

4.1 Focus on the Learner (FOL)



In this assignment, you will focus on the learners that you are teaching on the course.

Gather information	• Interview all or some of the learners in your group. Find out information about their background, motivation for learning English, perceived learning needs, etc. Use the grid in appendix 1 to structure your notes if you like. • Swap information with your colleagues to gather information about everyone in the class. • Skim the relevant sections of "Learner English" by Swan and Smith (eds), 2001, Cambridge University Press. This provides information about problems that speakers of different languages usually have with English. This will give you an idea of what errors to look and listen for. • Set the written homework (appendix 2) and work together to make sure everyone in your group has a scan or copy of the learners' work. • Observe your learners during class and read their written work. Identify • their learning preferences • their language strengths (skills and systems) • their language weaknesses (skills and systems)
Write part A of your assignment (300-500 words)	• Summarize some of the following areas for your learners, filling in the assignment grid below: • General background information (first/other languages, age range, occupations, length of time in this country, general education and language education history, etc.) • Motivation for learning English and perceived needs in English. • Learning preferences and what evidence you have to think these are their learning preferences • You should write in full, connected prose in this section. • Attach the cover page to the front of your assignment, write your name on the cover and sign the plagiarism declaration • Turn it in on paper by the deadline.
Write part B of your assignment (450-700 words) The total for parts A and B must be 750-1,000 words	• Write about the language strengths that your learners have. These should be skills related and systems related. You can also add strengths related to their study habits, learning preferences, etc. too but you must include skills/ systems strengths. • Write about one grammar problem learners have (use analysis from "Gather Information" stage) by filling in the grid below. • Using the grid below, say what the problem is. • Document at least two instances in which learners showed they have this one problem and provide the correction. • Find one activity that could help your learners with this problem (include the actual activity handout in the appendices) and say why it is helpful for this group of learners in particular. • Write about one pronunciation problem your learners have (use analysis from "Gather Information" stage) by filling in the grid below. • Say what the problem is, using phonemes if applicable. • Document at least two instances in which your learners showed they have this one problem and what they should have said. • Find one activity that could help your learners with this problem (include the actual activity handout in the appendices) and say why it is helpful for these learners in particular. • Make sure you reference your material correctly with author(s), year of publication, title, publisher and link if relevant. Provide this information in a bibliography as well. • You may focus on individual learners at this stage of the assignment if you wish.
Turn in your assignment	• Have a peer proof read your work. • Use the same cover page as you did for Part A of the assignment with your tutor comments on • Make sure you have attached a referenced copy of the actual material that you will use with your learner. This does not contribute to your word count. • Turn it in by the deadline.

Word limit for parts A and B combined: 750-1000 words

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CELTA pass criteria: candidates can demonstrate their learning by:

- a) *showing awareness of how a learner's/learners' background(s), previous learning experience and learning style(s) affect learning*
- b) *identifying the learner's/learners' language and/or skills needs*
- c) *correctly using terminology relating to the description of language systems and language skills*
- d) *selecting appropriate material and/or resources to aid the learner's/learners' language development*
- e) *providing a rationale for using specific activities with a learner/learners*
- f) *finding, selecting and referencing information from one or more sources using written language that is clear, accurate and appropriate to the task*

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Now fill in the following grid for your assignment:

