

Singular and plural

A

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.

B

Some nouns end in **-ics**, but are not usually plural. For example:

athletics gymnastics economics politics
physics electronics maths (= mathematics)

- ☐ **Gymnastics is** my favourite sport. (*not* Gymnastics are)

News is not plural (see Unit 70B):

- ☐ I have **some news** for you. **It's** good news!

Some words that end in **-s** can be singular or plural. For example:

means a means of transport **many means** of transport
series a TV series **two TV series**
species a species of fish **200 species** of fish

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 company or a sports team:

- ☐ **Shell have** increased the price of petrol.
☐ **Italy are** playing Brazil next Sunday (in a football match).

You can also use a singular verb (The government **wants** ... / Shell **has** ... etc.).

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.

Exercises

79.1 Complete the sentences. Choose from the box.

- 1 My eyesight is getting worse. I need glasses.
- 2 The trousers you bought for me fit me.
- 3 The jacket you bought for me fit me.
- 4 I need scissors to cut this piece of material.
- 5 I can't find my binoculars. Have you seen?
- 6 I went shopping and bought a of jeans.
- 7 Where my sunglasses?
- 8 I went shopping and bought pair of pyjamas.
- 9 I don't know much about politics. I'm not interested in

a
are
them
doesn't
pair
it
~~glasses~~
some
don't

79.2 Complete the sentences. Use a word from section B (news, series etc.).

- 1 'Have you heard the news?' 'No. What's happened?'
- 2 The bicycle is a of transport.
- 3 A lot of American TV are shown in other countries.
- 4 The tiger is an endangered
- 5 There will be a of meetings to discuss the problem.
- 6 Fortunately the wasn't as bad as we expected.
- 7 How many of bird are there in the world?
- 8 I didn't have my phone, so I had no of contacting you.

79.3 Choose the correct form of the verb, singular or plural. In three sentences either the singular or plural verb is possible.

- 1 Gymnastics is / ~~are~~ my favourite sport. (is is correct)
- 2 My new glasses doesn't / don't fit very well.
- 3 The police want / wants to interview two men about the robbery.
- 4 Physics was / were my favourite subject at school.
- 5 It's a nice place to visit. The people is / are very friendly.
- 6 Germany is / are playing Spain tomorrow night. Are you going to watch it?
- 7 Does / Do the police know how the accident happened?
- 8 Where do / does your family live?
- 9 Most people enjoy / enjoys music.
- 10 I like this cafe. The staff here is / are really friendly and efficient.

79.4 Complete the sentences. Use **is** or **isn't**, and choose from the box.

- 1 Three years is a long time to be without a job.
- 2 Thirty degrees for Tom. He doesn't like hot weather.
- 3 Ten dollars We need more than that.
- 4 Four days for a holiday. You need at least a week.
- 5 Twenty kilos Are you sure you can manage?

a lot to carry
enough money
too hot
long enough
a long time

79.5 Are these sentences OK? Correct them where necessary.

- 1 Three years are a long time to be without a job. Three years is a long time
- 2 The committee want to change the rules of the club. OK (wants is also correct)
- 3 Susan was wearing a black jeans.
- 4 I like Martin and Jane. They're very nice persons.
- 5 I'm going to buy some new pyjamas.
- 6 There was a police directing traffic in the street.
- 7 This scissors isn't very sharp.
- 8 The company have decided to open a new factory.
- 9 This plant is very rare species.
- 10 Twelve hours are a long time to be on a plane.