

Session 1: What is the Commonwealth?

Heritage, unity, diversity: what still holds 56 nations together?

HOW THIS WORKS

I will say "We are on STEP 3". Follow the steps in order.

When you see , you answer in the chat: **type your answer, but DON'T press Enter until I say GO.**

After each correction, write the correct answer on this sheet. This sheet is your lesson: keep it.

STEP 1 — My definition 5 min

Copy here the definition of the Commonwealth you wrote for homework. Do not change anything.

 **CHAT** Type your definition in **ONE** sentence. Wait for GO.

STEP 2 — Phonology: the three sounds of -ED 5 min

RULE — La terminaison -ED du prétérit ne se prononce jamais /ed/. Elle a trois prononciations, selon le son qui la précède.

Sound	When?	Example
/ɪd/	after /t/ or /d/	ended
/t/	after a VOICELESS sound (p, k, f, s, ʃ, tʃ)	asked
/d/	after a VOICED sound or a vowel	joined

 **CHAT** I will say a verb. Type /t/, /d/ or /ɪd/. Wait for GO. Then write the correct sound in the table.

Verb	Sound	Verb	Sound
joined	/ /	signed	/ /
asked	/ /	stopped	/ /
ended	/ /	existed	/ /

Tip: put your hand on your throat. If it vibrates just before -ED, say /d/.

What exactly is the Commonwealth?

S1 Fifty-six countries. 2.7 billion people — almost one person in three on the planet. And no army, no parliament, and no money of its own.

S2 The Commonwealth of Nations is one of the strangest organisations in the world. Its own website describes it as "56 independent and equal countries", and adds that "33 of our members are small states, including many island nations". Its members range from India, with more than 1.4 billion people, to Tuvalu, with fewer than 12,000.

S3 Most of these countries were once part of the British Empire. When the Empire ended, they did not all disappear from each other's lives. In 1949, eight of them signed the London Declaration and agreed to stay together as "free and equal partners". The modern Commonwealth was born that day, and it has existed in that form ever since.

S4 But it is not a club of former colonies only. Mozambique joined in 1995. Rwanda joined in 2009. Gabon and Togo joined in 2022. None of these four countries was ever ruled by Britain. They asked to join, and the other members said yes.

S5 So what does the Commonwealth actually do? Less than people imagine. It cannot make laws. It has never had an army. It cannot force a member to do anything. Its leaders have met every two years since 1949, at a summit called CHOGM, where they agree on priorities: climate change, debt, trade, education. A country that breaks the rules can be suspended, and it has happened before. But nobody can be made to stay.

S6 Every four years, the members meet for something far more visible: the Commonwealth Games. And here the numbers stop making sense. Fifty-six countries send seventy-four teams.

S7 The explanation is simple, and it says a great deal about what this organisation is. England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are not independent states — they are nations inside the United Kingdom — but each of them competes with its own team and its own flag. So do small territories such as the Isle of Man. For hundreds of athletes, these Games are the only competition in the world where they can wear their own colours.

Quotations from thecommonwealth.org (2026).

STEP 4 — Understand the document 13 min

A2+ — FIND THE INFORMATION



CHAT One question at a time. Short answer in the chat, wait for GO. Then write the full correct answer.

1. How many countries belong to the Commonwealth, and how many people live in them?
.....
2. In what year was the modern Commonwealth born? How many countries signed the declaration?
.....
3. Name the four countries that joined after 1995, with the year for each one.
.....
4. How often do the leaders meet? What is the meeting called?
.....
5. Name three subjects the leaders discuss at their summit.
.....

B1 — EXPLAIN AND JUSTIFY (quote the text)

These two questions are answered aloud. Take notes during the correction.

6. The text calls the Commonwealth "one of the strangest organisations in the world". Give TWO reasons.
.....
9. "Here the numbers stop making sense." Which two numbers? Why is it surprising?
.....

STEP 5 — The Scottish mystery — solved 6 min

Last lesson, we could not explain why Scotland has its own flag at the Games. **Now you can.**



CHAT Explain it in ONE sentence. Wait for GO.

The correct explanation:
.....
.....



CHAT Look at your definition in STEP 1. Type ONE thing you got wrong. Wait for GO.

What I got RIGHT	What I need to CHANGE
.....	

STEP 6 — Grammar: preterit or present perfect? 11 min

These eight sentences all come from the text. Look at the verbs.

