

One Cat, Two Cats: When to Add -s or -es

One cat becomes two cats: a small spelling change shows that there is more than one. This guide introduces regular plurals with -s and -es, linking a proposed short video and picture-card activity to Year 1 English in England.

What it is

A plural is a word form that shows more than one: one cat, two cats. Regular plurals follow a spelling pattern, such as adding -s or -es. This guide focuses on cat/cats, dog/dogs, bus/buses and wish/wishes.

The Department for Education's English curriculum includes teaching Year 1 pupils to add -s and -es to make plurals. Its grammar appendix also connects these endings with changes in meaning.

The proposed video and printable sorting activity would make that connection visible through pictures and words. They could be used in the autumn term, but the curriculum does not require this topic to be taught in a particular term. Ask your child's teacher when it fits into their learning.

What happens

The proposed video would begin with one object, then show more than one. A word beside each picture would change too: cat becomes cats, and bus becomes buses. Your child could notice both the extra objects and the added letters.

The Department for Education's spelling appendix explains the pattern through sound. In cats, the ending sounds like 's'; in dogs, it sounds like 'z'. Both use -s. In buses and wishes, the ending sounds like 'iz' and adds another syllable — a beat in the spoken word — so these examples use -es.

For the printable activity, children could match pictures with words, then sort the plural words into groups labelled -s and -es. An adult could read the words aloud where needed.

What it means for your child

The aim is to connect meaning with spelling: cats tells the reader that there is more than one cat. Your child is learning how a small addition to a word can change what it tells us.

Year 1 English includes reading words with taught -s and -es endings as well as spelling them. The Department for Education advises teaching reading alongside spelling, so children can read back the words they have written.

You could invite your child to say a word, match its picture and look at its ending before trying to write it. If your child has special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), or is learning English, ask their teacher which words and ways of taking part suit their current learning. The activity can be a shared conversation.

How you can help at home

Try a brief game with everyday objects or pictures. Put out one toy cat, then add another, and say 'one cat, two cats'. You could write cat and cats on scraps of paper and invite your child to spot what changed.

Next, try pictures of a bus and several buses. Say both words together and listen for the extra beat in buses. Offer just a few pairs at a time, rather than a long list.

Your child could point, move cards or say the words while you write. If they enjoy writing, invite them to label a picture. Keep it playful and stop when they have had enough. Ask their teacher for familiar examples that match the words being taught at school.

Questions parents often ask

Does every plural use -s or -es? No. This activity introduces regular plurals; it does not cover every way English words show more than one.

Does my child need to learn it in the autumn term? There is no fixed autumn-term requirement in the English curriculum. Schools have flexibility over when they introduce content. Ask the teacher about your child's class.

What if my child writes 'bus' for several buses? You could say 'one bus, two buses', then show the added -es together. Keep the correction gentle and brief.

Do we need the printable? You could use drawings or objects instead. If your child finds the words difficult, ask their teacher which examples to start with and how to adapt the activity.

Sources

- Department for Education — National curriculum in England: English programmes of study, Year 1 reading and spelling requirements and school curriculum guidance. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study>
- Department for Education — English Appendix 1: Spelling, Year 1 guidance on adding s and es. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/239784/English_Appendix_1_-_Spelling.pdf
- Department for Education — English Appendix 2: Vocabulary, grammar and punctuation, Year 1 regular plural endings and their effects on meaning. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335190/English_Appendix_2_-_Vocabulary_grammar_and_punctuation.pdf