

## English grammar

# Singular and plural nouns

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### Grammar rules with examples

We normally make the plural by adding -s to the singular of a noun:

*a pen - two pens, a window - three windows, a tree - a lot of trees, a boy - many boys*

There are, however, a lot of exceptions to this rule.

### 1. Nouns ending in -ss, -sh, -ch, -x, -o.

- We add -es to the noun that ends in -ss, -sh, -ch, -x.

*dress - dresses, dish - dishes, match - matches, box - boxes*

- Nouns ending in -o can form their plural by adding -es, too.

*hero - heroes, potato - potatoes, tomato - tomatoes, torpedo - torpedoes*

- But we often add -s only to the words ending in -o which are of foreign origin or abbreviated.

*avocado - avocados, kimono - kimonos, piano - pianos, zero - zeros, kilo - kilos, photo - photos*

- Some nouns ending in -o can have both plural forms, -s or -es.

*banjo - banjos/banjoes, flamingo - flamingos/flamingoes, ghetto - ghettos/ghettoes, motto - mottos/mottoes, tornado - tornados/tornadoes*

### 2. Nouns ending in -y.

- If the noun ends in a consonant and -y, we change -y into -i and add -es.

*activity - activities, baby - babies, berry - berries, country - countries, fly - flies, lady - ladies*

- But we add -s only to the nouns ending in a vowel plus -y.

*boy - boys, day - days, guy - guys, key - keys, way - ways*

### 3. Nouns ending in -f or -fe.

- Some nouns ending in -f or -fe make the plural in the following way.

*calf - calves, half - halves, knife - knives, leaf - leaves, life - lives, loaf - loaves, sheaf - sheaves, shelf - shelves, thief - thieves, wife - wives, wolf - wolves*

- Other nouns make their plural in the normal way by adding -s.

*chief - chiefs, cliff - cliffs, gulf - gulfs, proof - proofs, roof - roofs, safe - safes*

- The following words can have two plural forms.

*dwarf - dwarfs/dwarves, handkerchief - handkerchiefs/handkerchieves, hoof - hoofs/hooves, scarf - scarfs/scarves, wharf - wharfs/wharves*

### 4. Plural forms made by a vowel change.

- A few nouns make their plural forms by changing their vowels.

*foot - feet, goose - geese, man - men, tooth - teeth, woman - women*

## 5. Specific changes in plural forms.

- Some English nouns change in spelling substantially in their plural forms.  
*child - children, die - dice, louse - lice, mouse - mice, ox - oxen, person - people*

## 6. Nouns that do not change in the plural.

Some words have the same form in the singular and plural.  
*I can see one sheep on the hill. - How many sheep can you see?*

- Names of some fish and animals.  
*carp, cod, mackerel, pike, plaice, salmon, squid, trout, cattle, deer, moose, sheep, swine*
- Other words that do not change.  
*barracks, craft (aircraft, spacecraft...), gallows, means, quid, series, species*

## 7. Nouns that are always plural.

Some nouns always have a plural form, take a plural verb and cannot be used with numbers.  
*Your clothes are in the other room.*  
*The goods have been delivered.*

- Things which have two parts.  
*binoculars, glasses, headphones, jeans, knickers, pants, pyjamas, scales, scissors, tights, trousers*

We use *pair of* if we want to count them.  
*I need two pairs of new tights and a pair of jeans.*

- Some other nouns.  
*arms (weapons), belongings, clothes, congratulations, earnings, goods, grounds, likes/dislikes, outskirts, savings, stairs, surroundings, thanks, valuables*

## 8. Nouns that are always singular.

Some nouns have a plural form, but take a singular verb, such as *news*.  
*The good news is that we can go on holiday now.*

- Names of sciences and activities.  
*acoustics, athletics, classics, economics, ethics, gymnastics, mathematics/maths, physics, politics*
- Names of diseases.  
*measles, mumps, rabies, rickets, shingles*
- Names of games.  
*billiards, bowls, checkers, darts, dominoes, draughts, hearts*

## 9. Nouns of Latin and Greek origin.

Many Latin and Greek words used in English retain their original plural forms. Others follow English grammar rules.

- Nouns with the Latin or Greek plural.  
*alumnus - alumni, fungus - fungi, nucleus - nuclei*

*axis - axes, analysis - analyses, crisis - crises, oasis - oases, thesis - theses  
bacterium - bacteria, datum - data, erratum - errata, stratum - strata  
criterion - criteria, phenomenon - phenomena*

## Notes

Different plural forms can sometimes have different meanings.

*indexes = tables of contents, indices = collections of information in alphabetical order  
brothers = siblings / brethren = members of the same community*

Some singular forms can have different meanings than plural forms.

*arm = part of human body, arms = weapons*

*content = amount of a substance, contents = everything that is contained within something*

*wood = material, woods = small forest*

## Singular and plural noun exercises:

[www.e-grammar.org/singular-plural-exercises/](http://www.e-grammar.org/singular-plural-exercises/)

**Our tip:** [www.e-grammar.org/pdf-books/](http://www.e-grammar.org/pdf-books/) All PDF exercises + grammar rules in one place.