Part A- Learners' backgrounds		
Category (Please omit this column from your word count)	Write here in prose. (Note, if you are handwriting this assignment, you will need to use more space to reach the word count and the required level of depth.)	Trainer comments (leave blank)
Learners' backgrounds (age, occupation, nationality, languages, education, etc.)	The students in this group range in age from college students hoping to travel to older professionals with careers at different levels of advancement. The actual attendees from the student group shift and change frequently, but this general age range seems to hold true, with slightly more established professionals than younger adults. Careers include chemistry, pharmacology, customer outreach for a family business, HIV Program work, and manufacturing. There seem to be more students from Haiti than any other single country in this group, with several Spanish-speaking students and an increasing number of Brazilians also attending as the course progresses. Therefore, the most common L1 present in the group is likely French and/or Haitian Creole. The second most common L1s are likely Spanish or Portuguese. Other nationalities represented by this group include Venezuelan, Moroccan, Colombian, and Chinese.	✓
Learners' motivations	The motivations expressed by these students are fairly typical and can be easily broken down into extrinsic (i.e., stemming from external rewards and consequences) and intrinsic (i.e., stemming from personal desires or goals). Extrinsic motivations for studying English seen in this student group include career advancement (both qualifying for a new job or progressing in their current careers), as well as needing to improve their ability to communicate with English-speaking colleagues and customers in their existing workplace. Intrinsic motivations include a desire to communicate better with the communities in which the students find themselves as well as be better prepared for travel to English-speaking countries such as the USA.	✓
The group's learning preferences and rationale	It seemed that in the initial teaching practice lessons, which focused on receptive skills, students in this group responded somewhat better to the listening texts than the reading texts, indicating a slight preference for auditory learning over reading or writing. This might be due in part to the students' level (pre-intermediate). There has been some difficulty getting students to fully engage in breakout rooms, but as they warm to the topic the conversations become easier. This may indicate a slight preference for solitary learning over group learning. However, when being thoughtful with breakout rooms by placing weaker students with stronger ones, we see good peer learning and better engagement. This group also engages more with topics about their personal lives and experiences than with abstract or impersonal ideas, and, when given enough	✓

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	time, they begin to play off each other's answers in personal contexts, leading to better social/linguistic learning.	
Word count for Part A (375 – 500 words)	394 words	✓

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Part B – Learners’ language abilities and needs.		
Learner strengths (skills and systems)	Stronger students express themselves well, even when lacking vocabulary and grammar. Most students are willing to be called on to answer first and be corrected.	✓
Grammar problem (name of structure/language point)	Collocation: adverb-adjective past tense/auxiliary use	✓
Examples of error and corrections (Write the whole sentence so the context is clear). Example 1: “We walked in the Park when man stopped us.” <u>Correction</u> “We were walking in the Park when (a) man stopped us.” Example 2: “They broke the car as they drive north”. <u>Correction</u> “The car (broke down) as they were driving north”.	Example 1: ERROR: “It was total different.” CORRECTION: “It was totally different .” Example 2: ERROR: “I real like Haiti.” CORRECTION: “I really like Haiti.” Example 1: ERROR: “Yesterday, I go to work.” CORRECTION: “Yesterday, I went to work.” Example 2: ERROR: “He don’t went.” CORRECTION: “He didn’t go .”	These are lexical errors; identify a grammar error with two examples
Material to help the learner with this problem (full source and appendix where it can be found in this assignment)	Doff, Thaine, Puchta, Stranks, Lewis-Jones. <i>Empower Pre Intermediate</i> . Cambridge University Press. p.10-11. (Appendix 3) I would adapt Exercise 2a to help students practice adverb-adjective collocations. <i>Empower</i> asks students to look at highlighted words forming the first half of an adverb-adjective/other phrase and to indicate which of these adjectives make the second word weaker or stronger. The phrases are “really into”, “especially useful”, “absolutely hate”, “pretty sure”, “particularly like”, and “fairly easily”. Specifically, I would do the following: 1. Ask students to read the text. 2. Complete 2a as written. 3. Elicit what is similar about the first word/adverb in each phrase until students point out the -y ending. 4. Provide examples of incorrect adverb-adjective collocations and call on specific students to correct them. Doff, Thaine, Puchta, Stranks, Lewis-Jones. <i>Empower Pre Intermediate</i> . Cambridge University Press. p.10-18. (APPENDIX 3 RESUBMIT)	find a task for the grammar problem that you choose

