored in spoken, informal English and replaced by an -es ending. So you'll often hear cactuses, focuses and octopuses. Remember that technically these endings are incorrect, so while they are very common, some people might say you're making a mistake.

Changing -on to -a.

I've got another one that's difficult even for native speakers, it's for singular nouns that end in -on, but lose the -on ending in the plural and are replaced by an -a. For example,

phenomenon, a great academic word meaning event, becomes phenomena in the plural, meaning events. Criterion, which means standard or requirement, becomes criteria in the plural, meaning requirements or expectations.

Going from -is to -es.

And now we have singular nouns that end in -is. These are pretty simple and all we do is replace the -is with an -es. The important part to remember though, if you want to sound more fluent, is the vowel change that occurs. With the -es ending we get a longer, dragged out -ee sound. While with the -is it's a quick, -ih sound. So analysis becomes analyses. Analysis, analyses. Paralysis becomes paralyses. Paralysis, paralyses. Psychosis becomes psychoses. Psychosis, psychoses. Ellipsis becomes ellipses. Ellipsis, ellipses.

Nouns that don't change.

For our penultimate rule, meaning second to last rule, we have some nouns that don't change at all when going from singular to plural, so you have to memorize these. The most common are sheep, fish, deer, series and species. One sheep, two sheep. One fish, two fish. Though, I want to mention that with fish you might sometimes hear 'fishies' when someone is joking, acting cute or being sarcastic in a very informal situation. It's also common to hear young children say 'fishies' because they don't know it's incorrect yet. Like if you take a child to the zoo, and they say, 'I want to see the fishies.'

Next we have one deer, two deer. One series, two series. That's a good one to know because we often talk about a TV series, or several TV series, we like to watch. One species, two species. A species is a classification of a living organism, and there are about 8.7 million unique species of animals in the world!

Irregular plural nouns.

And last, but unfortunately not easiest, we have irregular plural nouns, which also require memorization because we don't have any rules to help us. This list includes some important nouns like child, children. Man, men. Woman, women. Person, people. Tooth, teeth. Foot, feet. And mouse, mice.