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English Numbers Numbers in English are one of the first things a student will learn when they begin studying the language. We use numbers all the time every day to talk about the time, quantities of items, dates and days of the month, temperature and measurements. English numbers are normally treated as adjectives because they give more information about the nouns of the sentence. Numbers can also be nouns if they stand alone and do not modify another noun. For example: Number as adjective: 'There are five students in the class' Number as noun: 'We went to Greece in 2016' Cardinal and ordinal numbers in English English numbers in general are split into two groups: cardinal numbers (e.g. one, two three) and ordinal numbers (e.g. first, second, third). Cardinal numbers are used to talk about the quantity of items (e.g. there are six apples in the bag), while ordinal numbers are used to talk about the distribution or order of items (e.g. 'her apartment was on the third floor'). Examples: There are four shapes in the row The yellow circle is the second shape from the left The green arrow is the fourth shape in the row The red triangle is the first shape in the row The pink star is the second shape from the right The pink star is the third shape from the left The yellow circle is the third shape from the right Here is a list of numbers in English with the digital format in the first column, the cardinal format in the second column and the ordinal format in the third column: Number Cardinal Ordinal 1 one first 2 two second 3 three third 4 four fourth 5 five fifth 6 six sixth 7 seven seventh 8 eight eighth 9 nine ninth 10 ten tenth 11 eleven eleventh 12 twelve twelfth 13 thirteen thirteenth 14 fourteen fourteenth 15 fifteen fifteenth 16 sixteen sixteenth 17 seventeen seventeenth 18 eighteen eighteenth 19 nineteen nineteenth 20 twenty twentieth 21 twenty-one twenty-first 22 twenty-two twenty-second 23 twenty-three twenty-third 24 twenty-four twenty-fourth 25 twenty-five twenty-fifth 26 twenty-six twenty-sixth 27 twenty-seven twenty-seventh 28 twenty-eight twenty-eighth 29 twenty-nine twenty-ninth 30 thirty thirtieth 31 thirty-one thirty-first 40 forty fortieth 50 fifty fiftieth 60 sixty sixtieth 70 seventy seventieth 80 eighty eightieth 90 ninety ninetieth 100 one hundred hundredth 500 five hundred five hundredth 1,000 one thousand, a thousand thousandth 1,500 one thousand five hundred, or fifteen hundred one thousand five hundredth, or fifteen hundredth 100,000 one hundred thousand hundred thousandth 1,000,000 one million millionth Be careful with the number 13 and the number 15. While all the other 'teen' numbers in English simply add the word 'teen' to the regular number (e.g. four-teen, six-teen, seven-teen, nine-teen) 13 uses 'thir' and 15 uses 'fif'. For an added complication, the number 18 only has one 't' (eighteen). English Numbers in 'The 12 Days of Christmas' A song that makes good use of cardinal and ordinal numbers in English is the Christmas carol, 'The 12 Days of Christmas'. Throughout the song, the singer tells of gifts they received from a loved one on each day of the festive season and keeps a cumulative total of each gift. Each verse therefore gets longer and longer as the song continues using more and more English numbers as the list of presents grows longer! The lyrics begin: On the First day of Christmas my true love sent to me a Partridge in a Pear Tree. On the Second day of Christmas my true love sent to me Two Turtle Doves and a Partridge in a Pear Tree. On the Third day of Christmas my true love sent to me Three French Hens, Two Turtle Doves and a Partridge in a Pear Tree. The following verses follow the same pattern with a new gift added each time. The singer repeats all the earlier gifts with their respective numbers, so each verse is one line longer than the previous verse. The subsequent gifts are: Fourth day: Calling Birds Fifth day: Gold Rings Sixth day: Geese a-Laying Seventh day: Swans a-Swimming Eighth day: 8 Maids a-Milking Ninth day: Ladies Dancing Tenth day: Lords a-Leaping Eleventh day: Pipers Piping Twelfth day: Drummers Drumming Here is a fun video of the full song, complete with lyrics: Examples of Numbers in English Some examples of how to use cardinal and ordinal numbers in English: There are thirty-five pupils in the English class Thirteen is an unlucky number in Western culture Eight is a lucky number in Chinese culture He failed his driving test for the third time There are a hundred-and-one dalmations in the Disney film She was the fifth person to win seven gold medals I visited France for the eighth time last year Seventy-two thousand people entered the competition to win a holiday Expressing zero in English The amount of nothing or zero can be expressed in many different ways in English. This depends on the context of the sentence. It can be expressed as: zero, nothing, nought, o, nil. In sport, we usually say 'nil' For example the score was 4-0 (four-nil). However in tennis it is uniquely expressed as 'love' (four games to love). 'O', pronounced 'oh' as in the letter O, is used when talking about times, years, phone numbers (in Britain) and decimals (in Britain) 'Nought' is used to talk about the number itself in Britain (but not in America, where zero is used) and phone numbers (Britain) 'Zero' is used to talk about the number itself, phone numbers and decimals. Zero is used more often in America, while in Britain we often use 'o'. Numbers for money in English Using English numbers when talking about money requires special treatment. The largest denomination number comes first followed by the currency and finally the smaller denomination number, which can also be followed by the currency. In everyday speech, people tend to miss out naming the currency if it is obvious which currency they are talking about, especially the smaller denominations (e.g. the pence or cents). Notice that the decimal point that separates the numbers (e.g. the pounds and pence or dollars and cents) is not pronounced. In English this is written as a decimal point, not a comma like it is in some other European countries, such as Spain. amount of Money pronounced £20 twenty pounds (sterling) \$45 forty-five (American) dollars €250 two hundred and fifty euros £50.75 fifty pounds, seventy-five pence ('fifty pounds seventy-five') €84.61 eighty-four euros, sixty-one cents ('eighty-four, sixty-one') \$103.25 a hundred and three dollars, twenty-five cents Decimals in English Decimals in English are written with a full stop (a 'decimal point') and this point is spoken aloud when reading the numbers. So you would pronounce 7.5 as 'seven point five'. For decimals that are less than 1, such as 0.5, some people pronounce the 0 as 'nought' (e.g. nought point five) while some people do not pronounce the 0 and say simply 'point five'. DEcimal ProNOUNCED 0.25 (nought) point two five 0.5 (nought) point five 0.75 point seven five 0.05 point zero five / point o five (Britain) 1.834 one point eight three four 4.91 four point nine one Fractions in English Fractions in English are expressed with the 'numerator' on the top and the 'denominator' on the bottom, separated by a line, which indicates the top number is a fraction of the bottom number. The top number (numerator) is a cardinal number and the bottom number (denominator) is an ordinal number. The bottom number is pluralised if the top number is bigger than 1. The exceptions to these rules are when the bottom number is 2 or 4. If the bottom number is 2, this is called a half (not a 'second') and if the bottom number is 4, this is called a quarter (not a 'fourth'). Of course, in mathematics, some fractions are the same as others. For example, 3/6 (three sixths) is the same as 1/2 (one half) because three is exactly half of six. If both numbers are the same, this is a 'whole'. For example 4/4 is four quarters, which is equal to one whole. FRaction Pronounced 1/4 one quarter / a quarter 1/2 one half / a half 3/4 three quarters 2/5 two fifths 7/8 seven eighths 5/6 five sixths Percentages in English Percentages in English are pronounced exactly as they look. Percentages are written with the % symbol, which is pronounced 'percent' (meaning per hundred). percentage Pronounced 1% one percent 30% thirty percent 45% forty-five percent 100% one hundred percent 500% five hundred percent 10.5% ten point five percent 83.74% eighty-three point seven four percent Image source Measurements in English Measurements are simple in English because you only need to read out the number followed by the unit of measurement. For example, five metres sixty-three centimetres. Notice that British English spelling uses the 're' ending, while American English spelling uses 'er' at the end of the words for 'metre' and kilometre'. Imperial and metric measurements In Britain, we often use imperial measurements (e.g. pounds and ounces for weight, and feet and miles for distance), whereas in America, they usually only use the metric measurements (e.g. grams and kilograms for weight and kilometres and metres for distance). For example, the road signs in Britain will use miles not km. Measurement pronounced 75km seventy-five kilometers 60km/h sixty kilometres per hour 25mph twenty-five miles per hour 6ft six feet 2in two inches 30cm thirty centimetres 5ml five millilitres 4tbsp four tablespoons 2tsp two teaspoons 1.2kg one point two kilograms 2.5lbs two point five pounds / two and a half pounds 6oz six ounces Image source Temperature in English When we use English numbers to talk about temperature, the numbers are always combined with the unit Fahrenheit or Centigrade (Celsius). If the temperature is above zero degrees it is pronounced simply as the number. If the temperature is below zero degrees the word 'minus' is pronounced before the number. We use the symbol ° followed by the temperature scale to express temperature. So °C expresses 'degrees Celsius' and °F expresses 'degrees Fahrenheit'. These days, Celsius is used much more often than Fahrenheit, so we don't always mention the scale in speech. It tends to be obvious which scale is being used from the numbers given. (For reference, 32°F is equal to 0°C). For example: 20°C twenty degrees Celsius -5°C minus five degrees Celsius 70°F seventy degree Fahrenheit -3°C minus three 0°C zero degrees Image source Years and Dates in English Using numbers in English when talking about dates is always an important area of study for students as it is very useful in a day-to-day context. Reading dates with years in a foreign language can feel intimidating because they can be long, big numbers. In English, we usually say a date as two numbers. So 1980 would be 'nineteen eighty'. After the year 2000 we say either twenty to start the number or we also say two-thousand and then say 'and' before the last part of the date. So 2017 can be 'twenty seventeen' or 'two-thousand and seventeen'. When using English numbers for dates, we also often say the year before the date to make it clear, especially if it is a millennium or a year before one thousand. Image source Dates For talking about dates in English, we say the ordinal number followed by 'of' and the month, followed by the year. For example: 3rd September 1959 would be pronounced 'the third of September nineteen fifty-nine'. We don't write the word 'of' and sometimes we write the cardinal number not the ordinal. For example: 3 September 1959, or just use the numbers 03/09/1959 or 3/9/59. BC and AD with dates For years before the year 0, we add the suffix BC (which means 'before Christ'), pronounced as the letters of the alphabet. The years after 0 all have the suffix AD (Anno Domini, which is Latin for 'in the year of our Lord') but we almost never write or say this when we talk about years unless for clarity, for example sometimes a film might use the suffix AD if talking about a year in the future. Year Pronounced 2017 twenty seventeen / two thousand and seventeen 2008 two thousand and eight 2000 (the year) two thousand 1939 nineteen thirty-nine 1901 nineteen o one 1900 nineteen hundred 1200 twelve hundred 1768 seventeen sixty-eight 1056 ten fifty six 358 (the year) three hundred and fifty-eight 800 BC eight hundred BC 3000 BC three thousand BC A prehistoric family living in a year BC! Image source Share your thoughts on using numbers in English What do you find most difficult about using numbers in English? Are English numbers used in the same way as numbers in your own native language? Are there any areas where you find expressing number in English confusing? Let us know your thoughts on English numbers in the comments.

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