

Reference 2

Numbers, units of measurement and common symbols

You know how to say all the numbers in English. Here we look at how combinations of numbers are said aloud.

BrE = British English AmE = North American English

For spelling differences between BrE and AmE, see Reference 4.

A Fractions

Fractions are normally spoken as in these examples:

$\frac{1}{2}$	<i>a (one) half</i>
$\frac{1}{4}$	<i>a (one) quarter</i>
$\frac{3}{4}$	<i>three quarters</i>
$\frac{1}{5}$	<i>a (one) fifth</i>
$\frac{2}{3}$	<i>two thirds</i>
$\frac{1}{4}$ kilometre	<i>a quarter of a kilometre</i>
$\frac{1}{2}$ centimetre	<i>half a centimetre</i>

Complex fractions and expressions of division are usually said with *over*.

$\frac{27}{200}$	<i>twenty-seven over two hundred</i>
	<i>twenty-seven divided by two hundred</i>

B Decimals

Decimals are normally spoken as in these examples:

0.36	<i>nought point three six (BrE)</i>	<i>zero point three six (AmE)</i>
5.2	<i>five point two</i>	

C Percentages

Percentages are spoken as *per cent*.

16.3%	<i>sixteen point three per cent</i>
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D Calculations

Calculations are normally said in the following ways:

$7 + 3 = 10$	<i>seven and three is/are ten (informal)</i>
	<i>seven plus three equals ten (more formal)</i>
$28 - 6 = 22$	<i>six from twenty-eight is/leaves twenty-two (informal)</i>
	<i>twenty-eight minus six equals twenty-two (more formal)</i>
$8 \times 2 = 16$	<i>eight twos are sixteen (informal BrE)</i>
	<i>eight times two is sixteen (informal) (the most common form in AmE)</i>
	<i>eight by two is/equals sixteen (informal)</i>
	<i>eight multiplied by two equals/is sixteen (more formal)</i>
$27 \div 9 = 3$	<i>twenty-seven divided by nine equals three</i>
500 ± 5	<i>five hundred plus or minus five</i>
>300	<i>greater than three hundred</i>
<200	<i>less than two hundred</i>

$3^2 = 9$	<i>three squared is/equals nine</i>
$\sqrt{16} = 4$	<i>the (square) root of sixteen is four</i>
$3^3 = 27$	<i>three cubed is/equals twenty-seven</i>
$\sqrt[3]{8} = 2$	<i>the cube root of eight is two</i>
$2^4 = 16$	<i>two to the power of 4 is/equals sixteen (AmE = two to the fourth power ...)</i>

E Units of measurement

Although the metric system is now common in the UK and other English-speaking countries, non-metric units are still used in many contexts, especially in the USA.

Units of length and distance are normally spoken as follows:

3 in, 3"	<i>three inches</i>
2 ft 7 in, 2' 7"	<i>two feet seven inches (or, very informally, two foot seven inches)</i>
500 yds	<i>five hundred yards</i>
3 m (AmE = 3 mi.)	<i>three miles</i>
500 mm	<i>five hundred millimetres (or, more informally, five hundred m-m)</i>
1.5 cm	<i>one point five centimetres</i>

Units of area are normally spoken as follows:

11 sq ft	<i>eleven square feet</i>
5 sq m, 5m ²	<i>five square metres</i>
7.25 cm ²	<i>seven point two five square centimetres</i>

Units of weight are normally spoken as follows:

3 oz	<i>three ounces</i>
5 lb	<i>five pounds</i>
300 g	<i>three hundred grams</i>
18.75 kg	<i>eighteen point seven five kilograms</i>

Units of volume, capacity and temperature are normally spoken as follows:

300 cc	<i>three hundred cubic centimetres (or, less formally, three hundred c-c)</i>
5 pt	<i>five pints</i>
3.2 gal	<i>three point two gallons</i>
75 cl	<i>seventy-five centilitres</i>
200 l	<i>two hundred litres</i>
20°	<i>twenty degrees</i>

F Common symbols

- & 'ampersand' – this symbol is read as 'and'
- * asterisk
- © copyright symbol
- ™ trademark symbol
- ® registered trademark
- bullet point
- ✓ BrE = tick; AmE = check
- ✕ BrE = cross; AmE = an 'X'
- # BrE = hash symbol (Note: in American English, this symbol is used for numbers, e.g. #28 AmE; no. 28 BrE)
- @ this symbol is read as 'at' – used in email addresses
- ∞ infinity symbol
- " this symbol is read as 'ditto' – used in lists to avoid writing a word if the same word is written immediately above it