

Speak Easy #004 – How to pronounce “s” endings

Episode description

In this Speak Easy episode, Suzanne and Andrew teach you how to make your English sound natural by mastering “s” endings on plural nouns and third-person singular verbs.

Fun fact

Did you know the letter “s” can be pronounced three different ways? Learn the pronunciation rules by listening to this episode.

Material included in the study guide

- Transcript
- Practice exercises
- Bonus audio downloads





Transcript

Andrew: Hey, everybody. My name is Andrew.

Suzanne: And I'm Suzanne.

Andrew: And you're listening to Culips.
Hi Suzanne.

Suzanne: Hi Andrew, how are you?

Andrew: I'm doing very well, and you? How are you?

Suzanne: I'm doing very, very well.

Andrew: That is awesome, glad to hear it. Suzanne, today we have a lot of material to cover, so I think we should get right to it. So today's episode is a Speak Easy episode. Speak Easy is the series where our resident pronunciation expert Suzanne teaches us some cool pronunciation tips that make our speech sound more like a native speaker's. We learn how to talk the way native speakers do, pronounce the way native speakers do. So, Suzanne, what topic do you have for us today?

Suzanne: So today we're going to look at when to use the "S" sound or /s/, the "Z" sound or /z/, or the /iz/ sound whenever we have a plural word or a third-person singular verb.

Andrew: OK. So, we're looking at the final sound of a plural or third-person singular word and this can appear in three different ways, right? A /s/, a /z/, or an /iz/ form.

Suzanne: Exactly. It's always going to be an "S" in written English, but in spoken English it will be either a /s/, /z/, or /iz/.

Andrew: All right, awesome. Well, I'm very excited to dig in to this topic, but just before we do that, everyone, we'd like to remind you that the study guide for this episode is available for download on our website, which is Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com. And I think the best way to study with this episode is with the study guide. You'll really get the most out of the content that Sue will share with us here with the study guide.

So why don't you visit Culips.com pick it up and then turn us back on. I think that is a good way to do it, to follow along with us in the study guide. So anyways, Sue, let's get started. And we're looking at "S" and "Z" plurals. So, yeah, what is it? What is an "S" and what is a "Z" plural?



Suzanne: Yeah, so when words are plural, like when you're describing one or more of something, like "books" or "vacations" or "boxes," you will add an "S" on the end of the written word to make it plural. But when you speak the plural word, you can have three different sounds. So when you make book plural, you add an "S" and it sounds like /s/, "books." When you make vacation plural it looks like an "S" in the written word, but it sounds like an /z/ or a zed, "vacations." And when you make box plural, you'll see there is an "ES" added, but it will sound like an /iz/, "boxes."

Andrew: You know, I speak with a lot of non-native English speakers every day. I'm working with people who use English as their second language and, to be perfectly honest, pluralizing words is something that is difficult for everybody learning English. I hear many, many mistakes, so I think for a lot of you listeners out there, this will be really a helpful episode. But, Suzanne, how do we know? How do we know which plural ending to use, when to use /s/, when to use /z/, and when to use /iz/? How do we know this?

Suzanne: Well, there are a few rules. But first let's listen to some examples and see if we can figure out the rules from those examples.

Andrew: Very good idea. OK, let's do that. Let's listen to an example right now.

Friend 1: Dude, the bees this year are really aggressive.

Friend 2: Yeah, my friend is a beekeeper and he says that every day he loses his cool because dozens of bees try to escape the hives.

Friend 1: Wow, what an interesting job. I guess he likes bee bites.

Friend 2: Nah, he works well with them and finds he doesn't get bitten very often, if ever.

Friend 1: Wow, I couldn't do it. A job like that creeps me out. Takes a lot of courage to stick your hands in a hive full of bees.

Friend 2: For sure. He takes good care of them and watches each moment when he's dealing with them.

Friend 1: I'd like to watch him in action some time.

Friend 2: Yeah, sounds good. I'll ask him when he works and we'll make a plan.



- Andrew: All right, so we just listened to an example. Sue, I have to say you made a little bit of a weird example, but it's good because it really illustrates this pronunciation feature of the plural and the third-person "S" sound. Now, Sue, like you told us earlier, there are three different ways we can pronounce the plural "S," third-person "S." The first way is /s/, just by adding the "S" sound, right?
- Suzanne: Yes.
- Andrew: So why don't we go through the example and find all the times we heard that in the example?
- Suzanne: Sounds good.
- Andrew: What did you hear, Sue? Maybe you can point them out to us.
- Suzanne: Sure, "Wow, what an interesting job. I guess he likes bee bites," right? "Likes" and "bee bites."
- Andrew: "I guess he likes bee bites." Yeah, so there we heard it two times, right? "Likes" and "bites."
- Suzanne: Next we see, "Nah, he works," "works well with them and finds he doesn't get bitten very often, if ever." So "works," works is an "S" sound.
- Andrew: OK, "he works with them." Perfect, "works."
- Suzanne: Then in the next line, we hear, "A job like that creeps me out." "Creeps."
- Andrew: "Creeps." OK, got the "S" there, what else?
- Suzanne: And then at the end, in the last line, they say "Yeah, sounds good, I'll ask him when he works and we'll make a plan." "Works."
- Andrew: OK, very good. So in the whole example, we heard "likes," "bites," "works," and "creeps." Very cool. So why do we add a /s/ sound to these words? What is the rule, Suzanne?
- Suzanne: If you notice, all of the root words or the words before adding the "S" end in a voiceless consonant. A consonant that doesn't have any voice, that just has air, like "work" or "creep" or "bite" or "like." These sounds /k/, /t/, and /p/ all do not have voice. So whenever you have a word that ends with a voiceless consonant, you're going to add an "S" sound to make it plural, or for the third-person singular verb. Like "works," "creeps," "likes," and "bites."



