

## There is, there was, etc.

A

When we introduce a new person or thing – to say that this person or thing exists, happens, or is found in a particular place – we can use a sentence beginning **There + be**:

- There was** a loud bang from upstairs. (*not* A loud bang was from upstairs.)
- There's** nothing to eat. (*not* Nothing is to eat.)

We invert this pattern in questions to ask about the existence etc. of people and things:

- Is there** anybody in here?

We can also use **there** with auxiliary and modal verbs with **be** (e.g. **has been, can be**):

- There must be** some way of contacting her.

with **verb + to be** (e.g. **used to be, is supposed to be, tends to be, appears to be, seems to be**):

- There appears to be** a major disagreement between the two presidents.

and some other verbs that indicate existence (e.g. **arise, emerge, exist, remain**):

- During the 1990s **there arose** a demand for organic food.

Because we use **there** in this way to *introduce* topics, the noun after **there + be** often has an indefinite or non-specific meaning. So we often use **a / an, zero article, any(one)** (+ noun), or **some(thing), no(body)**, etc. rather than **the, this, my, your** (+ noun), or a **name**, which give the noun a more definite or specific meaning. Compare:

- There's nobody** here.
- There was something** strange about her. *and*
- The cat was* in the kitchen. (*more usual than* There was the cat in the kitchen.; *but compare* **There was a cat** in the kitchen.)
- Jan is waiting* for me outside. (*more usual than* There is Jan waiting for me outside.)

When we use **there + be + the**, this is often done to show a change of topic. Choosing **the, that**, etc. + **noun** indicates that we think the topic is already known to the listener or reader:

- ... And then **there is the** question of who is going to pay.

B

The verb **be** should agree with the noun that comes after it:

- There is** a very good *reason* for my decision.
- There were** too many *people* trying to get into the football stadium.

However, in informal speech we sometimes use **there's** before a plural noun:

- 'Anything to eat?' 'Well, **there's some apples** on the table.'

If the noun phrase consists of two or more nouns in a list, we use a singular verb if the first noun is singular or uncountable, and a plural verb if the first noun is plural:

- When I opened the fridge **there was** only *a bottle of milk, some eggs, and butter*.
- When I opened the fridge **there were** only *some eggs, a bottle of milk, and butter*.

C

**There + be** is also used with nouns followed by a **that-, wh-, to-infinitive** or **-ing** clause:

- Is there a chance (that)** Kim could arrive this afternoon?
- There is no reason (why)** I can't see you tomorrow.
- There is a small stream which / that** runs at the bottom of the garden.
- There was an attempt to resolve** the dispute at the factory.
- There was a taxi waiting** outside the hotel.

We don't usually leave out a relative pronoun when it is the *subject* of the following finite verb, but can leave it out when it is the *object* (see Unit 53).

D

In formal English we can use a clause with **there being** to introduce a reason for something:

- There being** no evidence against him, he was released. (= Because there was no evidence).
- There being** no reports of adverse reactions, the drug is to be sold more widely.

## Exercises

95.1 Rewrite these sentences using **there only** if the answer is likely. Consider why some answers are not likely. **A**

- 1 Coffee was spilt on the table. *There was coffee spilt on the table.*
- 2 Your dinner is in the oven. *(A sentence with 'There ...' is unlikely.)*
- 3 Is something bothering you?
- 4 A barrier was across the road.
- 5 The doctor is free to see you now.
- 6 The problem of what to do with nuclear waste remains.
- 7 My son is at university.
- 8 A video is supposed to be on the website, but it doesn't work.
- 9 No petrol was available anywhere in the city.
- 10 Can anyone help me?
- 11 You can follow some general rules.
- 12 An art gallery used to be around here.

95.2 The sentences below are all taken from written English. Which is correct or more likely in the space – **is** or **are**? **A**

- 1 There ..... two pubs and a church on the village green.
- 2 There ..... other possible locations for the car park, but the central one is preferred.
- 3 There ..... no direct rail link between the cities.
- 4 There ..... further rain and strong winds forecast for the next three days.
- 5 There ..... chocolate bars, crisps, and a bottle of cola in the bag if you get hungry.
- 6 There ..... substantial evidence to suggest that the Robinsons lied to the police.
- 7 There ..... no easy answers to the problem of climate change.
- 8 There ..... a shower, television, and two single beds in each room.

95.3 Join the matching sentence halves using an appropriate relative pronoun (**that**, **which**, or **who**). Write the relative pronoun in brackets if it can be left out. **C & Unit 53**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 There were a lot of people at the party        | a an election will be held next month.    |
| 2 There's a cake in the kitchen                  | b are harder-working than Kristin.        |
| 3 There was never any doubt                      | c I've made especially for your birthday. |
| 4 There have been suggestions                    | d I could do to prevent him falling.      |
| 5 There aren't many people alive today           | e <del>hadn't been invited.</del>         |
| 6 There are still some old houses in the village | f haven't watched TV.                     |
| 7 There was absolutely nothing                   | g don't have electricity.                 |
| 8 There are few people in the company            | h Bruno would get the job.                |

1 + e *There were a lot of people at the party who / that hadn't been invited.*

95.4 Write new sentences with similar meanings beginning **There being ...** **D**

- 1 As there was no food in the house, they went to a local restaurant.  
*There being no food in the house, they went to a local restaurant.*
- 2 There was no further business, so the meeting closed at 12:30.  
.....
- 3 The patients were sent home because there was no doctor available.  
.....
- 4 Because the facilities were inadequate at the hotel, the conference was relocated to a nearby university.  
.....