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	<i>The Empower page is for inspiration only to help me structure a simple past/auxiliary use lesson.</i> <u>I will write</u> a brief reading piece using examples of <i>go</i> and <i>went</i> (APPENDIX 3 RESUBMIT). I will ask students to underline all instances of the words go and went. I will elicit the difference (present v past) through guided questions. Then I will give them a gap fill where they have to use <i>go/went</i> correctly (APPENDIX 3 RESUBMIT).	
Justification for choice and how it will be used. Be sure to refer back to the learners' learning preferences, motivation, strengths and weaknesses, interests, etc.	The students are already familiar with this text from a previous reading lesson, decreasing the likelihood that students will struggle to understand the reading. Students will practice the concept in a real-world context—talking about communication.	
Pronunciation problem (use phonemes)	The -s in plural words are often dropped, even when reading words ending in -s, indicating a pronunciation difficulty.	
Examples of error and corrections (write full utterances so the context is clear – use phonemes) Example 1: "I like New York /beri/ (very) much" <u>Correction</u> "I like New York /veri/ (very) much" Example 2: "My sister want to be a /bet/ (vet)" <u>Correction</u> "My sister want(s) to be a /vet/ (vet)"	Example 1: ERROR: I like /bə'nɑ:.nə/ (banana) and /'plɑ:n.teɪn/ (plantain). CORRECTION: I like /bə'nɑ:.nəz/ (bananas) and /'plɑ:n.teɪnəz/ (plaintains). Example 2: ERROR: Hello all /'stju:.dənt/ (student). CORRECTION: Hello all /'stju:.dəntəz/ (students).	
Material to help the learner with this problem (full source and appendix where it can be found in this assignment)	Woodward English. July 30, 2025. <i>Pronunciation of Final -S</i>. https://www.grammar.cl/english/pronunciation-final-s.htm I would adapt the information found in this resource as follows: 1. Ask students to place their hands on their throats while they pronounce pairs of voiceless and voiced consonants (p and b, t and d, etc.). 2. Elicit what feels different (vibration with some consonants and not others). Explain voiceless and voiced. Create a list of words that end with each of	

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	these letters. 3. Drill sibilant sounds (zz, ss, and sh) and create a list of words on the board ending with these sounds. 4. For each of the five groups of words, add the -s and drill with the class. Voiceless get an /es/ sound, voiced get a /ez/ sound, and the sibilants get siz / or /səz /, dʒɪz / or /dʒəz /, or /ʃɪz / or /ʃəz /. 5. Update list using phonemes, drill with class (choral and individual). 6. Have students talk in pairs using the words on the board to produce the correct pronunciation themselves.	
Justification for choice and how it will be used. Be sure to refer back to the learners' learning preferences, motivation, strengths and weaknesses, interests, etc.	As several students in the class are from Haiti, we can assume that at least some of them are French speakers. In French, many written consonants, including plural -s, are not pronounced, as we have seen in class. As this is likely to be a recurring problem, it is worth focusing on it explicitly.	
Word count: 350 – 500 words NB Total word count for Parts A and B must be 750-1000 words	473 words 867 words total (A + B)	

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Appendix 1

Interview the learners

Use this table to make notes. Use additional pages of your notebook if necessary.

Name: Madeleine	Age:	Nationality / L1: Venezuelan (assumed L1: Spanish)	Job / studies:
Reasons for learning English:	Language learning background (English and others):	Activities you enjoy / find useful in class:	Contact with English and study outside of class:
Name: Rhizlane	Age:	Nationality / L1: Moroccan (assumed L1: Arabic)	Job / studies: Chemistry career
Reasons for learning English: To continue her chemistry career working in a laboratory in Morocco	Language learning background (English and others):	Activities you enjoy / find useful in class: Enjoys oriental music	Contact with English and study outside of class: Currently lives in America Watches English videos
Name: Naiika	Age:	Nationality / L1: Haitian (assumed L1: French/Haitian Creole)	Job / studies: Studied Medicine (Haiti), pharmacist technician (US)
Reasons for learning English: To communicate with her community better, as she lives in the USA	Language learning background (English and others):	Activities you enjoy / find useful in class:	Contact with English and study outside of class: Currently lives in America Audiobooks, podcasts, movies + TV shows in English, Duolingo
Name: Rock	Age:	Nationality / L1: Haitian (assumed L1: French/Haitian Creole)	Job / studies: Student
Reasons for learning English: To improve his resume and get a good job in the USA	Language learning background (English and others):	Activities you enjoy / find useful in class:	Contact with English and study outside of class: Currently living in America Practices with friends Read to learn English during the pandemic Listens to music in English English TV
Name: Valeria	Age:	Nationality / L1: Colombian (assumed L1: Spanish)	Job / studies: Family business (jewelry), customer outreach

