ENGLISH GRAMMAR · DEEP DIVE

Existential There and Dummy It

Two words that fill the subject slot without meaning anything: the structures English needs because every sentence must have a subject, even when there is nothing to put in it.

A2 · there is / are · dummy it · subject

it

Weather, time, distance, and a heavy subject moved to the end.

It's raining. · It takes an hour.

It is difficult to explain this quickly.

there is / are

Introduces something new.

There's a problem.

There were twenty people at the meeting.

agreement

The verb agrees with what follows there.

There are several problems.

There is a table and four chairs.

PATTERN	USE	EXAMPLE
it takes + time + to	how long	**It takes** an hour to get to Oxford.
it's no use / worth + -ing	fixed expressions	**It's no use** complaining.
there used to be	past existence	**There used to be** a cinema here.
there seems to be	with a verb before be	**There seems to be** a mistake.

1 It or there?

Write it or there.

1 _____ is raining quite hard outside.

2 _____ is a problem with the booking.

3 _____ is ten miles to the nearest town.

4 _____ is difficult to explain this quickly.

5 _____ were twenty people at the meeting.

6 _____ takes an hour to get to Oxford.

7 _____ used to be a cinema on this corner.

8 _____ is nearly six o'clock already.

9 Look! _____ is a spider in the bath!

10 _____ seems that nobody knew about it.

2 is, are, was, were...

Write the right form of be (or the words in brackets).

1 There _____ several problems with this.

2 There _____ a table and four chairs.

3 There _____ too much noise to concentrate yesterday.

4 There _____ (seem / be) a mistake in the bill.

5 There _____ (will / be) a meeting tomorrow.

6 There _____ (have / be) three accidents this week.

7 It's no use _____ (complain) about it now.

8 It's worth _____ (try) again.

3 Spot the mistake

Each sentence has one mistake. Write the correct sentence on the line.

1 Is raining quite hard outside.

2 It is a spider in the bath!

3 There is several problems with this plan.

4 It takes to Oxford an hour.

5 Have many people in the room.

6 It is no use to complain about it now.

Remember English never uses have for existence: There are many people here (not Have many people).

4 My village

Write it, there, or a form of be.

I live in a small village. [1] _____ is about five miles to the nearest town, and [2] _____ takes twenty minutes by bus. [3] _____ used to be two shops, but now there [4] _____ only one. In the centre there [5] _____ a church and three old houses. [6] _____ is very quiet here, especially in winter, when [7] _____ gets dark at four. But [8] _____ is a lovely place to live.

5 It or there?

Which word starts each sentence? Write it in the right box.

… is cold today. | … is Monday. | … takes two hours. | … is worth seeing.

… is a cat in the garden. | … are no tickets left. | … was a loud noise.

… used to be a school here.

it	there

Where are the answers?

The answers, with an explanation for each one, are in the LinguaBite app. Open this Deep Dive and scroll to Downloads at the bottom of the article: once you have downloaded this worksheet, its answers appear there after a couple of days, so you do the exercises first. You can choose 1, 2 or 3 days in the app's Settings.

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