

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/

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 /iz/

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 /iz/ 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)

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

Activity: classify the following words according to the pronunciation of their final “S”

Hats – cards- bikes- boxes- desks- cats – watches- cups – horses- houses – loves- leaves-
dreams- boats- writes- cooks- believes – speaks – drives- sings- washes- crosses- reads

/s/	/z/	/ɪz/