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Reasons for learning English: She works in a multicultural company and wants to communicate better with her coworkers and community	Language learning background (English and others):	Activities you enjoy / find useful in class:	Contact with English and study outside of class: Currently living in America Reads books in English that she once read in Spanish Podcasts
Name: Rose	Age:	Nationality / L1: Haitian (assumed L1: French/Haitian Creole)	Job / studies: Officer in reporter office for Haitian HIV program
Reasons for learning English: She wants to communicate better at her job and ultimately get a better job	Language learning background (English and others):	Activities you enjoy / find useful in class:	Contact with English and study outside of class: Currently living in America YouTube and TV in English
Name: Gabriel	Age:	Nationality / L1: Brazilian (assumed L1: Portuguese)	Job / studies: Works for a manufacturing company
Reasons for learning English: Wants to travel to the US Wants to practice listening and writing	Language learning background (English and others):	Activities you enjoy / find useful in class: Likes rock, AC/DC	Contact with English and study outside of class:
Name: Bingbing	Age:	Nationality / L1: Chinese (assumed L1: Mandarin)	Job / studies:
Reasons for learning English: She lives in NY and needs English for her job; she also wants to travel	Language learning background (English and others):	Activities you enjoy / find useful in class:	Contact with English and study outside of class:
Name: SL	Age:	Nationality / L1: Haitian (assumed L1: French/Haitian Creole)	Job / studies:
Reasons for learning English:	Language learning background (English and others):	Activities you enjoy / find useful in class:	Contact with English and study outside of class:
Name:	Age:	Nationality / L1:	Job / studies:

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Reasons for learning English:	Language learning background (English and others):	Activities you enjoy / find useful in class:	Contact with English and study outside of class:
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Appendix 2

Homework assignment

Dear Student,

During this course, the teachers need to complete a written profile of the students in this class. The questions you've answered today are really useful in getting to know you. The teachers also need a sample of your written language so that we can analyze your strengths and weaknesses in writing. We'd also like to know more about you! Give as much detail as you can and please, do not use a grammar book or a dictionary.

We would be very grateful if you could write a **letter** to your teacher answering some of the following questions:

- Where are you from and where do you live? What is your home town like?
- What do you do for work / study? What would you like to do in the future?
- What do you like doing in your free time? What would you do if you had more free time?
- How do you like to learn English? What are you good at and what do you want to practice?
- What's your favorite book / movie / TV show and why?

Thanks a lot!

The teachers at Teaching House

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Appendix 3

Collocation Activity

2a to be adapted

1B I'm really into Facebook

Learn to talk about how you communicate

G Present simple and present continuous
V Adverbs

1 READING AND LISTENING

THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS

Communication is quick and easy with digital technology. But is it making us lazy? Should some things be more personal?

a How do you communicate? Do you do these things with your friends and family? If not, what do you do instead?

- send birthday cards to friends
- write a blog
- send postcards from abroad
- write letters by hand
- make plans with friends by email
- cancel plans by text or instant message
- telephone friends to invite them somewhere

I always send birthday cards.

I don't. I write 'happy birthday' on Facebook instead.

b Read the introduction to the article and the line in green under each photo. What do you think the missing words are?

c Read the article and check your answers to 1b. Answer the questions.

- Why does Julie think her friend will cancel?
- What does Facebook help Gin to remember?
- Why is Marc writing a blog?
- Why does Claudio prefer sending instant messages?

d Listen to four speakers. Match them with the topics they talk about.

