

chicago manual of style spelling for plurals

Article Title: Mastering Chicago Manual of Style Spelling for Plurals

Introduction to Chicago Manual of Style Spelling for Plurals

chicago manual of style spelling for plurals guides writers through the nuances of pluralization, a fundamental aspect of English grammar that can often present challenges. Ensuring correct plural forms is crucial for clarity, professionalism, and adherence to established style guides. This comprehensive article delves into the specific rules and exceptions governing pluralization as outlined in the widely respected *Chicago Manual of Style* (CMOS). We will explore common pitfalls, the treatment of foreign-origin words, and the systematic approach CMOS advocates for constructing correct plurals. Understanding these principles is essential for anyone aiming for precise and polished written communication, whether in academic, professional, or publishing contexts. By mastering the CMOS approach to plurals, writers can confidently navigate this often-tricky area of grammar.

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General Rules for Pluralization in CMOS

The *Chicago Manual of Style* generally adheres to the standard English practice of forming plurals by adding -s or -es to the singular form of a noun. This is the most common and straightforward method, applied to the vast majority of nouns. For example, "book" becomes "books," and "chair" becomes "chairs." When a noun ends in a consonant sound, adding -s is typically sufficient. However, the manual also provides guidance on exceptions and specific categories of words that require more attention.

CMOS emphasizes consistency and clarity above all else. While adhering to rules is important, the ultimate goal is for the reader to understand the text without ambiguity. Therefore, when a standard rule might lead to an awkward or potentially confusing plural, writers are encouraged to consult the manual's more specific guidelines or opt for the most common and widely accepted form.

Plurals of Nouns Ending in -s, -x, -z, -ch, and -sh

Nouns that end in a hissing or buzzing sound—specifically those ending in -s, -x, -z, -ch, and -sh—typically form their plurals by adding -es. This rule is applied to make the plural form more pronounceable. For instance, "bus" becomes "buses," "box" becomes "boxes," "blitz" becomes "blitzes," "church" becomes "churches," and "brush" becomes "brushes."

There are occasional exceptions, often based on pronunciation. For example, some nouns ending in -ch that are pronounced with a hard "k" sound (like a Greek origin) may take only an -s, such as "monarchs" and "stomachs." However, the general rule of adding -es for these endings is the primary guideline provided by CMOS.

Plurals of Nouns Ending in -y

The pluralization of nouns ending in -y depends on the letter preceding the -y. If the -y is preceded by a consonant, the -y is usually changed to -i and -es is added. Examples include "baby" becoming "babies" and "city" becoming "cities."

If the -y is preceded by a vowel, the plural is typically formed by simply adding -s. For instance, "boy" becomes "boys," and "key" becomes "keys." Proper nouns ending in -y also generally follow this rule, with exceptions for names that have established conventional plural forms.

Plurals of Nouns Ending in -o

Nouns ending in -o present a mixed bag of rules, often depending on the word's origin and common usage. Many nouns ending in -o, particularly those of English origin or commonly used words, form their plurals by adding -es. Examples include "potato" becoming "potatoes" and "echo" becoming "echoes."

However, many other nouns ending in -o, especially musical terms, abbreviations, and words of foreign origin, form their plurals by simply adding -s. This category includes words like "piano" (pianos), "photo" (photos), and "cello" (cellos). CMOS advises consulting a dictionary for words ending in -o if there is any doubt, as usage can be inconsistent.

Plurals of Nouns Ending in -f or -fe

Many nouns ending in -f or -fe change the -f or -fe to a -v and add -es to form the plural. This is a common pattern seen in words like "knife" (knives), "wolf" (wolves), and "leaf" (leaves).

Despite this common pattern, there are numerous exceptions where nouns ending in -f or -fe simply add -s to form their plural. These include words such as "roof" (roofs), "chief" (chiefs), "scarf" (scarfs or scarves, with scarves being more common), and "handkerchief" (handkerchiefs). As with -o endings, consulting a dictionary for less common words is a good practice.

Irregular Plurals

English is replete with irregular plural forms that do not follow the standard rules. These often stem from Old English or other linguistic influences. CMOS provides guidance on these common irregularities.

Some common examples of irregular plurals include:

- man → men
- woman → women
- child → children
- foot → feet
- tooth → teeth
- mouse → mice
- goose → geese
- ox → oxen

Writers should familiarize themselves with these common irregular forms to ensure accuracy.

Foreign-Origin Plurals

The *Chicago Manual of Style* acknowledges that many English words are derived from other languages and retain their original plural forms. However, it also notes that English often develops Anglicized plurals for these words, and both can be acceptable depending on context and common usage.

For words of Latin or Greek origin, classical plurals are sometimes used. For example, "crisis" (plural: crises), "analysis" (plural: analyses), "datum" (plural: data), and "medium" (plural: media) are common examples. CMOS suggests that when an Anglicized plural is in common use and clearly understood, it is often preferable for clarity, such as "stadiums" instead of "stadia." However, for established terms where the foreign plural is standard (like "data"), it should be used.

