

# MORPHY

TEACHER RESOURCE





## What You Need to Know

*Please note: This is an overview of information, not a complete guide to everything there is to know about plural forms in English.*

Plurals (more than one) can be indicated with the morpheme <(e)s>. (The suffix is recorded this way to show that there are two forms for this suffix. Some prefer to write it as two separate suffixes: <s> and <es>.) There are other plural suffixes in English so we do not say that <(e)s> is THE plural suffix. This suffix is also used to create third person singular, present tense. For example,

go+es → goes

*She goes to the park after school.*

Additionally, not all plurals are formed by suffixing. These plurals may be classified as “irregular” in some resources but they can often be explained orthographically and therefore are just another way we represent plural words in English. For example,

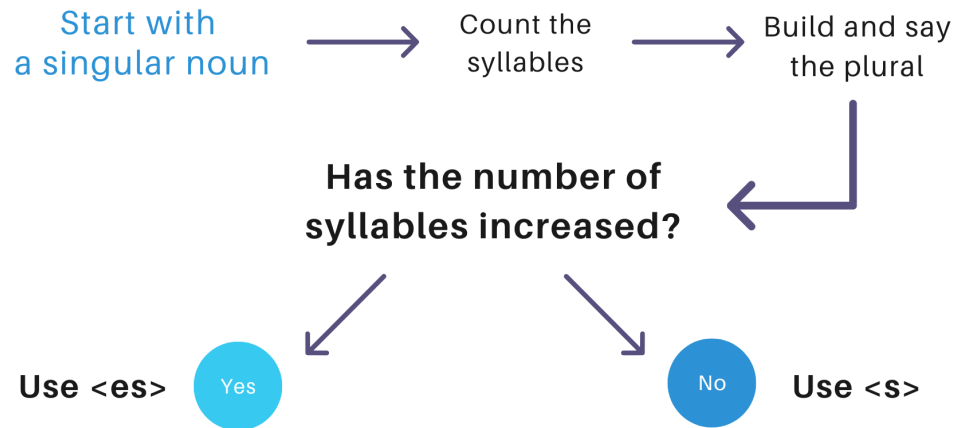
foot + {plural} → feet

*My feet smell when they get sweaty.*

The full form of the most common plural suffix is <es> and the shortened version is <s>. For the most part, the choice of which form we use is based on the syllable count in the final spelling.

- Use the shortened form of the suffix <s> whenever possible
- Use full form <es> whenever the plural forms another syllable

## Forming Plurals with <(e)s>



### Words with a Final, Non-Syllabic <e>

Base words that end with a final, single, non-syllabic <e> (which sometimes goes by “Magic E”, “Bossy E”, or “Silent E”) usually experience a change (i.e. replace the <e>) when adding a suffix that starts with a vowel. Rather than teaching students to simply “add an <s>” for words that end with a final, single, non-syllabic <e>, it is important to demonstrate the correct use of suffixes (and therefore this suffixing convention) whenever it occurs.

