

How many syllables?

Level: Intermediate

Target age: Adults and teenagers

Time needed: 30 minutes

Summary: This lesson focuses on plural nouns and 3rd person singular verbs which are spelt with the ending *-es*. It develops an awareness of when this ending represents an additional syllable (e.g. *age / ages*) and when it doesn't (e.g. *behave / behaves*).

Warmer

If necessary, check that students can count the number of syllables in a word, using words they have recently learned or used. For example, let's say they have been using the word *importance* in a recent activity. Say the word slowly and clearly (*im-por-tance*), clapping or tapping each syllable as you say it. Ask the students, *How many syllables?* Repeat the procedure with other words such as: *import, port, ports, porter, sport, sportsman, report, reporter*.

Finally, say a selection of other words, but without clapping or tapping, and ask the class to state the number of syllables.

Exercise 1

1. Hand out the worksheet and draw the students' attention to Exercise 1. Students listen and write the number of syllables in each word.
2. Check the answers as a class. If there are doubts or disagreements about any of the words, say the word yourself and clap or tap out the syllables. Give practice of any words the students find difficult to pronounce correctly. When the *-es* ending represents a separate syllable, it is pronounced /ɪz/. In the words in this exercise where it doesn't represent a separate syllable, it is pronounced /z/.
3. Ask students to work out when the *-es* ending represents a separate syllable.

After the following sounds:

/s/ as in *class*; /z/ as in *confuse*; /tʃ/ as in *catch*;
/dʒ/ as in *page*; /ʃ/ as in *brush*

Note: You could add /ʒ/, although this is rare at the end of words. Some people pronounce the word *garage* as /'gærɑ:ʒ/ (rather than /'gærɪdʒ/), for example. With both sounds, *garages* has three syllables.

Key:

1. behaves = 2; 2. brushes = 2; 3. catches = 2;
4. causes = 2; 5. classes = 2; 6. confuses = 3;
7. decides = 2; 8. faces = 2; 9. fares = 1;
10. glasses = 2; 11. inches = 2; 12. languages = 3;
13. messages = 3; 14. notices = 3; 15. pages = 2;
16. promises = 3; 17. sales = 1; 18. sentences = 3;
19. services = 3; 20. voices = 2

Exercise 2

1. Ask the students to listen and repeat each sentence, perhaps using a mixture of choral and individual practice.
2. Students practise the sentences in pairs or small groups, paying particular attention to the *-es* endings, but also to general aspects of pronunciation, linking and rhythm.

Exercise 3 (optional)

You could ask students to look at the words in Exercise 1 again and orally make sentences using the words. Students could also try to reproduce the sentences which they saw in Exercise 2, or invent their own.

How many syllables?

Worksheet

Exercise 1



Listen and write the number of syllables in each word.

- | | | | |
|-------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| 1. behaves | _____ | 11. inches | _____ |
| 2. brushes | _____ | 12. languages | _____ |
| 3. catches | _____ | 13. messages | _____ |
| 4. causes | _____ | 14. notices | _____ |
| 5. classes | _____ | 15. pages | _____ |
| 6. confuses | _____ | 16. promises | _____ |
| 7. decides | _____ | 17. sales | _____ |
| 8. faces | _____ | 18. sentences | _____ |
| 9. fares | _____ | 19. services | _____ |
| 10. glasses | _____ | 20. voices | _____ |

Exercise 2



Listen and repeat each sentence.

1. I haven't seen you for ages!
2. Look at him – he always behaves as if he owns the place.
3. How many toothbrushes do you think you get through in a lifetime?
4. She might be here soon – she sometimes catches the five o'clock train.
5. What causes flu?
6. Do you think school classes are getting any smaller?
7. Don't try to explain how it works – it just confuses me.
8. Who decides who's going to be invited?
9. The room's got a good view – it faces the square.
10. Can you see any familiar faces in this photo?
11. Fares on this route are cheaper this year.
12. I can't find my glasses.
13. How many inches are there in a foot?
14. What languages do they teach at your school?
15. Are there any messages for me?
16. Nobody notices how the place is changing.
17. People shouldn't stick notices on this wall.
18. How many pages have you read?
19. Don't make promises you can't keep.
20. Everyone promises to arrive on time but no one ever does.
21. Look what I bought in the sales.
22. How many sentences have you done so far?
23. You need to go to Customer Services.
24. Sssh! I can hear voices!