

1 Singular and plural

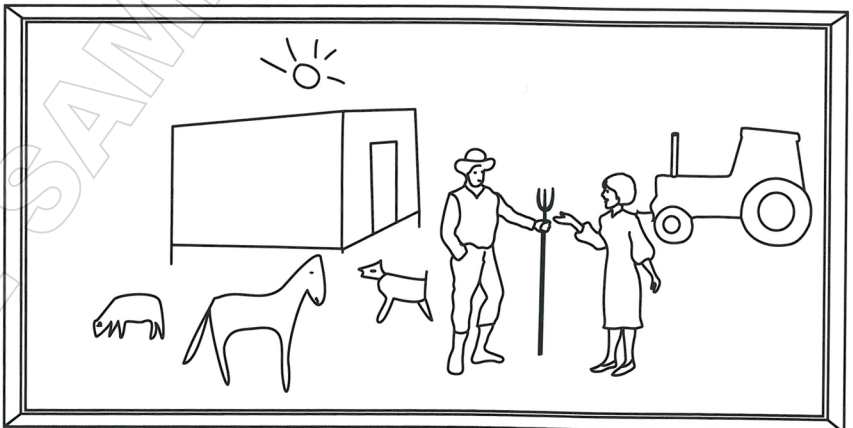
Form

Singular	Plural	
<i>an umbrella</i>	<i>umbrellas</i>	add -s
<i>a watch</i>	<i>watches</i>	add -es
<i>a dictionary</i>	<i>dictionaries</i>	-y → -ies

Some common irregular plurals

<i>tooth</i>	<i>teeth</i>	<i>oo → ee</i>
<i>man</i>	<i>men</i>	change the vowel sound and spelling
<i>mouse</i>	<i>mice</i>	
<i>knife</i>	<i>knives</i>	<i>f/fe → ves</i>
<i>potato</i>	<i>potatoes</i>	<i>o → oes</i>
<i>cactus</i>	<i>cacti</i>	<i>us → i</i>
<i>crisis</i>	<i>crises</i>	<i>is → es</i>
<i>sheep</i>	<i>sheep</i>	no change
<i>child</i>	<i>children</i>	different ending
<i>person</i>	<i>people</i>	different word

Presentation



The farm

- 1) Draw a simple, small farm on the board (a house, a shed, a field). Check that students know what your drawing shows! Add in Federico, the farmer and a visitor, Isabella. Write a year from the past (2000) at the top of the board.
- 2) Mime to indicate that Federico is telling Isabella about his farm. Add items to the picture (a dog, a cow) and elicit sentences he's saying (*I've got a dog. I've got a pony. I've got a sheep. I've got a goose. I've got a field. I've got a tractor. I've got a child. She's got a mouse!*).
- 3) Erase the past year and write the current year. Explain that Federico has been very successful. Add new items to the picture and elicit the new sentences (*I've got three dogs. I've got 20 ponies. I've got 40 sheep. I've got ten geese. I've got three fields. I've got two tractors. I've got two children. They've got five mice!*). If you don't want to draw 20 ponies, just write the number next to the animal.
- 4) Write up the words you have used and focus on the different ways of making plurals.
- 5) Use separate pictures to introduce any regular or irregular plurals you wish to focus on that don't easily fit into the farm context (*dictionary* → *dictionaries*; *knife* → *knives*).

If you choose an alternative context, look for situations which, like a farm, allow you to bring in a wide number of different plurals (/s/, /z/, /ɪz/) and irregulars like *foot* / *feet*, *mouse* / *mice*, *sheep* / *sheep*.

Practice

If you are teaching at very low levels, you will need to adjust your classroom language to suit the level. Many of these ideas can be introduced by gesturing rather than giving instructions.

Counting

Bring a number of different toys, objects and pictures into the room – including more than one of many items. Place the items on different students' desks. Set little tasks and ask questions around the class such as 'Count the objects on your desk,' 'What have you got on your desk?' 'What has Pedro got on his desk?' Add more objects and mix items around to give further practice.

In my home

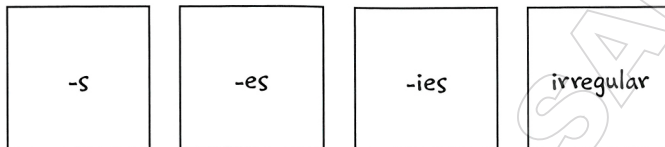
Tell the students 'In my home we have three bedrooms, two TVs, twelve chairs, seven clocks and two dogs. Now tell me about some numbers in your home.'

Variation

'Tell me about some numbers in this school / classroom.'

Quick choice quiz

A lively game (if you have a suitable room with sufficient floor space for movement) is a quiz in which students have to vote physically to show which answer they think is correct. On four large pieces of paper write the following in big, clear letters:



Ask all the students to come into an open space – the area at the front of class is often best. Place the four signs at different places on the walls of the room around the open space. The signs should not be too close to each other – but they should all be easily accessible for all students (no chairs or tables in the way).

Choose some singular nouns. When you say a noun, every student must decide individually how the plural is made – and move to stand in front of the correct sign. Students are allowed to change their minds when they see where other students are going! When everyone has made their final decision and stopped moving, announce the real answer – and award one point (a token) to each student in the right place. Gather everyone back in the middle again – and go on to the next noun.

Concept questions

- **The woman is in the room.** How many people are in the room? (*One*) Is there one person in the room? (*Yes*)
- **The women are in the room.** How many people are in the room? (*We don't know. More than one*) Is there one person in the room? (*No – more than one*)

Repeat the same idea with *child* / *children*, *person* / *people* etc.

Pronunciation

Regular -s / -es

Regular plural endings can have three different pronunciations.

- We use /s/ after unvoiced sounds *shops* /ʃɒps/, *hats* /hæts/, *seats* /si:ts/
- We use /z/ after voiced sounds *shoes* /ʃu:z/, *dogs* /dɒgz/, *seas* /si:z/
- We use /ɪz/ after the sounds /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /s/, /ʃ/ and /z/ *watches* /wɒtʃɪz/, *boxes* /bɒksɪz/, *places* /pleɪsɪz/

Watch out for these problems . . .

- **Students avoid plurals:** ✗ *I saw three student in the corridor.*
- **Students add an -s to words that are already in the plural:** ✗ *womens*
✗ *peoples* Of course, students will have heard words such as *women's* and *people's* and may have wrongly assumed them to be plurals rather than possessives.
- **Students use singular verbs with plural nouns (or vice versa):** ✗ *The children was . . .*
- **Students mispronounce the /s/ ending as /ɪs/:** *cooks* /kʊkɪs/, *walks* /wɔ:kɪs/. Help them by pointing out that words like *cooks* and *walks* are one syllable but they are using two.

Teaching tip: memory practice

Some methodology books may give the impression that the only worthwhile classroom activities are ones which involve realistic communication between students. However, while communicative practice is essential, there are some things that are probably best learnt by fairly traditional techniques involving simple input, memorisation, reminders and recall. Plurals is one area where some memory practice (helping students to know what the plural of *child* is) can be helpful – alongside chances to actually use language with lots of singulars and plurals in realistic tasks, dialogues and situations.