

## Predicting the Sound of -s, -'s Endings

The neutral endings, -s and -'s, are found on many types of words. Here are the four main uses of these endings.

- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Plural nouns:                 | <i>the <u>tables</u>, some <u>napkins</u>, the <u>forks</u></i> |
| 2. Present tense verb:           | <i>he <u>closes</u>, she <u>laughs</u>, it <u>seems</u></i>     |
| 3. Possessive noun:              | <i>Bob's, Grace's, the engineer's</i>                           |
| 4. Contraction of <i>is, has</i> | <i>It's <u>raining</u>. Bill's <u>never been here</u>.</i>      |

### A. Identifying -s and -'s Endings

Reliable rules can tell you how to pronounce these neutral endings. To apply the rules, however, it is necessary first to distinguish the -s and -'s endings from the s at the end of words that is not a neutral ending.

The neutral -'s is easy to identify. The apostrophe is a good guide. The neutral -s, however, cannot be isolated so easily; its shape alone does not provide enough of a clue. To be a neutral -s ending, the final s of a word must mark a plural noun or a third-person singular, present-tense verb.

These grammatical functions eliminate the final s of ss as a neutral ending, as in *impress*. They eliminate the s of such words as *as, gas, alas, alias, atlas, canvas, yes, his, bus, plus, thus, us* as neutral. Nor is the s at the end of *-ous, -is, -os, and -us* neutral.

The only exception to the shape + function criteria are *has, is, and was*. Their shape and third-person singular, present-tense verb function suggest a neutral ending; but for vowel quality reasons, these words do not have neutral endings.

*Is the s at the end of these words a neutral ending?  
If so, circle it; if not, leave it unmarked.*

- |                       |               |                 |                |
|-----------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|
| E.g. he tack <u>s</u> | 5. to amass   | 11. it falls    | 17. he tries   |
| E.g. A cross          | 6. it's mine  | 12. and thus    | 18. yes        |
| 1. the cosmos         | 7. a crisis   | 13. a kiss      | 19. at Steve's |
| 2. not Suzie's        | 8. she wants  | 14. that's it   | 20. so pious   |
| 3. it slows           | 9. a bus      | 15. two stanzas | 21. the campus |
| 4. two baths          | 10. five peas | 16. an atlas    | 22. six pumps  |

Answers to items 1-3 are: 1. -; 2. -'s; 3. -s.

## B. Pronouncing -s

The neutral -s that makes a noun plural or a verb third-person singular has two different pronunciations: (1) /əz/, a separate syllable, and (2) /s - z/, a single consonant sound attached to the preceding syllable. The choice between /s/ and /z/ is not so important; you may use the sound you find easiest. What **is** important is that you clearly pronounce an ending, either /s/ or /z/, when it is needed.

How should you pronounce the -s at the end of a particular word? You cannot answer this question by looking at the -s. You must look at **the letters immediately before the -s**. By examining those letters and using the following rule, you can make excellent predictions about the sound of -s in English words.

- ! If -s comes after these **clue letters**, pronounce the -s as /əz/. (Each clue contains a consonant spelling and the weak ending -e. *Memorize these clues.*)

<i>ce</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>che</i>	<i>xe</i>
<i>ge</i>	<i>ze</i>	<i>she</i>	
faces <u>  </u>	cases <u>  </u>	reaches <u>  </u>	mixes <u>  </u>
ages <u>  </u>	buzzes <u>  </u>	dishes <u>  </u>	

- ! If -s comes after **any other letters**, pronounce -s as /s - z/. For example,

the days      he sleeps      she values      it strikes  

In the following exercise, each word ends in a neutral -s. Your task is to decide how to pronounce that ending. First, look at the letters immediately left of the -s. If the letters are among the *clue letters* above, write those letters on the line after the word. Then, write əz between the slashes. If there are **no** clue letters, circle 'other', meaning letters other than the clue letters. Then write s - z between the slashes.

- Identify the letters left of -s. Write clue letters or circle 'other'.
- Transcribe the sound of the ending.
- Read each word aloud.