- Andrew: Very cool. So whenever you have a voiceless consonant, then you just add an “S” sound to make it plural, right? So like “park” would become “parks.” “Shoot” would become “shoots.” “Map” would become “maps,” all of those words end with voiceless consonants, and so we just add an /s/ sound to make it plural.
- Suzanne: Yeah. Another example is an “F” sound, “F” is also voiceless. So like “chef,” “chefs” that would also have an “S” at the end.
- Andrew: Perfect, perfect. So that’s our first rule, everyone. If you have a word that ends in a voiceless consonant that you have to turn into a plural, or if it’s a third-person verb, then you simply add a /s/ sound to the end. OK, Sue, what about the second rule, what is our second pronunciation rule for today?
- Suzanne: So let’s look at all of the words that are plural, or third-person singular that end in a /z/ sound. Can you help me pick those out Andrew?
- Andrew: The “bees,” “dude, the bees this year.”
- Suzanne: Yeah, the “bees,” exactly.
- Andrew: OK, we have “bees.” What else did I hear? I heard “says, says.”
- Suzanne: Yup, “says.”
- Andrew: “Hives, hives.”
- Suzanne: Good, yup “hives.” I think we have “hands.”
- Andrew: “Hands.”
- Suzanne: “Stick your hands.”
- Andrew: “Finds.”
- Suzanne: “Finds.” The last one there is “sounds.”
- Andrew: Ah, “sounds,” OK “sounds.”
- Suzanne: “Sounds” yeah.
- Andrew: Very good. So, in all of these words, we hear the last letter the “S,” the alphabet letter “S” on the end of the word being pronounced as a “Z,” as a zed, as we say in Canada.
- Suzanne: Sorry to confuse you guys.



- Andrew: So, Sue, why? Why do we pronounce these with a /z/ sound?
- Suzanne: Yeah, so if you notice, all of those words have a root word that ends with a voiced consonant right? Like “find,” or “sound,” or “hive,” “dozen,” “dozens,” right? “Dozen,” so these are all words that have voiced consonants at the end of their root word and so, because of that, you will add a /z/ sound at the end when it’s plural. So it’s also important to notice that a word that ends with a vowel, like “bee,” “bee” will go to “bees,” or “zoo” will go to “zoos.” Or “family” will go to “families.” So if it’s a voiced consonant or a vowel, the word will have a /z/ at the end when plural or in the third-person singular.
- Andrew: So just to recap, our first rule is that if the root word ends with a voiceless consonant, a voiceless sound, and that means there’s no vibration in your throat, when you pronounce it. Then we simply pronounce the “S” like a /s/. But if the root word ends in a voiced consonant, this means there’s vibration in our throat and this also includes words that end in vowels because vowels are voiced, then we switch to a /z/ sound when we pronounce the third-person singular verb or plural word, right?
- Suzanne: Right.
- Andrew: Very, very cool. OK, so there’s one final way that we can pronounce the plural S or the third-person “S” in verbs. And, Sue, what is that? Let’s take a look again to go back to the example, let’s find the instances of this third way to pronounce the plural. I don’t know, what did you hear?
- Suzanne: I think we only have a couple in here.
- Andrew: Yeah, it’s not as common, is it? This third way, yup.
- Suzanne: It’s not as common, right. So I heard “loses,” “loses.”
- Andrew: “Loses.” I heard “watches.”
- Suzanne: Yeah, “watches,” and I feel like that’s all I heard.
- Andrew: OK, so we heard “loses” and “watches.” It’s actually adding a whole extra syllable to the word, isn’t it? “Lose” becomes “loses.” “Watch” becomes “watches.” And so what’s the rule around this? When do we add that extra syllable to a word? Why and when?
- Suzanne: So we heard “lose,” “lose” change to “loses,” “loses.” So the ending to that word was what, Andrew? “Lose.”
- Andrew: “Lose,” so that’s a /z/ sound.



