

Plurals

Regular

The plural form of most nouns is formed by adding *s* to the end of the word.

There are twelve boys and thirteen girls in that class.

When a word ends in *sh*, *ch*, *s*, *z*, or *x*, the plural is usually formed by adding *es* to the end.

We need three batches of cookies for three different classes at school.

When a word ends in [consonant] + *y*, the plural is formed by changing the *y* to *ie* and adding *s*.

I may live in only one country at a time, but I feel like a citizen of many countries.

In compound nouns, the principal word is the one made plural.

daughters-in-law, governors general, passers-by, ladies in waiting

Irregular

Many nouns referring to animals have the same form in the singular and in the plural.

The land sustained an abundance of deer and moose, and could also be used to raise sheep.

If a noun ends in *f* or *fe* the plural is usually formed by adding *s*, but is sometimes formed by changing the *f* or *fe* to a *ve* and adding *s*.

His beliefs told him that those loaves required sharp knives.

If a noun ends in *o*, the plural is usually formed by adding *s*, but is sometimes formed by adding *es*.

My heroes all play banjos.

Words borrowed into English from other languages sometimes follow the rules for pluralisation in English and sometimes those for pluralisation in the original language.

phenomenon, phenomena and thesis, theses from Greek; alumnus, alumni and alumna, alumnae from Latin; tableau, tableaux and corps, corps from French

Special Cases

Plurals of symbols, numbers (including years), and uppercase letters are usually formed by adding *s*.

*He was concerned with the use of @s in formal writing since the 1990s.
I could not suppress a smile when I saw so many As on my transcript.*

Plurals of lowercase letters are usually formed by adding *'s* after the letter.

He wondered how many c's and m's were in the word "accommodate."

For most proper names, the plural is formed simply by adding *s* to the end of the name, though when a proper name ends in *s* the plural is formed by adding *es*.

*The three Jacks joined the three Jills to fetch three pails of water.
We always worked very hard to keep up with the Joneses.*

Collective nouns (referring to groups of people, animals, or things) are usually treated as singular. If, however, you want to lay stress on the individual members rather than on the overall unit, you may treat the noun as plural:

*A flock of birds is flying in a V formation, but A flock of birds are threatening our crops.
My family is strange, but My family are unpredictable in their tastes.*

Possessives

A noun can be made possessive when it could also have *of a* or *of the* preceding it.

the bag of a student = a student's bag
the orbits of the planets = the planets' orbits

Singular

A singular noun is usually made possessive by adding 's to the end of the word.

The woman's coat is red.

Most proper names are made possessive by adding 's to the end.

Wong's argument is compelling.

A singular noun that ends in *s* can be made possessive either by adding 's to the end of the word or by adding only ' to the end of the word.

A Christmas Carol is probably Dickens' / Dickens's best loved work.
The moss' / moss's tendency is to grow only on the north sides of trees.

Classical names ending in *s* as well as names ending with an *s* and an "iz" sound traditionally use only an apostrophe to mark possession.

Herodotus' sense of history is still with us today.
There are many allusions to the sea in Menzies' poetry.

Plural

A plural noun that ends in *s* can be made possessive either by adding only ' to the end of the word (the preferred method), or by adding 's to the end of the word.

All the soldiers' / soldiers's uniforms were torn.

A plural noun that ends in a letter other than *s* can be made possessive by adding 's to the end of the word.

The men's curling match will take place at 2:00, and the women's will take place at 5:00.

Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns generally do not use an apostrophe to indicate possession. This rule also applies to the possessive form of *it*, which is *its*.

Do you see that woman over there? Her dog is very friendly.
He was late for work because his car did not start this morning.
Is that your house? No, ours is the one beside it.
Virtue is its own reward.

Some possessive pronouns do, however, use 's.

That meal would not be to everyone's taste.

Note: *it's* is not a possessive but a contraction (short form) for *it is*.

It's warm in here. = It is warm in here.