singular	plural
<i>horse</i>	<i>horses</i>
1 syllable	2 syllables

~~*horse*~~ + *es* → *horses*

## One Suffix, Three Phonemes

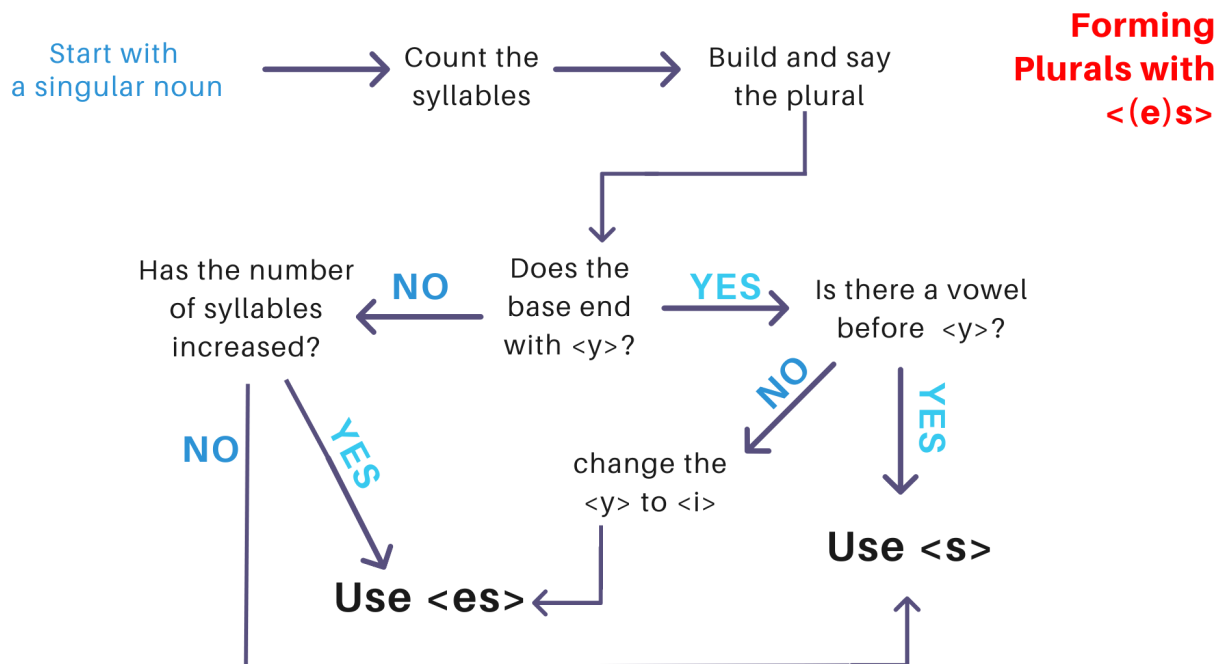
The suffix <s> can be pronounced /s/ or /z/, and <-es> is pronounced as /ɪz/. Spending time mapping words (identifying grapheme/phoneme correspondences) and highlighting this to students is important. Ask students to sort a collection of plurals according to the final sound of each. Do they notice a pattern within each group of words?

## When the Base Changes (Words that End with <y> or <f>)

<vowel + y> is considered a vowel digraph and is treated as a single unit (or grapheme). As such, the base (or stem) does not change and we can simply add an <s>. Examples of this include

day + s → days

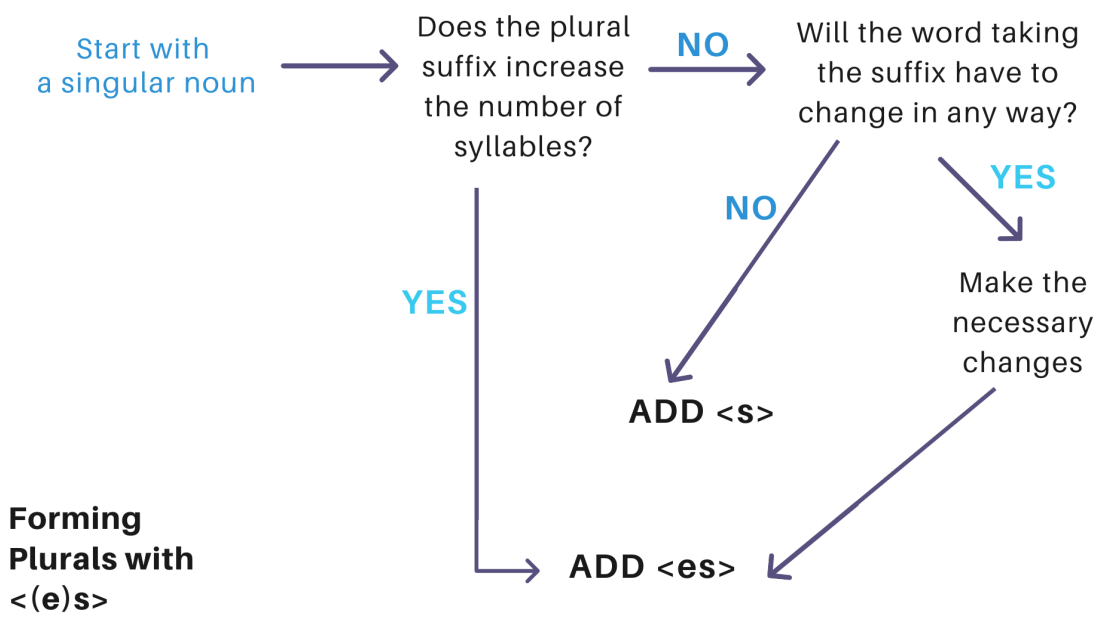
boy + s → boys.