- Suzanne: Yeah, so that's a "Z," and then also, "watch" /tʃ/, /tʃ/ "watch."
- Andrew: Yeah, "watch," /tʃ/.
- Suzanne: Yeah, it's a /tʃ/ sound and, in fact, it's kind of a form of an "S" and "Z," right? It's kind of in the same family. Whenever you have a "S" or a "Z" at the end of a word, like "loss" or "lose." Or a /f/ sound like "fish" or a /ʒ/ sound like "garage" or a /tʃ/ sound like "watch," or a /dʒ/ sound like—
- Andrew: "Judge."
- Suzanne: "Judge," thank you. If the word ends with a /s/ sound a /z/, a /s/, a /ʒ/, a /tʃ/ or a /dʒ/, you will add an /ɪz/ at the end of a word to make it plural. So let's try some examples, maybe, just because we didn't have so many instances in the dialogue.
- Andrew: Cool. Hey, Sue, how about I say the singular, you say the plural?
- Suzanne: Sounds great.
- Andrew: OK. Lease.
- Suzanne: Leases.
- Andrew: Prize.
- Suzanne: Prizes.
- Andrew: Buzz.
- Suzanne: Buzzes.
- Andrew: Mash.
- Suzanne: Mashses.
- Andrew: Match.
- Suzanne: Matches.
- Andrew: Wow, and we can use these as nouns or verbs, almost all of those examples, right? You could say, "I sign a lease," or "I sign leases." Or "I lease a car," "he leases a car," right? It's the same whether the word is a noun or a verb.
- Suzanne: Exactly, exactly. "These two cards are matches" and, well, "she matches the decor of the house."



Andrew: Perfect. Or you could say “her outfit matches today.”

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: OK, everyone, so we looked at three different rules for how to pronounce the plural “S” and the third-person singular “S” in English today. Thanks, Sue, for enlightening us all about these pronunciation rules.

Suzanne: My pleasure.

Andrew: One more time before we let you go, I want to remind you about our website, which is Culips.com. It’s the place where you can get more information about who we are, what we do, and you can also listen to previous episodes on the website and download the study guide for this episode. If you wanna check us out on social media, we are on Facebook at Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast and on Twitter at @Culips. All right, that is it for us today. Thank you for listening and we will talk to you next time. Bye.

Suzanne: Bye.

Announcer: Do you like listening to Culips? If so, please show your support by leaving Culips a 5-star rating and review on iTunes or Stitcher. This helps new listeners find the show. So don’t delay, rate and review today.

Practice exercises

1. Put the words in the corresponding boxes below. If the plural word ends in an /s/ sound, put it in the /s/ box.

1. Boxes
2. Talks
3. Plays
4. Socks
5. Rogues
6. Dishes
7. Tables
8. Pockets
9. Cruises
10. Loops
11. Beetles
12. Garages
13. Churches
14. Sizes
15. Vagrants

/s/	/z/	/ez/ or /ɪz/

2. Write the plural SOUND next to each word. Put an S, Z, or IZ. Then, listen to the recording and see if you got the answers correct. Practice along with the words by repeating what you hear. The audio file can be downloaded here:

<https://goo.gl/ype4Pn>

a. Fight –	f. Break –	k. Communication –
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b. Hose –	g. Home –	l. Summer –
c. Price –	h. Review –	m. Night –
d. Clam –	i. Charge –	n. People –
e. Cheese –	j. Hero –	o. Lace –

3. Listen and repeat the following dialogues to practice what you learned in this episode. The audio file can be downloaded here: <https://goo.gl/type4Pn>

Anne: Hey, Brian, is Matt's roommate bringing snacks or drinks to the party?

Brian: Hey, Anne. Ya know, I'm not sure. I think we'll need more snacks than drinks, honestly.

Anne: I baked some cookies and plan on bringing my grandma's famous pizzas.

Brian: Pizzas sound perfect. Are they old family recipes?

Anne: Yes! I'm bringing one with olives, chives, and Italian spices, and another one with mushrooms and sweet peppers.

Brian: Oh man, you're making me hungry! All of that sounds so good!

Waiter: Welcome to Lou's. Are you ready to order?

Customer: Yes, I'll take a Coke with only, like, three ice cubes. I'll have the salad to start with no tomatoes or onions. Oh, and extra pickles.

Waiter: OK, the pickles come in slices. Is that okay?

Customer: Yeah, that sounds great. I'll also have the burger with three cheeses and sautéed mushrooms and onions.

Waiter: Great! Would you like fries or mixed veggies on the side?

Customer: Definitely fries!

Waiter: OK, great! I'll be right back with drinks in a moment.

Answers

1- Put the words in the corresponding boxes below. If the plural word ends in an /s/ sound, put it in the /s/ box.

- | | | |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1. Boxes | 2. Talks | 3. Plays |
| 4. Socks | 5. Rogues | 6. Dishes |
| 7. Tables | 8. Pockets | 9. Cruises |
| 10. Loops | 11. Beetles | 12. Garages |
| 13. Churches | 14. Sizes | 15. Vagrants |

/s/	/z/	/ez/ or /iz/
Talks	Plays	Boxes
Socks	Tables	Dishes
Pockets	Rogues	Cruises
Loops	Beetles	Garages
Vagrants		Churches
Pockets		Sizes

Episode credits

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