Plural nouns: Irregular endings

Introduction



There were lots of people at the event, including men, women & children.

Definition and use

We usually add s or es to a singular noun to form the plural but there are also irregular forms of plural nouns in English.

Construction and examples

Most depend on the ending of the singular noun but there are exceptions and some involve other spelling changes. Here are some examples of the most common:

	Singular	Plural	Comments
f/fe	shelf half leaf life knife	shelves halves leaves lives knives	This includes most words ending in 'lf' but an exception is 'gulfs'. Words ending in 'ff' take 's' e.g. 'cliffs'. Some words ending in a single 'f' take 's', e.g. 'chiefs', whilst others can take either form, e.g. 'scarfs'/'scarves'.

oo	**tooth** **goose** **foot**	**teeth** **geese** **feet**	**This only applies to a minority of words. Most with 'oo' are regular, e.g. boots, spoons, books.**
Sometimes, there is no change.	**sheep** **deer** **fish** **means** **series** **species** **aircraft**	**sheep** **deer** **fish/fishes*** **means** **series** **species** **aircraft**	**There are lots of other examples including more animals and types of fish, e.g. salmon and cod.** **It is correct to use 'fish' for more than one of the same species and 'fishes' for more than one of different species. 'Fish' is also an uncountable noun when referring to food.**

See also subject/verb agreement and compound nouns.

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Last update: **2023/02/14 14:21**