Tara	blogs and emails
Magda	relationships and text messages
Chris	important days and Facebook
Mike	plans and text messages

e Listen again. Is each speaker happy or unhappy about the use of technology? Why/Why not?

f Which ideas do you agree with?

- It's rude to cancel by text.
- It's alright to finish a relationship by text.
- Facebook is the perfect place to say 'Congratulations!'
- I love to get postcards and letters.



Gin

'Facebook means I don't _____ anything.'

I'm really into Facebook. It's especially useful for birthdays, that kind of thing. When I check my Facebook page, it tells me whose birthday it is. So I never forget and I can just write a message on their wall. And when people have big news – maybe a new baby or something – you can write a comment straight away.



Julie

'I'd prefer a phone call to a _____.'

I absolutely hate it when friends cancel by text message. It's so rude. My friend Sara and I planned to go to the cinema tonight. But I'm pretty sure she'll cancel – she generally does. I'm waiting for her text message now.



Marc

'Writing a blog is a lot easier than sending _____.'

I'm studying in New York, away from my family. And while I'm here I'm writing a blog so my friends and family at home know my news. I particularly like putting all my photos on there because people leave comments. Most of my friends use Facebook but I prefer writing a blog. It's fairly easy to do and it's quicker than writing 50 separate emails.



Claudio

'I just send an _____.'

I normally communicate with people by instant message because they're free. I've even finished relationships with girlfriends by IM. In fact, I mainly do that. I know it's not the best thing to do – but it's better than a lot of shouting and crying. Some of my friends don't even send a message. They just stop all communication and wait for her to realise they're not interested.

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UNIT 1

2 VOCABULARY Adverbs

a Look at the **highlighted** adverbs in the text. Answer the questions.

- Which adverbs make another word stronger?

- Which adverbs make another word less strong?

b Look at the sentences and complete 1–4 with the frequency adverbs.

I **generally** just send a text.
I **hardly ever** get cards or presents from friends.
I **mainly** finish relationships by IM.
My daughter **rarely** calls me.



c **1.11** Pronunciation Look at the words in the table. Do the letters in **bold** make **long** or **short** vowel sounds? Complete the table headings. Listen and check. Repeat the words.

_____ vowels	_____ vowels
always	pretty
normally	especially
hardly	particularly
awful	often
gorgeous	sometimes
alright	never
rude	lovely

d **1.12** Listen and repeat the sentences.

- I absolutely hate rude people.
- I particularly enjoy getting letters.
- I think Facebook is fairly good.
- I hardly ever send postcards.
- I generally text my friends.
- I'm really into blogs.
- I'm pretty sure my mum can't use Skype.
- I mainly see my family at weekends.

e **1.13** Change the sentences in 2d so they are true for you. Then compare your sentences with a partner.

3 GRAMMAR

Present simple and present continuous

a Look at these sentences. Which are present simple? Which are present continuous?

- present _____
1 I like putting all my photos on my blog.
2 When I plan something, I send a text.
present _____
3 I'm waiting for her text message.
4 She's writing a blog so we know what she's doing.

b Match sentences 1–4 with these uses of present simple and continuous.

We use the present simple to talk about:

- habits and routines ☐
- feelings and permanent situations ☐

We use the present continuous to talk about:

- actions right now ☐
- temporary actions around now ☐

c **1.14** Now go to Grammar Focus 1B on p.142

4 SPEAKING

1.15 Ask and answer the questions. Give reasons for your answers.

How often do you ...?

- send a message to your boss or teacher to say you are sick
- share important news on Facebook
- read English-language websites
- send an e-card instead of a real card
- buy presents for people online
- start conversations with new people
- write emails in English
- call friends and relatives on Skype
- send video by instant message

How often do you
read English-language
websites?

Not very often. But,
I'm planning a holiday in
America...

How often do you
send 'e-cards'?

Never. I absolutely
hate them!

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APPENDIX 3 RESUBMIT

For inspiration:

2A

We had an adventure

Learn to talk about past holidays

G Past simple
V Tourism

1 READING AND LISTENING

a Ask and answer the questions.

