

# Existential Sentences

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**Target Learners:** Upper intermediate secondary students



**Class Duration:** 120 mins



**Corpus Used:** COCA, BNC, Lextutor (2K-Graded, Disney)



**Lesson Objectives:** By the end of the lesson, students will be able to

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the form and meaning of existential sentences;
2. Identify the subject-verb agreement rule for existential sentences;
3. Recognize different types of extension of existential sentences;
4. Spot the common mistakes related to existential sentences, e.g. 'there have' ;
5. Show awareness of different existential verbs with the use of corpora;
6. Use existential sentences to describe a dream school.

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[https://lml.eduhk.hk/grammar/?page\\_id=29](https://lml.eduhk.hk/grammar/?page_id=29).

## Acknowledgements:

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**A. Sophie is a reporter. She is working in Spain this week to write about the local fiestas. She phones her son Oliver to tell him all about it. Now watch the video and fill in the blanks.**



<http://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/grammar/beginner-grammar/there-there-are-it>

**Mum:** Hi, Oliver!

**Oliver:** Hi, Mum. Are you having a good time? Where are you now?

**Mum:** Can't you remember? You have to guess then! I'll give you some clues! It's warm and sunny and it's the city's 'fiesta' week. (1) There's so much happening.

**Oliver:** Oh yeah, like what?

**Mum:** Well, when I arrived, (2) there were fire-breathing dragons in the streets.

**Oliver:** Really?

**Mum:** Yeah, totally crazy. Hey, I'll send you a photo.

**Oliver:** Wow, that looks a bit dangerous! Were there any accidents?

**Mum:** No, it seems to be quite normal here! They're used to it. Now (3) there are giants walking down the street.

**B. Summarize the meaning of 'there' by looking at the tips.**



(1) There's so much happening =

So much is happening.

(2) There were fire-breathing dragons in the streets =

Fire-breathing dragons were in the streets.

(3) There are giants walking down the street =

Giants are walking down the street.

'There' is a dummy pronoun and it carries no meaning in existential ('there be') sentences. It does not refer to a place but introduces a topic or something existent.

### C. Subject-verb agreement in existential sentences

(a) Read the lines below. Underline the verbs immediately after 'there'. Then highlight the following noun phrase. The first one has been done for you as an example.

1. There <u>is</u> a big parade through the center of Manhattan.
2. Apparently, there is a monkey at the zoo that juggles with an umbrella and two oranges.
3. Although the studio was small, there was a sofa and a tiny alcove with just enough room for the cot.
4. There are many historic British traditions, and the Queen often goes to special ceremonies.
5. She visited Angola and Bosnia, where there are still terrible problems with landmines after the wars.
6. There are plenty of restaurants five minutes away on Bristol Road if you want something to eat.
7. By her fireside there was a settee and a table.
8. The gates were all closed and there was a mother and a daughter who was pregnant.
9. At the top there was a bathroom and Henry's tiny bedroom.
10. In most countries there are clinics and advice centers with a free phone line.
11. There are investors and second home buyers who sell every two or three years.
12. There were flowers and a jug of fresh milk on the table.
13. She would make sure there were carrots and water for them.
14. There are two computer rooms, an art center and an indoor swimming pool.
15. There are common values and a recognition that humans are not the be all and end all of the planet.

(b) Based on the verbs underlined and the noun phrase highlighted, fill in the table below. The first one has been done for you as an example.

No.	there	verb	the nearest noun phrase (singular)	No.	there	verb	the nearest noun phrase (plural)
1	there	is	a big parade				

What can you find from the table?

If the nearest noun phrase is singular, the verb is singular; if the nearest noun phrase is plural, the verb is plural.

The verb number in 'there be' clauses is determined by the number of the nearest noun phrase.

(c) Read the lines and fill in the correct verbs (*is/ are/ was/ were*).

1. There \_\_\_\_\_ an oak tree in my garden.
2. There \_\_\_\_\_ some bowls and a pan of soup in the kitchen.
3. Before they built the supermarket, there \_\_\_\_\_ lots of shops in the high street.
4. There \_\_\_\_\_ a table with drinks on it next to him, and he took a large whisky for himself.

5. You're someplace else where there \_\_\_\_\_ blue sky and a road you don't recognize.

#### D. Structure of existential sentences

(a) Read the lines below. Try to rewrite the sentences without using 'there'. Then identify the structure of the underlined part. The first one has been done for you as an example.

(Cling: present-participial clause    Clen: past-participial clause)

1. There are three people <u>on the coach</u> . (prepositional phrase, adjective, cling, clen) <u>Three people are on the coach.</u>
2. There are many stars <u>in the sky</u> . (prepositional phrase, adjective, cling, clen)
3. There are lots of jobs <u>available</u> . (prepositional phrase, adjective, cling, clen)
4. There will be two guys <u>sitting outside your house</u> . (prepositional phrase, adjective, cling, clen)
5. There are many mysteries <u>hidden in other caves</u> . (prepositional phrase, adjective, cling, clen)
6. There are some unpleasant things <u>going on</u> . (prepositional phrase, adjective, cling, clen)
7. There was a foot <u>in a grey sock</u> . (prepositional phrase, adjective, cling, clen)
8. There were ladies <u>present</u> . (prepositional phrase, adjective, cling, clen)

Can you find the pattern of the above existential sentences?

