



Ah, the holiday season is upon us. It's time for hot beverages, twinkling lights, pine scents, and . . . mailboxes filled with incorrectly punctuated Christmas cards.

We ran a similar tip last year, but who better to give advice on this subject than someone with a last name that ends in -s! Regular WTW contributor Jaime Grimes, DVP technical writer-editor, also produces "Write It Right(ly)," a periodic DVP Download helpful tip. Email her at mzo4@cdc.gov with any writing questions—seriously, she loves that kind of stuff!

Happy Holidays' Holiday's Holidayses Holidays

You know what I'm talking about:

Merry Christmas! From the Fields'
Happy Holidays from the Smith's!
Seasons Greetings from the Jones

All of the above are incorrect. It's enough to make a writer think, "bah humbug!"

It's never too late to learn the correct way to punctuate possessive nouns that end in -s.

If a common or proper noun ends in -s, add "es" to make it plural, as seen here:

- The last name Fields becomes "the Fieldses."
- The last name Grimes becomes "the Grimeses."
- The last name Jones becomes "the Joneses."

Also acceptable is writing "the Fields family," "the Grimes family," or "the Jones family," as it is for proper names that do not end in -s, like "the Smith family" or "the Grammar family."

Christmas card addresses, greetings, and closings should never show possession. But generally, follow these rules:

- If a singular common or proper noun ends in -s, -x, -ch, -sh, or -z and owns something, add -'s:

- The boss's office
 - The boss's staff members
 - Mr. Ross's favorite restaurant
 - Mr. Ross's meetings
 - The finch's cage
 - The quiz's first question
- If a plural common or proper noun ends in -s, -x, -ch, -sh, or -z and owns something, add -es':
 - The bosses' office
 - The bosses' staff (more to come in a future WTW on words with a string of "es" sounds)
 - The finches' cage
 - The quizzes' first questions
- If a singular common or proper noun ends in a letter other than the ones above, such as -e, and owns something, add -'s:
 - The bike's wheel
 - The hat's brim
- If a plural common or proper noun ends in a letter other than the ones above, such as -e, and owns something, add -s':
 - The bikes' wheels
 - The hats' brims

There's still time to make your cards the most correct cards in the mailbox (because that's the whole point, right?). But for now, I'll leave you with this fun fact: My husband and I often sign our cards with "the Grimeseseseses" because it cracks us up. One year, a greeting card company shortened it to "the Grimes" during their editorial review. CRISIS(eseseses)!

May you be greeted with correctly punctuated holiday cards and have a great holiday season!