- Where do you like to go on holiday?
- Do you like to try new things on holiday? What?
- Can you think of any kind of holiday you wouldn't enjoy?

b Read *Yes Man changed my life* and answer the questions.

- What is Danny Wallace's book, *Yes Man* about?
- What did Richard do after he read *Yes Man*?

c Read *Day One* and *Day Two* and then answer the questions.

Day One

- Why did Richard go into the travel agent's?
- What holiday did he book?
- Did he book the kind of holiday he usually likes?
- When was his flight?

Day Two

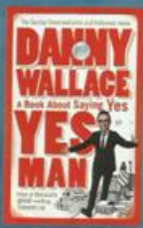
- Why did Richard go to the beach?
- How was the weather?
- What did he buy at the beach?
- What is he going to do on Day Three? How does he feel about it?

d Would you like to try water skiing? Do you think Richard will enjoy it?

e Listen to Richard describing day three. Are sentences 1–5 true (T) or false (F)? Correct the false sentences.

- The class began with a lesson before they went out to sea.
- Richard felt fine when they went out on the boat.
- He found it difficult to stand up on the water skis.
- He hated water skiing.
- When he got back to the hotel, he went to bed.

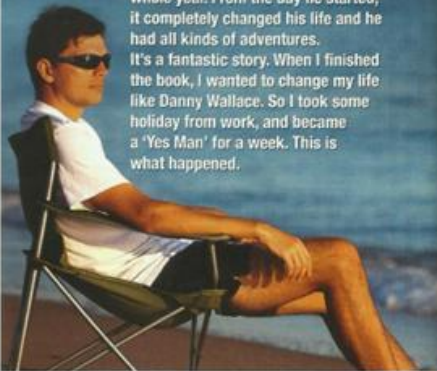
f Can you think of a time when you were surprised you enjoyed something?



YES MAN CHANGED MY LIFE

by Richard Collins

Yes Man is the best book I've ever read. It's the true story of a year in the life of author, Danny Wallace. Before Danny Wallace became the 'Yes Man', his life was boring and he felt old. So he decided to make things more exciting. He started saying "yes" to every question people asked him. And he did it for a whole year. From the day he started, it completely changed his life and he had all kinds of adventures. It's a fantastic story. When I finished the book, I wanted to change my life like Danny Wallace. So I took some holiday from work, and became a 'Yes Man' for a week. This is what happened.



2 GRAMMAR Past simple: positive

a Underline the past simple form of these verbs in the article.

become	feel	decide	start	ask	do	change	
have	want	get	see	sleep	go	arrive	give

b Which verbs in 2a end in *-ed* in the past tense? How do the other verbs change?

You can find a list of irregular verbs on p.176

c Complete the sentences with the past simple form of the verbs in brackets.

- I _____ as a waiter for a day, for no money. (work)
- I _____ a day fishing with five Greek fishermen. (spend)
- I _____ at a beach party until six in the morning. (stay)
- I _____ a dancing competition. (win)
- I _____ the same boat trip three times. (take)
- I _____ swimming at midnight. (go)

3 LISTENING

a Which of the activities in 2c do you think Richard enjoyed? Tell a partner. Listen and check.

b Listen again. What is Richard's last question? Do you think he will say yes or no? Why?

c Ask and answer the questions.

- Do you ever say yes when you don't want to? When?
- Would you like to be a 'Yes Man' for a week? Why / Why not?

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Reading (teacher written):

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A Day in My Life

Every day, I go to work at 8 o'clock in the morning. I go by bus because it is fast and cheap. My colleague also goes to work with me, so we usually talk on the bus. When we arrive, we go straight to our office.

Yesterday was different. Yesterday I went to work on foot because the bus was late. I went with my friend and we went through the park. It was a long walk, but we enjoyed it.

After work, I usually go to the primary school to fetch my daughter. But yesterday I had an appointment, so I went to the doctor instead. I was tired when I got home, so I went to bed at 9 '0 clock.