When the base or stem changes in any way to build the plural form, we use the full suffix <es>. For example, if the base ends with <consonant + y> we switch the <y> to <i> before adding <es>. (This is because unlike <vowel + y>, <consonant + y> are two separate graphemes and must be treated as such. When the <y> becomes internal after suffixing, it is changed to <i>.) Bases that end in /f/ due to a single <f> or <fe> sometimes change to <v> when building the plural form of the word. Once again, because the base changes, we use <es> for the plural spelling.

*daisy*<sup>i</sup> + *es* → *daisies*

*loaf*<sup>v</sup> + *es* → *loaves*



## Words that End with <o>

Did you know that polysyllabic words that have a single final <o> were originally loan words from another language? Examples of this include echo, casino, and tomato.

**Words that end with <o> use both full and short forms of this suffix.**

Monosyllabic words with a final <o> tend to use <es>.

go + es → goes      do + es → does

Polysyllabic words that have been fully 'adopted' into English, use <es>. These words include\*:

buffalo	cargo	echo	embargo
hero	mango	mosquito	motto
potato	tomato	tornado	volcano

*\*Please note this is not a complete list.*

Other polysyllabic words that are still considered loan words will likely use <s>.

Examples of these words include\*:

banjo	casino	torso	patio
tobacco	kimono	polo	zero

*\*Please note this is not a complete list.*

There are several cases where the shortened form <s> is used:

- There is another vowel before the final <o>  
*radios      videos      cuckoos*
- The word is a proper name  
*Romeos      Gizmos*
- The single form is an abbreviation of a longer word  
*hippos      photos      kilos*
- The word is an Italian musical term  
*pianos      sopranos*

## Apostrophes and Plurals

The purpose of the apostrophe is to represent omitted letters in a contraction (such as don't or can't) or to show possessive relationships (such as Bob's dog). You might notice that even autocorrect gets this wrong from time to time; apostrophes are not usually used to show plurals. The apostrophe is only used as a plural suffix in two special cases (to avoid confusion in written words):

- When plurals are needed for short words out of their usual grammatical context.

*Remember these do's and don'ts.*

- Plurals of single letters

*There are three a's in bananas.*

Plurals of acronyms and numbers are sometimes written with apostrophes. This is not necessary, even though it might look odd at first. It is perfectly acceptable to write DVDs, RNs, or 1920s.

## Introducing the Concept

### Teachers Know Best

As you know your students and their current understanding of morphology concepts best, you will decide just how deep and how quickly to unpack this learning with them. You may wish to start with a selection of words that simply add <s> in their plural form before introducing words that use <es>. Or you may wish to introduce both at the same time, drawing attention to the syllabic changes that occur at times when moving from singular to plural form (and how we use that information to help us spell the word correctly). No matter how you choose to explore this concept with students, anchor their understanding of morphemes through the use of word sums.

### Word Sorts

Word sorts can be a powerful tool for students to use to develop and share their thinking with others. This also allows teachers to see quickly any misconceptions or opportunities for further exploration. Word sorts can be guided (where teachers

provide the sorting categories) or open (where students determine their own sorting rules). Word sort topics could include:

- Singular VS Plural
- No Syllabic Changes VS Syllabication Increase
- Base changes VS Base doesn't change
- <s> to make plural VS <es> to make plural
- Ending sounds of plurals

Adding word sums to a word sorting activity further cements understanding and offers another opportunity for formative assessment. Perhaps asking students to write word sums for two words of their choosing from each category would be sufficient.

## Games and Activities

### Write the Word Sum

Students use their individual whiteboards and markers to write the word sum for the plural word you have written on the board. Once everyone has written the sum, they can turn the boards to show you or you can ask a student to write their response at the front of the room to share with everyone. Discuss misconceptions and reinforce spelling conventions of why we spell the plural the way we do.

