Unit 79

# Singular and plural

## A

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



trouser**s** *(two legs)*
also jean**s**/tight**s**/short**s**/pant**s**



pyjama**s**
*(top and bottom)*



glass**es**



binocular**s**



scissor**s**

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.



American English → Appendix 7

LIVEWORKSHEETS

# Exercises



**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 — mathematics
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. — Three years is a long time
2 The government have decided to increase taxes. — OK (has decided *is also correct*)
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. — .....



LIVEWORKSHEETS