Exercise (teacher created):

Fill in the gaps. Use *go* or *went*.

1. I _____ to a restaurant last night.
2. This morning, I _____ to the doctor.
3. Every year, I _____ on holiday.
4. I like to _____ to work by car.
5. My daughter _____ to school last week.

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Appendix 4

Pronunciation Activity

Content to be adapted

Pronunciation of Final -S

Plural Nouns and Verbs in Third Person

How to pronounce words ending in S | Pronunciation of final S...

Watch later

Share

HOW TO PRONOUNCE WORDS ENDING IN S

Pronunciation of S AT THE END OF WORDS

PRONUNCIATION OF FINAL S IN ENGLISH

/ɪz/
SIBILANT

C	races
S	buses
X	boxes
Z	prizes
SS	kisses
CH	watches
SH	dishes
GE	changes

/s/
VOICELESS

P	sleeps
K	books
T	hats
F	cliffs
GH	laughs
PH	graphs

/z/
VOICED

B	crabs
D	words
G	bags
L	falls
M	dreams
N	fans
NG	sings
R	wears
V	gloves

There are 3 ways of pronouncing S at the end of a word in English. The pronunciation of words ending in S depends on the final consonant sound.

/ɪz/ Sometimes written as **/əz/**

Words that end in a vowel sound use the **/z/** pronunciation for S.
e.g. – plays – sees – tries – follows – continues

Voiced Sound – is a vibrating or humming sound.
– Voiced Sound – is the vocal cords do not vibrate.
– Voiced Sound – uses the vocal cords and they produce a vibration or humming sound in the throat.

Woodward's English

Pronunciation of S AT THE END OF WORDS

	/ɪz/	/s/	/z/
REGULAR PLURAL NOUNS	buses	books	words
THIRD PERSON SINGULAR VERBS (Example: He/She/It)	watches	sleeps	plays
POSSESSIVE NOUNS (Example: John's)	Alice's	Mike's	Mary's

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The pronunciation of S at the end of plural nouns, verbs in third person and as a part of the possessive case sometimes causes problems for non-native speakers because it can be pronounced in three different ways: / ɪz /, / s / or / z /.

(Note: whenever you see letters or symbols between two slash marks (/ /), it refers to the pronunciation of that letter or sound)

The pronunciation depends on the last sound of the verb or noun which is usually a consonant. Before we learn the difference ways to pronounce the final S, we must first know what voiced and voiceless consonants are as well as sibilant sounds:

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Voiced Consonants vs. Voiceless Consonants

A **voiced** consonant (or sound) means that it uses the vocal cords and they produce a vibration or humming sound in the throat when they are said. Put your finger on your throat and then pronounce the letter L. You will notice a slight vibration in your neck / throat. That is because it is a **voiced** sound.

A **voiceless** sound (sometimes called unvoiced sound) is when there is no vibration in your throat and the sound comes from the mouth area. Pronounce the letter P. You will notice how it comes from your mouth (in fact near your lips at the front of your mouth). The P sound doesn't come from your throat.

Try this with the other letters and you will "feel" the difference between a voiced and a voiceless consonant (or sound).

Sibilant Sounds

Another sound which is relevant to this is the **sibilant sound** which is produced by forcing air out toward your teeth. It is characterized by a hissing sound (sssss), a buzzing sound (zzzzz) or the sound teachers make when they want you to be quiet (shhhh!).

- Z like the sound a bee makes... zzzzzz
- S like the sound a snake makes... ssssss
- SH like the sound a teacher makes when they want you to be quiet... shhhh

Now we know the difference between voiced, voiceless and sibilant sounds we can look at the following rules for the correct pronunciation of S at the end of words in English:

The pronunciation of the S at the end of words in English

The pronunciation of the final S in plural words and verbs in the third person depend on the final consonant sound before that S.