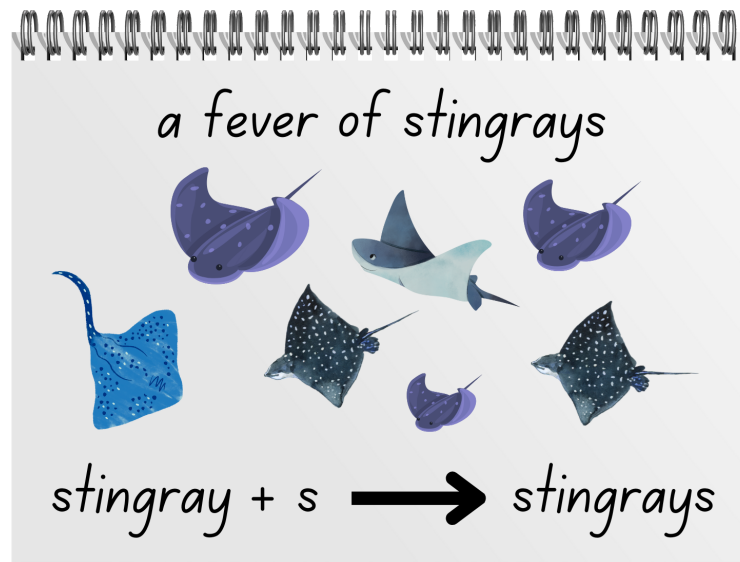
### Memory

Write plurals on one index card and the word sum on another. Students turn all cards face-down and play memory, matching the plural with its corresponding word sum. To keep the pair, students must read the word sum aloud.

### Classroom Book: Collective Nouns

This project could be done collaboratively with book buddies or just as a class. Introduce the concept of collective nouns to your students. A collective noun is a term used to refer to a group of something (such as a murder of crows or a flock of birds). You could use *An Ambush of Tigers* by Betsy R Rosenthal or a [video](#) to do this. Write collective nouns on different pieces of paper for students to pick from a

container; you may wish to stick with [groups of animals](#). You will want to select ones that feature <(e)s> in the plural form. After students have their collective noun, they will write the collective noun at the top of the page and the word sum for the plural at the bottom. In the middle of the page, they illustrate their collective noun. When finished, all pages can be assembled in a classroom book for students to enjoy throughout the year.

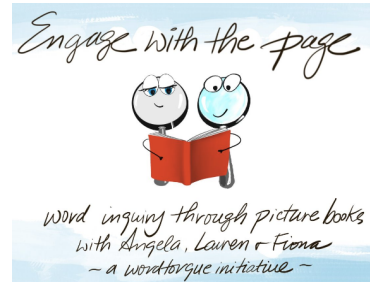
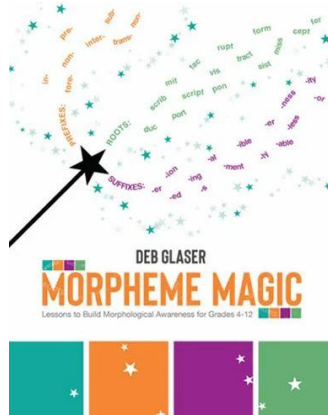
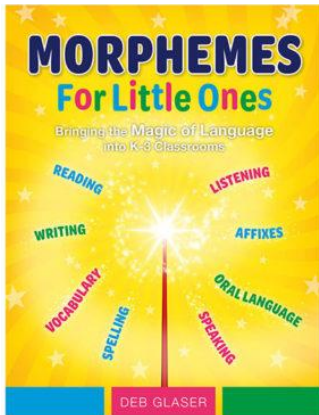


### Tune Into Other Plurals

As mentioned earlier, there are more ways than just <(e)s> to create the plural form of words. Develop an anchor chart or central classroom location to collect these words. Encourage students to look for patterns amongst the collected words. To write word sums for these words, you can use this structure <base> + {plural} → <plural form>. The book *One Foot, Two Feet* by Felicia Zekausakas and Peter Maloney would be a great text to read as a class to start this collection of plurals.

foot + {plural} → feet  
mouse + {plural} → mice  
moose + {plural} → moose

## Resources



[Engage with the Page](#)

## References

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***For more information, please contact your local consortia office.***

