INFLECTED ENDINGS: Same stroke? Separate stroke?

Steno writers – particularly students – sometimes find themselves in a quagmire of indecision due to conflicting advice from theory authors and "experts" about various aspects of writing steno. Writing inflected endings is a case in point.

> **Always add /-D/-G/-Z(S) in separate strokes**: The U.S. national association (NCRA) doesn't say that approved theories *must* teach adding inflected endings in separate strokes, but the Theory Review Task Force has been critical of theories which don't subscribe to this principle. Some captioning companies are quoted as saying they require captioners to add *all* inflected endings in separate strokes.

> **Always add the /-D/-G/-Z(S) onto root words if possible**: Some theories, and also a well-known and respected realtime writer/lecturer/former national speed champion, admonish writers to always add –D, -G, -Z(S) onto root words, if possible, in order to reduce their average-strokes-per-word ratio.

Hmm. Two views which couldn't be much farther apart! It's little wonder if you find the contradiction confusing. So what should *you* do? As with most contradictions you encounter in life, investigate the pluses/minuses of the opposing viewpoints and then decide what's best for *you*.

Concerns about adding inflected endings onto root words are two-fold: (1) Adding –D, -G, -Z(S) onto root words creates hundreds of homonyms and stenonyms, conflicts which otherwise don't even exist for steno writers; (2) Misstrokes may result in incorrect plural/verb forms or past tense, putting the accuracy of the record at risk.

These are both very legitimate concerns. First let's talk about potential conflicts.

Some theories use –S, others use –Z, to create plurals/verb forms. *Both* create numerous homonyms when attached to root words ending in *vowel sounds.* Examples:

base/baize/bays	fleece/flees	nose/knows	rouse/rows
brace/braise/brays	gaze/gays	ice/eyes	cease/seize/sees
Bruce/bruise/brews	guise/guys	pace/pays	size/sighs
browse/brows	grace/graze/grays	peace/peas	sauce/saws
cruise/crews	gross/grows	pause/paws	souse/sows
close/clothes	haze/hays	praise/prays	space/spays
clause/claws	hose/hoes	price/prize/pries	spice/spies
daze/days	juice/Jews	prose/pros	tease/teas
dice/dies	Joyce/joys	place/plays	trace/trays
dose/does/doze	lace/laze/lays	police/please/pleas	trice/tries
deuce/dues	lease/lees	race/raise/rays	truce/trues
face/phase/fays	lice/lies	rice/rise/ryes	vice/vise/vies
phrase/frays	mace/maze/mays	rose/rows	use/yews
freeze/frees	niece/knees	ruse/rues	

Incorporating –D onto root words ending in *vowel sounds* also creates homonyms. Examples:

ode/owed	grade/grayed	pride/pried	staid/stayed
bade/bayed	hide/hied	proud/prowed	suede/swayed
bode/bowed	lode/lowed	raid/rayed	tide/tied
baud/bahed	aloud/allowed	rode/rowed	toad/towed
braid/brayed	mode/mowed	rude/rued	wade/weighed
Claude/clawed	mood/mooed	side/sighed	
'fraid/frayed	need/kneed	Slade/slayed	
guide/guyed	parade/prayed	spade/spayed	

Incorporating –G onto root words ending in *vowel sounds* rarely creates conflicts, but the occasional one, like plague/playing, can still jump up and bite you.

(Examples cited in this article are *not* complete lists of homonyms/stenonyms created by adding inflected endings to root words. But I'm listing those that come readily to mind because it's important to realize that far more than just a small handful of conflicts *are* created by adding inflected endings to root words!)

Unless you feel confident that when writing at reporting/captioning/CARTing speeds, under on-the-job pressures and distractions, you have enough mental resources to recognize and avoid all these conflicts, then you should seriously consider adding inflected endings *in a separate stroke* for any word ending in a *vowel sound*.

What about words ending in consonant sounds?

Using –Z to create plurals/verb forms *avoids* homonyms such as:

apse/aps	frounce/frowns	once/ones	since/sins
copse/cops	glance/glans	parse/pars	source/sores
course/cores	gorse/gores	pence/pens	sparse/spars
curse/curs	hearse/hers	pierce/peers	tense/tens
false/falls	hence/hens	pulse/pulls	Vance/vans
fierce/fears	house/hows	purse/purrs	whence/whens
force/fors	lapse/laps	scance/scans	wince/wins
dunce/duns	Morse/mores	scarce/scares	

–Z can be added to words ending in *consonant sounds* without creating conflicts *except* when the root word ends in a G or K sound (which may create conflicts with –GZ (shun) or BGZ (kshun) endings). Also, if your theory distinguishes –ts/-st, you can use -TS to create plurals/verb forms of root words ending in –T and avoid the shift from home position required to stroke –TZ.

