

## Unit 78 Singular or plural?

**a** We use some nouns only in the *plural*. For example:

trousers jeans shorts pyjamas tights scissors glasses/spectacles

You can also use *a pair of ...* with these words:

- I need **some new trousers**. *or* I need **a new pair of trousers**.

**b** We do not often use the plural of **person** ('persons'). Instead we use **people**:

- He is **a nice person**.
- They are nice **people**.

**c** These nouns end in **-s** but they are not usually plural:

- **Athletics** is my favourite sport.
- What time **is the news** on television? (See also **Unit 69d**.)

These words end in **-s** and can be singular *or* plural:

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

**d** Some singular nouns are often used with a plural verb. For example:

government staff team family audience committee

We often think of these things as a number of people ('they'), not as one thing ('it'). So we often use a plural verb:

- **The government** (= they) **want** to reduce taxes.
- **The staff** (= they) **aren't** happy with **their** new working conditions.

A singular verb ('The government **wants** ...') is also possible.

Note that we normally use a plural verb with the names of sport teams:

- **Scotland are** playing France in a football match next week.

We always use a plural verb with **the police**:

- **The police have** arrested Tom.
- **Are the police** well-paid?

**e** Sometimes we use a plural noun with a singular verb. We do this when we talk about a sum of money, a period of time, a distance etc.:

- **Five thousand pounds** (= it) **was** stolen in the robbery. (*not* 'were stolen')
- **Three years** (= it) **is** a long time to be without a job. (*not* 'are')

**f** We say 'a holiday of three **weeks**' but '**a three-week** holiday':

- I've got **a three-week** holiday in July. (*not* 'a three-weeks holiday')

Here, **three-week** is used as an adjective before 'holiday'. When we use 'three-weeks' as an adjective, it loses the **s**. So we say:

a <b>ten-pound</b> note ( <i>not</i> 'pounds')	two <b>14-year-old</b> girls
a <b>four-week</b> English course	a <b>six-hour</b> journey

You can also say 'I've got three **weeks'** holiday'. See **Unit 79d**.

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