	<b>Clue</b>	<b>Sound</b>		<b>Clue</b>	<b>Sound</b>
E.g. allows	_____ <u>other</u>	/s - z/	E.g. foxes	<u>xe</u> other	/ əz /
E.g. riches	<u>che</u> other	/ əz /	E.g. hikes	_____ <u>other</u>	/s - z/

	Clue	Sound		Clue	Sound
1.	emerges	___ other / /	13.	settles	___ other / /
2.	examines	___ other / /	14.	proofs	___ other / /
3.	mentions	___ other / /	15.	crashes	___ other / /
4.	glasses	___ other / /	16.	verbs	___ other / /
5.	shoes	___ other / /	17.	torches	___ other / /
6.	expects	___ other / /	18.	shelves	___ other / /
7.	promises	___ other / /	19.	notices	___ other / /
8.	pieces	___ other / /	20.	suffixes	___ other / /
9.	welcomes	___ other / /	21.	degrees	___ other / /
10.	gangs	___ other / /	22.	builds	___ other / /
11.	bridges	___ other / /	23.	adheres	___ other / /
12.	criticizes	___ other / /	24.	amasses	___ other / /

Answers to items 1-3 are: 1. *ge, /əz/*; 2. *other, /s - z/*; 3. *other, /s - z/*.

### C. Pronouncing -'s

The neutral -'s ending is used on a noun to show possession and on a noun or pronoun as a contraction of *is* or *has*. Like the -s ending, the -'s ending also has two distinct pronunciations: (1) /əz/, a separate syllable, and (2) /s - z/, a single consonant sound.

To choose between the two pronunciations of -'s, you must again look at **the letters immediately before the -'s**. The following rule expands the clue letters of the previous rule and can be used to predict the sound of -s and -'s in any English word. (The rule is illustrated with -'s words.)

#### Final Version of the -s, -'s Rule

! If -s or -'s comes after these **clue letters**, pronounce the -s as /əz/. (*Learn to recognize these clues.*)

<i>ce</i>	<i>s/se</i>	<i>ch/che</i>	<i>x/xe</i>
<i>ge</i>	<i>z/ze</i>	<i>sh/she</i>	
Bruce' <u>s</u>	Bess' <u>s</u>	coach' <u>s</u>	Max' <u>s</u>
judge' <u>s</u>	blaze' <u>s</u>	Nash' <u>s</u>	

! If -s or -'s comes after **any other letters**, pronounce -s and -'s as /s - z/. For example,

Jack' <u>s</u>	pastor' <u>s</u>	Mary' <u>s</u>	Linda' <u>s</u>
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If an apostrophe comes after a word, ignore it, e.g. *the witches' brew, the governors' conference, Rogers' Bakery*. Pronounce the word according to the -s, -'s rule, treating the final s of names, as in *Adams*, as if it were a neutral ending.

- a. Identify the letters left of -s or -'s. Write clue letters or circle 'other'.
- b. Transcribe the sound of the ending.
- c. Read each word aloud.

	Clue	Sound		Clue	Sound
E.g. Thomas's	__s__	other / əz /	13. Blanche's	____	other / /
E.g. Edna's	____	other / s - z /	14. phones	____	other / /
1. Jones'	____	other / /	15. Stephens'	____	other / /
2. Olga's	____	other / /	16. Felix's	____	other / /
3. Alex's	____	other / /	17. flows	____	other / /
4. George's	____	other / /	18. latices	____	other / /
5. Heather's	____	other / /	19. Mathews'	____	other / /
6. Charles'	____	other / /	20. Mathew's	____	other / /
7. Alice's	____	other / /	21. gorges	____	other / /
8. Bryan's	____	other / /	22. Inez's	____	other / /
9. Mitch's	____	other / /	23. William's	____	other / /
10. Ilse's	____	other / /	24. scolds	____	other / /
11. Donna's	____	other / /	25. sketches	____	other / /
12. Lawrence's	____	other / /	26. Moses's	____	other / /

Answers to items 1-3 are: 1. *other, /s - z/*; 2. *other, /s - z/*; 3. *x, /əz/*.