#	Sentence	P or PP ?
1	<i>Mozambique joined in 1995.</i>	
2	<i>The Commonwealth has never had an army.</i>	
3	<i>In 1949, eight of them signed the London Declaration.</i>	
4	<i>It has existed in that form ever since.</i>	
5	<i>None of these four countries was ever ruled by Britain.</i>	
6	<i>Its leaders have met every two years since 1949.</i>	
7	<i>They asked to join, and the other members said yes.</i>	
8	<i>A country can be suspended, and it has happened before.</i>	

 **CHAT** Type the NUMBERS of the sentences in the PRESENT PERFECT. Example: 1 5 7. Wait for GO.

THE RULE — complete it during the correction

In sentences 1, 3, 5 and 7, there is a precise (1995, 1949).

In sentences 2, 4, 6 and 8, we find little words like: never • ever since • •

▶ **When the sentence says WHEN exactly, English uses the**
Form: verb + -ED (*signed, joined, asked*) or irregular form (*was, said*)

▶ **When the past is still connected to NOW, English uses the**
Form: HAVE / HAS + past participle (*has existed, have met, has never had*)

WHAT IS A PAST PARTICIPLE?

Le past participle, c'est le participe passé : la forme du verbe qu'on utilise après HAVE / HAS, comme en français après « avoir » (j'ai mangé, il a signé).

C'est la 3e colonne de la liste des verbes irréguliers.

	Base verb	Preterit	Past participle
REGULAR	to join	joined	joined
	to exist	existed	existed
	to happen	happened	happened
IRREGULAR	to be	was / were	been
	to have	had	had
	to meet	met	met

▶ **Regular verbs:** the past participle is the same as the preterit: verb + -ED.

▶ **Irregular verbs:** you must learn it. Look at the 3rd column of your irregular verb list.

In the text: it HAS EXISTED · its leaders HAVE MET · it HAS never HAD an army · it HAS HAPPENED before

PRACTICE — choose the correct form

 **CHAT** Type a or b for each sentence. Wait for GO.

1. Rwanda (a) joined / (b) has joined the Commonwealth in 2009.

Why?

2. Rwanda (a) was / (b) has been a member since 2009.

Why?

3. The Commonwealth (a) never had / (b) has never had an army.

Why?

HOMEWORK — Word Bank 2

All these words are in the text. Read the pronunciation aloud, then find the English word.

 **Trap:** /det/ is written with a letter you don't pronounce. Which one?

English	Pronunciation	Français
	/ˈmembə/	un membre
	/bɪˈlɒŋ/	appartenir à
	/dʒɔɪn/	adhérer, rejoindre
	/ˌɔːɡənaiˈzeɪʃn/	une organisation
	/ˌɪndɪˈpendənt/	indépendant
	/ˈpɑːtnə/	un partenaire
	/ˈiːkwəl/	égal
	/ˌdekləˈreɪʃn/	une déclaration
	/saɪn/	signer
	/ˈempaɪə/	un empire
	/ˈkɒləni/	une colonie
	/ruːl/	gouverner, diriger
	/lɔː/	une loi
	/ˈɑːmi/	une armée
	/ˈsʌmɪt/	un sommet (réunion)
	/ˈliːdə/	un dirigeant
	/det/	la dette
	/treɪd/	le commerce
	/səˈspend/	suspendre
	/ˈterətri/	un territoire
	/kəmˈpiːt/	concourir

HOMEWORK — Trace écrite — to learn

The Commonwealth of Nations is a group of _____ independent countries. Together, they are home to 2.7 _____ people — almost one person in three on the planet.

Most of its members _____ (to be) once part of the British _____. In 1949, eight of them _____ (to sign) the London _____ and agreed to stay together as "free and equal _____". The modern Commonwealth _____ (to exist) in that form ever since.

However, it is not a club of former _____ only. Mozambique _____ (to join) in 1995, Rwanda in 2009, and Gabon and Togo in 2022. None of these four countries _____ (to be) ever ruled by Britain.

The organisation is surprisingly weak. It cannot make _____, it has never had an _____, and it cannot force a member to do anything. Its _____ (to meet) every two years at a _____ called CHOGM, where they discuss climate change, _____ and trade.

Finally, the mystery of last lesson is solved. Fifty-six countries send _____ teams, because England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are nations inside the _____, and each of them _____ (to compete) with its own team and its own flag.

WORD BANK — one verb is used twice

army · billion · colonies · debt · Declaration · Empire · fifty-six · laws · leaders · partners · seventy-four · summit · United Kingdom

Verbs: to be · to compete · to exist · to join · to meet · to sign

★ BONUS — for those who want more

Answer in 3 to 5 lines each, in English.

- "Nobody can be made to stay." What does this sentence suggest about WHY countries remain members?
- Mozambique, Rwanda, Gabon and Togo asked to join a group built on the British Empire. In your opinion, why would a country do that?

Absent from the online lesson?

Read the text (STEP 3), answer questions 1 to 5 (STEP 4), and do the two HOMEWORK pages. You will catch up with the rest next lesson.