

Ordinal Number

Definition of Ordinal Number

An ordinal number refers to a number that indicates the position or order of things or objects, such as first, second, third, fourth, and so on.

Ordinal numbers do not indicate quantity as cardinal numbers do. Ordinal numbers attribute to a position or place of an object's standing. They are written as *first*, *second*, *third*, or in numerals, as *1st*, *2nd*, and *3rd*, etc. Normally, they are indicated by "th," or sometimes by "nd" or "st." For instance, many writers title their books in ordinal numbers, such as *Henry the Fourth*, by Stuart J. Murphy, and *Second Watch*, by J.A. Jance.

Common Use of Ordinal Numbers

He got third prize, sixth in line on his twentieth

She was hired on January 8, and on the 25th she got appointment letter from board of directors.

The first three series were wonderful to watch, but the second two were quite boring.

Can't you wait till March twenty-fourth?

A boy of 20-years old, sitting with his twin brother remembering their eleventh birthday, which was celebrated with their family at an amusement park.

Examples of Ordinal Numbers in Literature

Example #1: *Twelfth Night* (By William Shakespeare)

A critic, Leslie Hotson asserts that *Twelfth Night* was specifically performed in the honor of Queen Elizabeth and some of her guests on January 6, 1601. However, many scholars disagree and claim that Shakespeare wrote his play *Twelfth Night* later.

Despite disagreement, many agree with Hotson's [argument](#) that the play celebrates Twelfth Night festivities. Twelfth Night is, in fact, a religious holiday that marks the end of an event of major revelry and celebration. During Twelfth Night season people drank, ate, and danced themselves.

This paragraph illustrates the use of ordinal numbers. It has been used in different shades of meanings five times.

Example #2: *The Master of the Game* (By Sidney Sheldon)

“Jamie was mesmerized by the men, women and children who thronged the streets. He saw a kaffir clad in an old pair of 78th Highland trews and wearing as a coat a sack with slits cut for the arms and head. The karfir walked behind two Chinese men, hand in hand, who were wearing blue smock frocks, their pigtails carefully coiled up under their conical straw hats...”

In this passage, see the underlined ordinal number “78th.” This is number of a [character](#)’s dressing, Highland trews, probably showing its size.

Example #3: *Ode on Indolence* (By John Keats)

“A third time pass’d they by, and, passing, turn’d
Each one the face a moment whiles to me;
Then faded, and to follow them I burn’d
And ached for wings, because I knew the three;
The first was a fair Maid, and Love her name;
The second was Ambition, pale of cheek,
And ever watchful with fatigued eye...
I knew to be my demon Poesy.”

In this example, the [speaker](#) reports a morning when he sees three figures, mentioning them by using ordinal numbers. Seeing them the third time, the first figure is a beautiful woman named “love” and the second one

Example #4: *Gulliver's Travels* (By Jonathan Swift)

“1st, The man–mountain shall not depart from our dominions, without our license under our great seal.

“2d, He shall not presume to come into our metropolis, without our express order; at which time, the inhabitants shall have two hours warning to keep within doors.

“4th, As he walks the said roads, he shall take the utmost care not to trample upon the bodies of any of our loving subjects, their horses, or carriages, nor take any of our subjects into his hands without their own consent ...

“8th, That the said man–mountain shall, in two moons' time, deliver in an exact survey of the circumference of our dominions, by a computation of his own paces round the coast.

This passage has used ordinal numbers in a very beautiful way. The author has used these numbers in words starting from 1st up to the 8th number, showing the order and list of rules that Gulliver agrees to follow with Lilliputians.

Function of Ordinal Numbers

The purpose of using ordinal numbers is to indicate position, or order of things or objects. These numbers show the order. Their function is to arrange different things in order due to the position and status of things. Since the counting process requires labeling of things with numbering, when objects or things are placed in an order, ordinal numbers tell their exact position, or they help to put things in an order in a collection. Ordinal numbers are commonly used in mathematics, sciences, literature, and every walk of life.