

# Numbers and time

## 1 Cardinal numbers

Cardinal numbers are *one, two, three*, etc. Ordinal numbers are *first, second, third*, etc. > 2

### A Figures and words

Here are some examples of cardinal numbers in written English.

*free for 10 days 450 million trees aged 2 to 11 inclusive  
35,000 free air miles to be won an apartment for 6*

Sometimes numbers are written in words rather than figures. This happens especially with small numbers.

*one of four super prizes two bedrooms (one double and one single)  
ten megabytes of data a child of eight the Thirty Years War*

We do not usually use a figure at the beginning of a sentence.

*Five hundred and seventy-one people applied for the job.*

### B Numbers 1-100

1 <i>one</i>	11 <i>eleven</i>	21 <i>twenty-one</i>
2 <i>two</i>	12 <i>twelve</i>	22 <i>twenty-two</i>
3 <i>three</i>	13 <i>thirteen</i>	30 <i>thirty</i>
4 <i>four</i>	14 <i>fourteen</i>	40 <i>forty</i>
5 <i>five</i>	15 <i>fifteen</i>	50 <i>fifty</i>
6 <i>six</i>	16 <i>sixteen</i>	60 <i>sixty</i>
7 <i>seven</i>	17 <i>seventeen</i>	70 <i>seventy</i>
8 <i>eight</i>	18 <i>eighteen</i>	80 <i>eighty</i>
9 <i>nine</i>	19 <i>nineteen</i>	90 <i>ninety</i>
10 <i>ten</i>	20 <i>twenty</i>	100 <i>a/one hundred</i>

Be careful with these spellings: *fifteen, eighteen, forty, fifty, eighty*.

We put a hyphen in compound numbers below 100, e.g. *twenty-one, three hundred and sixty-five*.

## C Numbers over 100

102	<i>a/one hundred and two</i>
164	<i>a/one hundred and sixty-four</i>
596	<i>five hundred and ninety-six</i>
7,832	<i>seven thousand eight hundred and thirty-two</i>
256,940	<i>two hundred and fifty-six thousand nine hundred and forty</i>
1,000,000	<i>a/one million</i>
8,330,000	<i>eight million three hundred and thirty thousand</i>
1,000,000,000	<i>a/one billion</i>

We use *and* between *hundred* and the rest of the number: *two hundred and fifty*. Americans can leave out *and*: *two hundred fifty*.

*Hundred, thousand, million*, etc do not have an *-s* when they are part of a number.

*The flight costs six hundred pounds.*

But for phrases like *hundreds of people*, > E.

We can write a thousand in figures as 1,000 or 1000 or sometimes 1 000. But we do not use 1.000 for a thousand. We use a point only in decimals. > 3B

For the numbers 1100, 1200, etc up to 1900, we sometimes say 'eleven hundred', 'twelve hundred', etc.

*The hostages spent over fourteen hundred days in captivity.*

*One billion* means one thousand million (1,000,000,000).

## D A and one

We can use *a* or *one* before *hundred, thousand, million*, etc.

*We've got a hundred members / one hundred members.*

*A* is more informal, and we use it when the number is not an exact figure.

*I've told you a thousand times not to do that.*

*One* is usual in longer numbers, e.g. when we use both *million* and *thousand* together.

*Unemployment stands at one million four hundred thousand.*

We cannot leave out *a* or *one*.

(NOT ~~*We've got hundred members.*~~)

## E Informal expressions for numbers

In informal English we can use *a couple* for two.

*I was carrying a couple of suitcases.*

Sometimes *a couple of* means 'a few'.

*Wait here. I'll only be a couple of minutes.*

We sometimes use *a/one dozen* for twelve and *half a dozen* for six.

*I need half a dozen eggs.*

To express a large but not exact number, we can use *dozens of*, *hundreds of*, *thousands of*, *millions of*, and *billions of*.

*There were **hundreds of** people in the square.*

*A drop of water consists of **millions of** atoms.*

But compare *There were eight **hundred** people in the square.*

NOTE

We can use a number with the of-pattern for part of a quantity. > Finder 168F

*Four of the passengers were injured.*

## F About, over, etc with numbers

We can use words such as *about* to show that a number is approximate.

*about two years around a thousand pounds approximately four miles*

Here are some other ways of modifying a number.