The ending is pronounced **/s/ after a voiceless sound**, it is pronounced **/z/ after a voiced sound** and is pronounced **/ɪz / or /əz/ after a sibilant sound**:

- **Voiceless:** helps /ps/ -- sits /ts/ -- looks /ks/
- **Voiced:** crabs /bz/ -- words /dz/ -- gloves /vz/,
- **Sibilant:** buses /sɪz / or /səz /, bridges /dʒɪz / or /dʒəz /, wishes /ʃɪz / or /ʃəz /

4.1 Focus on the Learner (FOL)

1. The /ɪz/ sound (or /əz/ sound)

Sometimes this sound is written as /əz/ and uses the symbol "schwa" or "upside down e" before the z. For ease we will write this sound as /ɪz/ or /ɪz/

If the last consonant sound of the word is a **sibilant sound** (a hissing or buzzing sound), the final S is pronounced as /ɪz/. This /ɪz/ sound is pronounced like an extra syllable. (e.g. the word *buses* has two syllables)

If the sound has a J sound (/dʒ/ like the letter J at the beginning of the word jacket or /ʒ/ like the S in pleasure), then the final S is also pronounced as /ɪz/.

Examples of words ending in the /ɪz/ sound:

- C: races (sounds like "race-iz")
- S: pauses, nurses, buses, rises
- X: fixes, boxes, hoaxes
- Z: amazes, freezes, prizes, quizzes
- SS: kisses, misses, passes, bosses
- CH: churches, sandwiches, witches, teaches
- SH: dishes, wishes, pushes, crashes
- GE: garages, changes, ages, judges

Remember: after verbs ending in -sh, -ch, -ss and -x, we add the -es to the end of the verb (in third person) and the pronunciation is /ɪz/ as an extra syllable.

2. The /s/ sound

If the last consonant of the word is **voiceless**, then the S is pronounced as /s/. Be careful not to create an extra syllable.

NOTE: The consonants c, s, sh, ch and x are voiceless though they use the sibilants ending seen above.

Examples of words ending in the /s/ sound:

- P: cups stops, sleeps
- T: hats, students, hits, writes
- K: cooks, books, drinks, walks
- F: cliffs, sniffs, beliefs, laughs, graphs (the -gh and -ph here are pronounced like a F)
- TH: myths, tablecloths, months (voiceless *th*)

4.1 Focus on the Learner (FOL)

3. The /z/ sound

If the last letter of the words ends in a **voiced** consonant (or sound), then the S is pronounced like a Z /z/ (without creating another syllable). This Z sound is similar to the sound a bee makes zzzz.

We also use this ending when the word ends in a vowel sound (e.g. bees, flies etc.)

Examples of words ending in the /z/ sound:

- B: crabs, rubs
- D: cards, words, rides, ends
- G: rugs, bags, begs
- L: deals calls, falls, hills
- M: plums, dreams
- N: fans, drains, runs, pens
- NG: kings, belongs, sings
- R: wears, cures
- V: gloves, wives, shelves, drives
- Y: plays, boys, says,
- THE: clothes, bathes, breathes
- VOWEL SOUNDS: sees, fleas

Pronunciation of S cheat sheet

Pronunciation of S

AT THE END OF WORDS



/ɪz/ SIBILANT	/s/ VOICELESS	/z/ VOICED
C races	P sleeps	B crabs
S buses	K books	D words
X boxes	T hats	G bags
Z prizes	F cliffs	L falls
SS kisses	GH laughs	M dreams
CH watches	PH graphs	N fans
SH dishes		NG sings
GE changes		R wears
		V gloves

There are 3 ways of pronouncing S at the end of a word in English. The pronunciation of words ending in S depends on the final consonant sound.

/ɪz/ Sometimes written as **/əz/**

Words that end in a **vowel sound** use the **/z/** pronunciation for S.
e.g. -- plays -- sees -- tries -- follows -- continues

- **Sibilant Sound** -
= a hissing or buzzing sound.

- **Voiceless Sound** -
= the vocal cords do not vibrate.

- **Voiced Sound** -
= uses the vocal cords and they produce a vibration or humming sound in the throat.

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