

## Classical Roots: Formation of Plurals and Derivation of Academic Abbreviations

### Formation of Plurals

in English Nouns Derived from Latin and Greek

A small number of English nouns have irregular plurals because they were adopted from Latin or Greek directly into English usage. These words kept their Latin or Greek configuration because they were used primarily in scientific or academic discourse.

Some of the more frequently encountered words, clustered into the linguistic groups to which they belong in the original classical language:

#### a>ae (Latin)

alumna, -ae  
antenna, -ae  
formula, -ae

#### us>i (Latin)

alumnus, -i  
emeritus, -i  
focus, -i  
locus, -i  
**stimulus, -i**  
syllabus, -i

[However,  
prospectus, prospectuses<sup>1</sup>]

#### um>a (Latin)

agendum, -a  
auditorium, -a  
curriculum, -a  
colloquium, -a  
**datum, -a**  
erratum, -a  
**medium, -a**  
maximum, -a  
minimum, -a  
symposium, -a

#### on>a (Greek)

**criterion, -a**  
**phenomenon, -a**

#### a>ata (Greek)

**schema, schemata**  
stigma, stigmata  
stoma, stomata  
thema (theme), themata

#### is>es (Latin, from Greek)

analysis, analyses  
hypothesis, hypotheses  
thesis, theses

Technical details for the obsessive:

In the Latin (and Greek) language, each noun belongs to a family or *declension*. The declensions are distinguishable because of their endings (for example, nominative singular nouns in the Latin first declension end with -a, nominative singular nouns in the second declension end with -us).

In addition, nouns (and adjectives) change their endings depending on their number (singular or plural), gender (masculine, feminine, neuter), and how they are being used in a sentence (subject, direct object, indirect object, object of a preposition, etc.). In fact, a noun could have six or eight different endings. Each declension has a different pattern of endings. For example, the possible endings of the Latin second declension (for masculine nouns) are: -us, -i, -o, -um, -orum, -is, -os.

<sup>1</sup> Unlike the other -us nouns, this one is from the 4<sup>th</sup> declension, not the 2<sup>nd</sup> declension, so, in Latin, the plural would be "prospectus," same as singular. To clarify the number in English, we apply the English rule for plurals: "prospectuses."

**Academic Abbreviations**  
their classical derivations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Latin derivation</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
c. or ca.	<i>circa</i> (preposition)	around (at approximately the same time)
cf.	<i>confer</i> (imperative of <i>conferro</i> )	compare with [not the equivalent of “see”]
et al.	<i>et alia</i> (plural of <i>alium</i> )	and others (other different ones)
etc.	<i>et cetera</i> (plural of <i>ceterum</i> )	and others (the rest of the set)
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i>	for example (literally, “an example, as a courtesy”)
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> (adverb)	in the same place
i.e.	<i>illud est</i>	in other words (literally, “that is”)
N.B.	<i>nota bene</i>	Note well; take careful note.
op. cit.	<i>opere citato</i>	"in the work cited" A frequently abused scholarly abbreviation; it is properly used in citing a passage on a different page of a work recently noted.
passim	<i>passim</i> (adverb)	here and there, throughout
per se	<i>per se</i>	by itself
[sic]	<i>sic</i> (adverb)	so stated in the original (literally, “thus, so”)
vs.	<i>versus</i>	against
viz.	<i>videlicet</i>	obviously, plainly, of course