*more than 100 destinations over 5 metres long*

*less than ten miles below ten per cent children under 3*

*only £14.99 at least 3 weeks sleeps up to 6 people*

NOTE

a For *over* and *above* with numbers, > Finder 211A.

b We can use *or so* and *odd* informally in the following way.

*There were thirty **or so** people in the queue.* (= about thirty people)

*There were thirty-**odd** people in the queue.* (= between thirty and forty people)

## G Numbers used to identify → Audio

We use numbers not only to express quantity but also to identify things. For example, a credit card, a passport, or a telephone has a number to identify it.

We read each figure separately

*Express Card 4929 8063 1744*

*'four nine two nine, eight zero six three, one seven four four'*

*Call us on 01568 927 869*

*'oh one five six eight, nine two seven, eight six nine'*

We say 'zero' or 'oh' for 0. When a number is repeated we say e.g. 'four four' or 'double four'.

NOTE

When we talk about the figure 0, we call it 'nought' (British English) or 'zero'.

*You've missed out a **nought** / a zero from this number.*

## 2 Ordinal numbers

- A** Ordinal numbers are *first, second, third, fourth*, etc. *First, second*, and *third* are irregular, but we form the others by adding *-th* to the cardinal number, e.g. *ten* → *tenth*, or changing the ending *-ty* to *-tieth*, e.g. *forty* → *fortieth*. When we use figures, we write the cardinal number and add the last two letters of the ordinal number, e.g.  $4 + th = 4th$ .

1st <i>first</i>	8th <i>eighth</i>	21st <i>twenty-first</i>
2nd <i>second</i>	9th <i>ninth</i>	22nd <i>twenty-second</i>
3rd <i>third</i>	12th <i>twelfth</i>	54th <i>fifty-fourth</i>
4th <i>fourth</i>	13th <i>thirteenth</i>	100th <i>(one) hundredth</i>
5th <i>fifth</i>	20th <i>twentieth</i>	347th <i>three hundred and forty-seventh</i>

NOTE

Be careful with these spellings: *fifth, eighth, ninth, twelfth*, and *twentieth, thirtieth*, etc.

- B** Here are some examples of the use of ordinal numbers.  
*her 25th birthday on the 83rd floor in the 21st century*  
*The third and fourth adult passengers in your car can travel free.*

An ordinal number usually comes before a cardinal.

*The first four runners were well ahead of the others.*

NOTE

- a We also use ordinal numbers in fractions > 3A, and in dates > 6.  
b Monarchs have Roman numerals spoken as ordinals. *George V* is 'George the fifth'.

## 3 Fractions, decimals, and percentages

### A Fractions

In fractions we use *half, quarter*, or an ordinal number.

$\frac{1}{2}$ <i>a half/one half</i>	$1\frac{1}{2}$ <i>one and a half</i>
$\frac{2}{3}$ <i>two thirds</i>	$2\frac{1}{3}$ <i>two and a third</i>
$\frac{1}{4}$ <i>a quarter/one quarter</i>	$6\frac{3}{4}$ <i>six and three quarters</i>
$\frac{4}{5}$ <i>four fifths</i>	$\frac{15}{16}$ <i>fifteen sixteenths</i>

With numbers less than *one*, we use *of* before a noun phrase.

*I waited three quarters of an hour.*

*Two thirds of the field was under water.*

For more examples with *half*, > Finder 169B.

With numbers above *one*, the noun is plural.

*I waited one and a half hours.*

*The room is three and three quarter metres long.*

Compare the fractions in these examples.

*three quarters of a metre* (less than one metre)

*three and three quarter metres* (more than one metre).

With *one and a half/quarter*, etc + noun, there is an alternative pattern.

*one and a half hours* / *an hour and a half*

*one and a quarter pages* / *a page and a quarter*

NOTE

For the use of a singular or plural verb after a fraction, > Finder 146B.

## B Decimals

We use a decimal point (not a comma).

0.2 'point two'/'nought point two'/'zero point two'

*Zero* is more typical of American English.

Each figure after the decimal point is spoken separately.

7.45 'seven point four five'

15.086 'fifteen point oh/nought/zero eight six'

We can use a plural noun after a decimal.

*There was 0.6 seconds between the leaders.*

*3.25 metres is the length of the wall.*

A phrase of measurement usually takes a singular verb. > Finder 145C.

## C Percentages

Look at these examples.

