

Would you explain when to use “alumna” and when to use “alumnae?” This a good question, as Kappas we want to be sure to use the words correctly. Maybe this information written by Gay Chuba Barry, Penn State, Fraternity Publications Chairman, 1988-2004, will clarify your confusion.

Alumna - Alumnae...Oh, Dear!

“Latin is a language,
Dead as it can be.
First it killed the Romans,
And now it’s killing me.”

For most of us who took Latin in the “dark ages,” that little ditty carried the day for us. And oh how I can remember my Latin teacher, Miss Will. Drill was not a word she took lightly. This brings me full circle to the use of the words alumna and alumnae in its various forms.

Alumna – feminine singular... can be used as a noun or an adjective (modifier).

Noun - Mary is an alumna of Ohio State.

Adjective – Mary is an alumna member of Kappa Kappa Gamma.

When using alumna as an adjective, never use the plural form. Plurals can only be used as nouns.

Adjective – Mary and Jane are alumna members of Kappa Kappa Gamma.

Notice that even though alumna is modifying a plural noun it remains in singular form because in this case it is used as adjective.

Alumnae – feminine plural – can only be used as a noun.

Noun...plural – Mary and Jane are alumnae of Ohio State.

Remember, “alumnae” can only be used as a noun.

Parallel examples: collegiate members/alumna members.

Undergraduate members/alumna members. (Undergraduate, while also a noun, is used as an adjective here. Think of this example when deciding what is correct for the use of alumna or alumnae.) In all cases use alumna when it is immediately followed by a noun.

Too, keep in mind the difference between collegiate and collegian, which also find their roots in Latin. Collegiate is the adjective; collegian is the noun. Therefore, “we are collegiate members” or “Mary and Jane are collegians.”

Never, Mary and Jane are collegiates. (My grammar check just underlined collegiates as incorrect, indicating it is not a noun.)

Exception: Alumnae Association. If we were truly to follow “Miss Will’s” brilliant knowledge of Latin it would be Alumna Association. Incorrect usage through the years has now caused this to be acceptable.

Alumnus – male singular

Alumni – male plural...same rules apply for the use of these words as the above.

Hopefully this is helpful. When in doubt, always use *The Kappa Style Guide*.