

Universidad de Los Andes  
Facultad de Humanidades y Educación  
Escuela de Idiomas Modernos

## PRONUNCIATION OF **-(E)S/S** IN ENGLISH<sup>1</sup>

The English **-(e)s** ending represents two different grammatical categories:

1. the plural of nouns, as in *cat-cats, bed-beds, box-boxes*;
2. the third person singular form of verbs in the Simple Present tense, as in *eat-eats, read-reads, teach-teaches*;

The English **-’s** ending represents four different grammatical categories:

3. the possessive form of nouns, as in *John’s house, the girls’ dolls, Mr. Jones’s car* (or *Mr. Jones’ car*), *Russ’s wife* (or *Russ’ wife*), *Nix’s answer*;
4. the contracted form of 'is', as *It’s OK; The girl’s happy*;
5. the contracted form of the auxiliary 'has' (in the present perfect), as in *It’s rained all day long; The man’s fallen asleep*;
6. the contracted form of the auxiliary 'does', as in *What’s it mean?;*
7. the plural of letters and numbers, as in *two A’s, three X’s, your 5’s, in my 60’s*.

These **-(e)s/s** endings are not always pronounced in the same way. You can apply the following rules in order to choose the right pronunciation:

1. When the word to which we add **-(e)s/s** ends in one of the following sounds, **[s, z, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ]** (sibilant sounds), they are pronounced **[-ɪz]**. Examples:  
house - houses [ˈhaʊzɪz]    rose - roses [ˈrəʊzɪz]    wash - washes [ˈwɑʃɪz]  
watch - watches [ˈwɒtʃɪz]    orange - oranges [ˈɒrɪndʒɪz]    Jones’s [ˈdʒɔʊnzɪz]  
Russ’s [ˈrʌsɪz]    Nix’s [ˈnɪksɪz]    Rose’s [ˈrəʊzɪz]    Nash’s [ˈnæʃɪz]  
mirage – mirages [ˈmɪrɑːʒɪz]    massage - massages [ˈmæsɑːʒɪz] (BrE)
2. When the word to which we add **-(e)s/s** ends in one of the following voiceless consonants sounds, **[p, t, k, f, θ]**, they are pronounced **[-s]**. Examples:  
stop - stops [stɒps]    paint - paints [peɪnts]    cake - cakes [keɪks]  
laugh - laughs [lɑːfs]    myth - myths [mɪθs]    Beth – Beth’s [beθs]  
Pete – Pete’s [peɪts]    Philip – Philip’s [ˈfɪləps]    Ralph – Ralph’s [ræɪfs]
3. When the word to which we are adding **-(e)s/s** ends in one of the voiced consonants sounds, **[b, d, g, v, ð, m, n, ŋ, l, r]** or any of the vowel sounds, they are pronounced **[-z]**. Examples:

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<sup>1</sup> This first page of this handout was prepared by Prof. Ingrid Goilo de Tyrode. It has been slightly modified to suit the purposes of this class.

sob - sobs [sɒbz]	bed - beds [bedz]	dog - dogs [dɒgz]
save - saves [seɪvz]	bathe - bathes [beɪðz]	feel - feels [fi:lz]
sin - sins [sɪnz]	sing - sings [sɪŋz]	fear - fears [fiərz]
go - goes [gəʊz]	cry - cries [kraɪz]	boy - boys [bɔɪz]
Ted's [tʰedz]	Pam - Pam's [pʰæmz]	Emma's [eməz]

**Exercise 1:** Read aloud each of the following sentences.

1. What causes all those troubles?
2. His poems didn't deserve the first prize.
3. Steve needs to have his eyes examined.
4. Who says that the quiz was easy?
5. The horse races are televised on Sundays.
6. See that he finishes his assignments at three.
7. It's a wise man he who minds his own business.
8. She has no classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays.
9. Sheila occasionally gets good results with her methods.
10. World War II left many innocent casualties.
11. Sara chooses her textbooks very carefully.
12. Sean [ʃɒn] spends his snack money on presents.
13. His sister usually asks him to listen to reason.
14. Mrs. James tries to amuse us with her stories.
15. The thief will be in prison for the rest of his life.
16. Charles writes articles for magazines and newspapers.
17. Oranges, lemons and limes are citrus fruits.
18. These truck drivers have organized several unions.
19. Susan often serves a glass of juice for dessert.
20. Jesus rose from the grave three days after his death.
21. George's brother sings on television.
22. The present situation may give rise to confusion.

**Exercise 2:** Ask a classmate to give long answers to each of the following questions.

1. Where does your mother live?
2. Who teaches you English phonetics?
3. When was your father born?
4. Whose birthday is it on July 24?
5. At what time does the sun usually rise?
6. At what time does the sun usually set?
7. Who's going to win the presidential election?
8. How often do you wash your clothes?
9. Why is our country going through hard financial times?
10. What do you think about this subject?
11. Should thieves be put to death?
12. What time does this class finish?
13. When's your next birthday celebration?
14. How easy are these pronunciation exercises?
15. What's going to happen in December?