Adding –D onto root words ending in *–l, -n, -r* sounds creates homonyms. Examples:

Baird/bared	chard/charred	guild/gilled	sold/soled
bald/balled	cord/cored	held/helled	sword/soared
band/banned	find/fined	hold/holed	told/tolled
bard/barred	foaled/fold	mild/miled	ward/warred
board/bored	fund/funned	mind/mined	weld/welled
bold/bowled	goaled/gold	pard/parred	wild/wiled
build/billed	gourd/gored	pend/penned	wind/wined

Incorporating –G onto root words ending in *-l*, *-n, -r, -sh (-RB)* sounds creates stenonyms (words which aren't pronounced or spelled the same but which would be written with the same steno). Examples:

bang/banning	dark/dashing	mark/mashing	sing/sinning
bark/bashing	dong/donning	narc/gnashing	stark/stashing
bilge/billing	dung/dunning	quark/quashing	stung/stunning
bulge/bulling	fang/fanning	pang/panning	sung/sunning
burg/burring	hark/hashing	ping/pinning	tang/tanning
burke/bushing	lark/lashing	rung/running	wing/winning

Absent some unusual principle in your theory, you *could* incorporate –D and –G onto words ending in consonant sounds *except –l, -n, -r* and *-sh* without creating conflicts. So your choices really are: (1) The consistency/automaticity of always adding –D and -G in separate strokes; (2) Stroking –D and –G in separate strokes only for root words ending in *–l, -n, -r,* or *-sh* sounds; (3) Adding –D and –G to all root words *except* those which would create conflicts – requiring the mental gymnastics of "I can write *fanned* in one stroke, but not *banned*, *doled* but not *bowled*; *scored* but not *cored*, *pushing* but not *bushing*, *spinning* but not *winning*," *purring* but not *burring*, *filling* but not *billing*, etc.

Decisions, decisions, decisions! When making **your** decision, it's important to keep in mind that writing machine shorthand at high speeds requires effort on the part of your fingers **and** your brain. Writing fewer strokes lets your fingers be a little lazier; but in most instances – and certainly in this one – the trade-off is that your brain has to work considerably harder. Only you can determine the best balance for **you** as to how much of the work your fingers should do and how much your brain can do. And it's worth remembering that if sparing your fingers a few strokes creates inconsistencies which cause *mental* hesitation, then saving strokes may actually be detracting from speed rather than contributing to speed.

In Phoenix Theory, we always come back for /-D, /-G in a second stroke, but we do so in a way that frequently avoids need for a **third** stroke. For ending strokes, we consistently omit the schwa vowel sound preceding consonants. Examples: –ered (-RD), -ers (-RZ), -ering (-RG), -ened (-PBD), -ening (-PBG), -ens (-PBZ), -eled (-LD), -ling (-LG), -les (-LZ), etc. These endings don't create conflicts and they eliminate the need to add inflected endings in a **third** stroke for a substantial number of words.

As for dragging in unwanted letters which may create incorrect plurals/verb forms and past tense, that's also a very legitimate concern. But addressing that specific concern by requiring **all** plurals/verb forms to be added in a second – or even third – stroke, seems somewhat excessive. Absent some serious flaw in stroking technique, extraneous letters occur in our notes when: (1) They're **adjacent** to other keys in the stroke. For –Z, this would apply only to root words ending in –D or -S. (2) Our fingers brush across or rest on an *extraneous* key heavily enough to trigger it. For example, P- and -P are stroked with our two longest fingers and consequently are the most susceptible to being *accidentally* triggered. But this doesn't apply to –Z because (a) it's stroked with the shortest finger; (b) triggering it requires an intentional extension of the little finger.

If you have any tendency to drag a –Z with an –S or –D, absolutely you should always avoid those possibilities for error by adding the –Z in a second stroke for root words ending in –S or -D. But how likely is it that someone will drag a -Z into strokes ending in any other consonant key? Regardless, if your goal is to become a captioner, you have to give consideration to the fact that, at least at present, some captioning companies do require their captioners to create *all* plurals/verb forms in a second stroke.

It's important to make a personal decision whether to incorporate inflected endings onto root words or add them in separate strokes and to follow that decision consistently so you create automatic responses and eliminate hesitation. I hope I've given you information which helps you make the informed decisions that work best for *you*.
(Carol Jochim, author, Phoenix Theory)