

Singular and plural

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

				
trousers (<i>two legs</i>) also jeans/tights/shorts/pants	pyjamas (<i>top and bottom</i>)	glasses	binoculars	scissors

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

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

News is not plural (see Unit 70B):

- ☐ What time **is the news** on TV? (*not are the news*)

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

means a means of transport **many means** of transport
series a television series **two television series**
species a species of bird **200 species** of bird

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 sports team or a company:

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

A singular verb (The government **wants** ... / Shell **has** ... etc.) is also possible.

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.

79.1 Complete each sentence using a word from Sections A or B. Sometimes you need **a** or **some**.

- 1 My eyesight isn't very good. I need glasses.
- 2 A species is a group of animals or plants that have the same characteristics.
- 3 Footballers don't wear trousers when they play. They wear _____.
- 4 The bicycle is _____ of transport.
- 5 The bicycle and the car are _____ of transport.
- 6 I want to cut this piece of material. I need _____.
- 7 A friend of mine is writing _____ of articles for the local newspaper.
- 8 There are a lot of American TV _____ shown on TV in Britain.
- 9 While we were out walking, we saw many different _____ of bird.

79.2 In each example the words on the left are connected with an activity (for example, a sport or an academic subject). Write the name of the activity. The beginning of the word is given.

- | | | | |
|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|
| 1 calculate | algebra | equation | <u>mathematics</u> |
| 2 government | election | minister | p_____ |
| 3 finance | trade | employment | e_____ |
| 4 running | jumping | throwing | a_____ |
| 5 light | heat | gravity | ph_____ |
| 6 exercises | somersault | parallel bars | gy_____ |
| 7 processor | silicon chip | gigabyte | el_____ |

79.3 Choose the correct form of the verb, singular or plural. In two sentences either the singular or plural verb is possible.

- 1 Gymnastics is / ~~are~~ my favourite sport. (is is correct)
- 2 The trousers you bought for me doesn't / don't fit me.
- 3 The police want / wants to interview two men about the robbery last week.
- 4 Physics was / were my best subject at school.
- 5 Can I borrow your scissors? Mine isn't / aren't sharp enough.
- 6 It's a nice place to visit. The people is / are very friendly.
- 7 Fortunately the news wasn't / weren't as bad as we expected.
- 8 Where does / do your family live?
- 9 I can't find my binoculars. Do you know where it is / they are?
- 10 Does / Do the police know how the accident happened?
- 11 Germany is / are playing Spain tomorrow night, but it's not on TV.
- 12 Most people enjoy / enjoys music.

79.4 Most of these sentences are wrong. Correct them where necessary.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Three years are a long time to be without a job. | <u>Three years is a long time</u> |
| 2 The government have decided to increase taxes. | <u>OK (has decided is also correct)</u> |
| 3 Susan was wearing a black jeans. | _____ |
| 4 I don't like hot weather. Thirty degrees is too hot for me. | _____ |
| 5 I like Martin and Jane. They're very nice persons. | _____ |
| 6 Ten pounds aren't enough. I need more money than that. | _____ |
| 7 I'm going to buy a new pyjama. | _____ |
| 8 The committee haven't made a decision yet. | _____ |
| 9 There was a police directing traffic in the street. | _____ |
| 10 What is the police going to do? | _____ |
| 11 This scissors isn't very sharp. | _____ |
| 12 Four days isn't enough for a good holiday. | _____ |