

Singular/Plural nouns

We use **singular verb forms** with:

- mass nouns: *butter, cheese, bread, air, gold, wood* etc. *There is some **butter** left in the fridge.*
- school subjects: *maths, geography, physics* etc. ***Physics** is my favourite subject at school.*
- games: *football, billiards, dominoes* etc. ***Billiards** is my favourite game.*
- diseases: *measles, mumps, flu* etc. ***Measles** is a terrible childhood disease.*
- some other nouns: *news, advice, information, money, furniture, hair, homework, rubbish, jewellery, luggage* etc. ***The furniture** in the room is quite old.*

We use **plural verb forms** with:

- objects consisting of two parts: **items of clothing** (*pyjamas, trousers, shorts etc*), **tools** (*scissors, pliers etc*), **instruments** (*binoculars, compasses etc*).
- group nouns: *family, team, police, staff* etc, when we mean the individuals that make up the group. However, we use singular verb forms when we refer to them as a unit. ***My family have** different ideas on certain issues.* (We mean the individual members of the family.) ***Mary's family always spends** Easter together.* (We refer to them as a unit.)

9**Underline the correct word.**

- 1 How many children is/are there in your class?
- 2 Some people never do/does any exercise.
- 3 There is/are a pair of socks under the bed.
- 4 His new clothes was/were very expensive.
- 5 I can't find the stairs in this building. Where is/are they?
- 6 The police is/are looking for the criminal.
- 7 I want to cut some paper. Where is/are the scissors?
- 8 Your hair need/needs cutting.
- 9 Your pyjamas is/are on the bed.
- 10 The information you gave me was/were very helpful.
- 11 There was/were a lot of people at the cinema last night.
- 12 My shorts is/are made of silk.
- 13 His shoes is/are too small. He needs a new pair.
- 14 My parents is/are walking the dog at the moment.
- 15 These earrings was/were given to me by my grandmother.

6**Underline the correct word.**

- 1 A: How many biscuits was/were there in the tin?
B: I don't know.
- 2 A: These trousers is/are too long.
B: You must have bought the wrong size.
- 3 A: My hair is/are a mess today.
B: Don't be silly. You look lovely.
- 4 A: I need some new socks.
B: There is/are a new pair in that bag for you.
- 5 A: What happened to that escaped criminal?
B: The police is/are still looking for him.
- 6 A: Did you see Steve at the party?
B: No. There was/were too many other people there.
- 7 A: Do you like my new shoes?
B: Oh yes. My shoes is/are very similar, actually.
- 8 A: I can't stand people who never do/does anything for themselves.
B: Nor can I. No one should depend totally on others.
- 9 A: My shorts is/are dirty.
B: Well, you'll have to wear a skirt.
- 10 A: The stairs in the cathedral was/were very steep.
B: Yes. I was exhausted when I reached the top.

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Fill in *is* or *are*.

- 1 Be careful! Those scissors ...*are*... very sharp.
- 2 Maths John's favourite subject at school.
- 3 The police investigating the crime.
- 4 These trousers too big for me.
- 5 The stairs in my house made of wood.
- 6 His new furniture very modern.
- 7 The weather going to be bad this weekend.
- 8 My advice that you get a new job.
- 9 His new clothes very fashionable.
- 10 The team all training hard for Saturday's match.
- 11 The money in the jar for this week's shopping.
- 12 My pyjamas not on my bed. Where they?
- 13 Mumps a childhood disease.
- 14 My luggage in the car already.
- 15 Your hair very long again.
- 16 Tom's gloves made of soft leather.
- 17 The class all working on a project together.
- 18 Athletics my favourite sport.
- 19 My shoes too small for me now.

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.

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

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).

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)

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 <u>Three years</u> 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. | _____ |