

# Singular and plural

**A** Sometimes we use a *plural* noun for one thing that has two parts. For example:



These words are plural, so they take a plural verb:

- ☐ My **trousers are** too long. (*not* My trousers **is**)

You can also use **a pair of** + these words:

- ☐ **Those are** nice **jeans**.      *or*    That's **a nice pair of** jeans. (*not* a nice jeans)
- ☐ I need **some** new **glasses**.    *or*    I need **a new pair of** glasses.

**B** Some nouns end in **-ics**, but are not usually plural. For example:

**athletics    gymnastics    economics    politics**  
**physics    electronics    maths** (= mathematics)

- ☐ **Gymnastics is** my favourite sport. (*not* Gymnastics **are**)

**News** is not plural (see Unit 70B):

- ☐ I have **some news** for you. **It's** good news!

Some words that end in **-s** can be singular or plural. For example:

|                |                             |                                |
|----------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>means</b>   | <b>a means</b> of transport | <b>many means</b> of transport |
| <b>series</b>  | <b>a TV series</b>          | <b>two TV series</b>           |
| <b>species</b> | <b>a species</b> of fish    | <b>200 species</b> of fish     |

**C** Some singular nouns are often used with a plural verb. For example:

**audience    committee    company    family    firm    government    staff    team**

These nouns are all groups of people. We often think of them as a number of people (= they), not as one thing (= it). So we often use a plural verb:

- ☐ **The government** (= they) **have decided** to increase taxes.
- ☐ **The staff** at the company (= they) **are** not happy with **their** working conditions.

In the same way, we often use a plural verb after the name of a company or a sports team:

- ☐ **Shell have** increased the price of petrol.
- ☐ **Italy are** playing Brazil next Sunday (in a football match).

You can also use a singular verb (The government **wants** ... / Shell **has** ... etc.).

We use a plural verb with **police**:

- ☐ **The police are** investigating the crime, but **haven't** arrested anyone yet.  
(*not* The police **is** ... **hasn't**)

Note that we say **a police officer** / **a policeman** / **a policewoman** (*not* a police).

**D** We do not often use the plural of **person** ('persons'). We normally use **people** (a *plural* word):

- ☐ He's **a nice person**.    *but*    They are nice **people**. (*not* nice persons)
- ☐ **Many people don't** have enough to eat. (*not* Many people **doesn't**)

**E** We think of a sum of money, a period of time, a distance etc. as *one* thing. So we use a singular verb:

- ☐ **Fifty thousand pounds** (= it) **was** stolen in the robbery. (*not* were stolen)
- ☐ **Three years** (= it) **is** a long time to be without a job. (*not* Three years **are**)
- ☐ **Two miles isn't** very far to walk.

**1 Complete the sentences. Choose from the box.**

- 1 My eyesight is getting worse. I need glasses.
- 2 The trousers you bought for me ..... fit me.
- 3 The jacket you bought for me ..... fit me.
- 4 I need ..... scissors to cut this piece of material.
- 5 I can't find my binoculars. Have you seen ..... ?
- 6 I went shopping and bought a ..... of jeans.
- 7 Where ..... my sunglasses?
- 8 I went shopping and bought ..... pair of pyjamas.
- 9 I don't know much about politics. I'm not interested in .....

a  
are  
them  
doesn't  
pair  
it  
~~glasses~~  
some  
don't

**2 Complete the sentences. Use a word from section B (news, series etc.).**

- 1 'Have you heard the news?' 'No. What's happened?'
- 2 The bicycle is a ..... of transport.
- 3 A lot of American TV ..... are shown in other countries.
- 4 The tiger is an endangered .....
- 5 There will be a ..... of meetings to discuss the problem.
- 6 Fortunately the ..... wasn't as bad as we expected.
- 7 How many ..... of bird are there in the world?
- 8 I didn't have my phone, so I had no ..... of contacting you.

**3 Choose the correct form of the verb, singular or plural. In three sentences either the singular or plural verb is possible.**

- 1 Gymnastics is / are my favourite sport. (is is correct)
- 2 My new glasses doesn't / don't fit very well.
- 3 The police want / wants to interview two men about the robbery.
- 4 Physics was / were my favourite subject at school.
- 5 It's a nice place to visit. The people is / are very friendly.
- 6 Germany is / are playing Spain tomorrow night. Are you going to watch it?
- 7 Does / Do the police know how the accident happened?
- 8 Where do / does your family live?
- 9 Most people enjoy / enjoys music.
- 10 I like this cafe. The staff here is / are really friendly and efficient.

**4 Complete the sentences. Use is or isn't, and choose from the box.**

- 1 Three years is a long time to be without a job.
- 2 Thirty degrees ..... for Tom. He doesn't like hot weather.
- 3 Ten dollars ..... We need more than that.
- 4 Four days ..... for a holiday. You need at least a week.
- 5 Twenty kilos ..... Are you sure you can manage?

a lot to carry  
enough money  
too hot  
long enough  
a long time

**5 Are these sentences OK? Correct them where necessary.**

- 1 Three years are a long time to be without a job. Three years is a long time
- 2 The committee want to change the rules of the club. OK (wants is also correct)
- 3 Susan was wearing a black jeans. ....
- 4 I like Martin and Jane. They're very nice persons. ....
- 5 I'm going to buy some new pyjamas. ....
- 6 There was a police directing traffic in the street. ....
- 7 This scissors isn't very sharp. ....
- 8 The company have decided to open a new factory. ....
- 9 This plant is very rare species. ....
- 10 Twelve hours are a long time to be on a plane. ....