






Singular and plural

A

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

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| trousers (two legs) also jeans/tights/shorts/pants | pyjamas (top and bottom) | 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.