*Save 25%! ('twenty-five per cent')*

*a 2 per cent growth in population ('two per cent')*

*inflation of 3.72 per cent ('three point seven two per cent')*

NOTE

For the use of a singular or plural verb after a percentage, > Finder 146B.

# 4 Number of times

We can say *once*, *twice*, *three times*, *four times*, etc to say how many times something happens.

*I've only met your cousin **once**, so I don't know him very well.*

*Peter goes to evening classes **twice** a week.*

*I've run the New York Marathon **three times** now.*

For more expressions of frequency with *once*, *twice*, etc, > Finder 195F.

*Once* also means 'at a time in the past'.

*Dinosaurs **once** walked the earth.*

NOTE

For *twice*, *three times*, etc in expressions like *twice as big*, > Finder 196C Note.

## 5 The time of day

**A** Here are some examples of how we refer to clock time.

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4.00	<i>four (o'clock)</i>	
8.05	<i>five (minutes) past eight</i>	<i>eight (oh) five</i>
2.10	<i>ten (minutes) past two</i>	<i>two ten</i>
5.12	<i>twelve minutes past five</i>	<i>five twelve</i>
11.15	<i>(a) quarter past eleven</i>	<i>eleven fifteen</i>
9.30	<i>half past nine</i>	<i>nine thirty</i>
1.35	<i>twenty-five (minutes) to two</i>	<i>one thirty-five</i>
10.45	<i>(a) quarter to eleven</i>	<i>ten forty-five</i>
7.52	<i>eight minutes to eight</i>	<i>seven fifty-two</i>

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As well as *past* and *to*, Americans also use *after* and *till*.  
*twenty-five minutes past/after six*  
*five minutes to/till four*

**B** We use *o'clock* only on the hour.

*I got home at six o'clock.*

(BUT NOT *I got home at quarter past six o'clock.*)

We can leave out *o'clock* in informal English.

*I got home at six.*

We do not use *o'clock* with *am/pm*, and we do not write it after the figures 00.

(NOT *six o'clock pm*) and (NOT *6.00 o'clock*)

**C** In most contexts we can use either way of saying the time: *half past ten* or *ten thirty*. We usually prefer *ten thirty* when we are talking about a timetable.

We use the 24-hour clock in timetables.

*The next train is at 15 30.* ('fifteen thirty')

NOTE

In official announcements, you may hear times on the hour spoken as e.g. '(oh) nine hundred hours' or 'thirteen hundred hours' rather than 'nine o'clock' or 'one o'clock'.

(BUT NOT *thirteen o'clock*)

**D** We can use *am* /eɪ 'em/ meaning 'in the morning' (up to about midday) and *pm* /pi: 'em/ meaning 'in the afternoon or evening'.

*The match starts at 3.00 pm.*

We can also say *in the morning/afternoon/evening*.

*The phone rang at half past four in the morning.*

Twelve o'clock in the day is *midday* or *noon*. Twelve o'clock at night is *midnight*.

NOTE

*am* and *pm* are sometimes written with full stops: *a.m./p.m.*

- E** We usually leave out *minutes* after 5, 10, 20, and 25, but we usually use it after other numbers.

*seventeen minutes past/to six*

In informal speech we can leave out the hour if it is known.

*It's nearly twenty past (four) already.*

Using *half* for *half past* is also informal.

*What time is it? ~ Half nine.* (= half past nine)

## 6 The date

- A** These are the three most common ways of writing the date in English.

Cardinal number + month: *3 May 15 August*

Ordinal number + month: *3rd May 15th August*

Month + cardinal number: *May 3 August 15*

Ordinal numbers, e.g. *15th*, are becoming less usual. Americans normally put the month first, e.g. *August 15*. For a comparison of usage in Britain and the US, > 24F.

In speech ordinal numbers are usual.

'the third of May' 'the fifteenth of August'

'May the third' 'August the fifteenth'

This version without *the* is also possible and is common in the US.

'May third' 'August fifteenth'

- B** We write the year without a comma after the thousands, and we say the year like this.

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1998 'nineteen ninety-eight'

347 'three (hundred and) forty-seven'

1500 'fifteen hundred'

1801 'eighteen oh one'

2000 '(the year) two thousand'

2005 'two thousand and five', 'twenty oh five'

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We can also use plural numbers in expressions like these.

*life in the 1980s* ('the nineteen eighties')

*pop music of the 60s* ('the sixties')

*a man in his fifties*