Plurals of Proper Nouns

Plurals of proper nouns generally follow the same rules as common nouns, with a focus on readability and common practice. For names ending in -s, -x, or -z, adding -es is typical, such as "the Joneses." Names ending in -y often add -s, like "the Kennedys."

For surnames that end in a vowel sound, adding -s is usually straightforward, such as "the Smiths." The pluralization of family names can sometimes be a matter of established convention, and CMOS advises writers to use the form most commonly accepted for that particular name or family.

Plurals of Compound Nouns

The pluralization of compound nouns—nouns made up of two or more words—depends on which part of the compound is the "headword" or the most significant element. Generally, the plural is formed by pluralizing the main noun within the compound.

For example, in "mother-in-law," "mother" is the headword, so the plural is "mothers-in-law." In "passer-by," "passer" is the element that is doing the action, so the plural is "passers-by." Hyphenated compounds are usually treated this way. For unhyphenated compounds, the last word is often pluralized if it functions as the primary noun (e.g., "newsstand" becomes "newsstands"), but this can vary.

Plurals of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CMOS recommends that plurals of abbreviations and acronyms be formed by adding -s without an apostrophe. For example, the plural of "CD" is "CDs," and the plural of "DVD" is "DVDs." This rule applies to both initialisms and acronyms that are pronounced as words.

For abbreviations that end in a period, the period is retained before the added -s, such as "Mr." becoming "Mrs." (though this is a singular-to-plural gender change, it illustrates the principle of adding -s). The key is to avoid apostrophes in forming plurals of abbreviations and acronyms to prevent confusion with possessives.

Plurals of Numbers and Letters

When referring to numbers or letters as nouns themselves, CMOS advises using an apostrophe followed by an -s to form the plural, particularly if the letter or number could be confused with another word or a singular form. For example, "mind your p's and q's" or "The band played songs from the 1980s."

However, if clarity is not an issue, an apostrophe may be omitted. For instance, "Her grades were all As." For numbers, the decades are commonly written with an apostrophe, such as "the '90s," but CMOS prefers "the 1990s" for clarity and formality. When referring to multiple instances of a numerical digit as a numeral, simply adding -s is often sufficient, like "There were three 7s on the dice."

Plurals of Words Used as Words

When a word is being discussed as a word, not for its meaning, CMOS suggests italicizing the word and adding an apostrophe followed by an -s to form the plural. For example, "The sentence contained too many of's."

This rule helps distinguish the word being discussed from its grammatical function within a sentence. It's a way to clearly mark that you are talking about the linguistic entity itself, rather than its use in conveying meaning. This applies to words used as nouns, verbs, or any other part of speech when the focus is on the word itself.

FAQ

Q: What is the general rule for forming plurals according to the Chicago Manual of Style?

A: The general rule in the Chicago Manual of Style is to add -s to the singular form of most nouns to create the plural. For example, "cat" becomes "cats."

Q: How does CMOS handle nouns ending in -s, -x, -z, -ch, and -sh?

A: Nouns ending in these sounds typically form their plurals by adding -es to ensure pronounceability, such as "box" becoming "boxes" and "church" becoming "churches."

Q: What are the rules for pluralizing nouns ending in -y?

A: If a noun ends in -y preceded by a consonant, the -y is usually changed to -i and -es is added (e.g., "baby" becomes "babies"). If the -y is preceded by a vowel, simply add -s (e.g., "boy" becomes "boys").

Q: Are there specific guidelines for nouns ending in -o?

A: Yes, nouns ending in -o have varied pluralization. Many add -es (e.g., "potato" to "potatoes"), while others add -s, particularly musical terms and abbreviations (e.g., "piano" to "pianos"). CMOS recommends consulting a dictionary for less common words.

Q: How does CMOS advise on forming plurals for compound nouns?

A: Plurals for compound nouns are typically formed by pluralizing the principal or headword of the compound. For example, "mother-in-law" becomes "mothers-in-law."

Q: What is the preferred method for pluralizing abbreviations and acronyms in CMOS?

A: The Chicago Manual of Style recommends adding an -s without an apostrophe to form plurals of abbreviations and acronyms, such as "CDs" and "DVDs."

Q: How are plurals of foreign-origin words handled in CMOS?

A: CMOS recognizes both original foreign plurals (e.g., "crisis" - "crises") and Anglicized plurals (e.g., "stadiums"). It often favors the Anglicized form if it is common and clear, but adheres to established usage for specific terms.

Q: When should an apostrophe be used to form a plural according to CMOS?

A: An apostrophe followed by an -s is generally recommended for forming plurals of letters and numbers when clarity is needed to avoid confusion, as in "mind your p's and q's" or "the 1980s." It is also used for words discussed as words themselves.

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