

Latin Plurals Pronunciation and Lesson Notes

Most English nouns take –s, –es or -ies for their plural form.

- dog / dogs
- bus / buses
- baby / babies

Words with Latin plurals are the exception. These academic and scientific words retain their original Latin plural endings. Since not many people speak Latin nowadays, words with Latin plurals are often used incorrectly in English. Common mistakes include:

1. getting the singular and plural forms of the noun mixed up.
2. incorrectly add an –s to a word that is already a plural, e.g. ‘Here are the ~~datas~~.’

Note: ‘data’ is technically a plural noun. However, the meaning is often used in the singular, which is acceptable, because few people know the singular form ‘datum’. Therefore, both of the sentences below are correct:

- ‘Here is the data.’
- ‘Here are the data.’

Singular Noun	Plural Noun	Non-Standard Plural	Always Incorrect
fungus /ˈfʌŋ.gəs/ ‘fun-gus’	fungi /ˈfʌŋ.gəɪ/ ‘fun-guy’	funguses /ˈfʌŋ.gəs.ɪz/ ‘fun-gus-iz’	
cactus /ˈkæk.təs/ ‘kak-tus’	cacti /ˈkæk.təɪ/ ‘kak-tie’	cactuses /ˈkæk.təs.ɪz/ ‘kak-tus-iz’	
crisis /ˈkraɪ.sɪs/ ‘cry-sis’	crises /ˈkraɪ.sɪz/ ‘cry-seas’		crisises ‘cry-sis-iz’
criterion /kraɪˈtɪə.ri.ən/ ‘cry-tier-ri-un’ <i>*frequently misused</i>	criteria /kraɪˈtɪə.ri.ə/ ‘cry-tier-ri-uh’		criterias ‘cry-tier-ri-uhs’
phenomenon /fəˈnɒm.i.nən/ ‘fa-nom-i-non’	phenomena <i>*frequently misused</i> /fəˈnɒm.i.nə/ ‘fa-nom-i-na’	phenomenons /fəˈnɒm.i.nənz/ ‘fa-nom-i-nunz’	
datum <i>*rarely used</i> /ˈdeɪ.təm/ ‘day-tum’	data /ˈdeɪ.tə/ ‘day-ta’		datas ‘day-tuhs’
memorandum /ˌmem.əˈræn.dəm/ ‘mem-uh-ran-dum’	memoranda /ˌmem.əˈræn.dəm/ ‘mem-uh-ran-duh’	memorandums /ˌmem.əˈræn.dəmz/ ‘mem-uh-ran-dumz’	
medium /ˈmiː.di.əm/ ‘me-di-um’	media /ˈmiː.di.ə/ ‘me-di-ah’		medias ‘me-di-ahs’

1. criteria (n; plural): the standard by which something is judged, e.g. 'Applicants for this job must meet all of the selection criteria'.
2. phenomenon (n; singular): something that can be observed to happen, usually in a scientific sense. For example, 'The trend of being a house husband is a relatively new social phenomenon.'
3. datum (n; singular) = a single piece of information. Note that 'datum' is rarely used. People say both 'The data is/are conclusive'.
4. Memorandum (n; singular) = an official note from one person to another in an organisation. Also called a 'memo' (n).
5. medium (n; singular) = the artistic material used to create a work of art. For example, 'The artist Van Gogh's preferred medium was paint on canvas'.
6. media (singular or plural) = to refer to the communications industry in general, including broadcasters and journalists. E.g. 'The media is/are reporting on the American elections'.