<p>The paraphrased sentences:</p> <p><u>Three people are on the coach.</u></p> <p>↓                      ↓                      ↓</p> <p>NP                      VP                      PP</p> <p>Existential sentence:</p> <p><u>There are three people on the coach.</u></p> <p>↓                      ↓                      ↓</p> <p><u>There</u>                      _____</p>	<p><u>There were ladies present.</u></p> <p>↓                      ↓                      ↓</p> <p><u>There</u>                      _____</p> <p><u>There are some unpleasant things going on.</u></p> <p>↓                      ↓                      ↓</p> <p><u>There</u>                      _____</p> <p><u>There are many mysteries hidden in other caves.</u></p> <p>↓                      ↓                      ↓</p> <p><u>There</u>                      _____</p>
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**E. Let's check your understanding.**

If the sentence is correct, put a tick ( ✓ ) in the brackets; If it is wrong, put a cross (X) in the brackets and correct the sentence. The first one has been done for you as an example.

1. There will be 4,000 fans travel to Huddersfield. ( X ) <u>There will be 4,000 fans <b>travelling</b> to Huddersfield.</u>
2. There have been some delays getting through to our customer service teams. ( ) _____
3. There are many details hiding from me. ( ) _____
4. There are a barbecue and a dinner in a local restaurant. ( ) _____
5. At such places as colonial Williamsburg there are shops sell pineapples. ( ) _____
6. And this time there was a woman sit by the fire. ( ) _____
7. There was no one come in when Joe and the others left. ( ) _____
8. There are so many good English books too. ( ) _____
9. There was a single shot and Ashton fell. ( ) _____
10. There will be 1,000 students looking for work as lifeguards. ( ) _____
11. There were a telephone and two chairs in the hall, and I sat down there. ( ) _____



## F. Little researcher

(a) Look at the following sentences written by your classmates. Do a search and discuss with your partner whether they are correct.

1. There have many people in Hong Kong. ( F )
2. There have many books on the table. ( F )

1. Go to this website <https://www.lex Tutor.ca/conc/eng/> and enter [there have] in the 'key word' box. Then choose [2k graded] corpus and click [Get concordance] at the bottom of the webpage.

**Corpus Concordance English v.8**

With sub-corpus sort on \* asterisked \* corpora +NEW\* BAWE Brit Academic Written (8 million/30 subs) » DEMO + Spoken (1.6m/9 subs) » DEMO

French German Spanish English

Base Speed ≈ 1 second per million words of corpus  
Add more for extras (associated words, family search, sub-corpus)

Keyword(s): equals there have (Max chars. 20) In corpus: 2k Graded (920k) Corpus descriptions

OPTION: With associated word(s) within 4 words to Either side  
and NONE of these words anywhere in the line

CONTROLS: NEW SORT | Sort Lines by Mean VP (Demo)

Sorted By word(s) to of keyword | or Keyword | Line Width 130 | Number of Lines 10,000 | Gapped? No

On STARTS or FAMILY searches, "sort by keyword" gives distribution of forms before concordance lines (+ again at bottom)

+ Scan for any recurring word (potential collocate) within 5 words presenting <= 4 times

DEMOS: Demo 1 Demo 2 Demo 3 Demo 4 Demo 5 sub-corpus > 'Royal' in US v UK Disambiguation by collocation > River bank

Money bank

Reset Get concordance

2. Read the lines shown in the corpus. When do we use 'have' after 'there'?

that has no end. THERE HAVE been many answers given to these questions, and some o  
th season today, THERE HAVE been all manner of changes involving free agent moveme  
d. Very quietly. THERE HAVE been no noisy tears, or anything of that kind.' I am v  
's West Indians, THERE HAVE been repeated calls for the Mayor's invitation to be r  
ained staff, and THERE HAVE been numerous complaints about inadequate care. Last m  
said Beverley. 'THERE HAVE been some nasty accidents in these hills. A man was ki  
ittle while ago. THERE HAVE been a couple of explosions down the hill since I stop  
ople, maybe, but THERE HAVE always been Starkadders at Cold Comfort Farm, and we w  
oney. No matter. THERE HAVE always been Starkadders at Cold Comfort Farm. Well, le  
in good health. THERE HAVE always been-' 'in know, in know,' interrupted Flora. '  
e of you. Never! THERE HAVE always been Starkadders at Cold Comfort. You must all  
in shall go mad! THERE HAVE always been Starkadders at Cold Comfort! in saw someth  
ou mun never go! THERE HAVE always been Starkadders at Cold Comfort. in shall go m  
he mud together. THERE HAVE always been Starkadders at Cold Comfort, and now there  
ast three months THERE HAVE been no fewer than twenty-three long-distance calls to  
ind telling you, THERE HAVE been moments in the last twenty-four hours when I've g  
back that stuck. THERE HAVE been many so-called 'spring revivals' in recent years  
believe you, but THERE HAVE been too many lies, and too many secrets. And I haven'

(b) What is the word class of 'there' in each of the following sentences?

1. 37 percent of likely republican voters <b>there</b> say they would never vote for him.
2. <b>There</b> seem to be so many choices.
3. Officials <b>there</b> say that tracks could be closed for weeks.
4. <b>There</b> exist people who perpetuate themselves in you.
5. <b>There</b> remain more questions than answers as to what brought down the plane.
6. How did you get <b>there</b> ?
7. <b>There</b> simply was not enough money to support all of the social services.
8. <b>There</b> , on a postcard-sized television screen, we first saw the attacks on the World.
9. <b>There</b> are many mysteries hidden in other caves.
10. 'If they don't take people out <b>there</b> , the other guy will,' he said.

a. Dummy  
pronoun

b. Adverb

(c) Work with your partners and do a search to see what verbs can follow the subject 'There' in an existential sentence. Follow the steps given on the next page to get concordance lines (Note: some are not existential sentences). Then complete the table.

<https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>

existential verb	example




Step 1:

COCA SEARCH FREQUENCY CONTEXT

List Chart **Collocates** Compare KWIC

there Word/phrase [POS]

\_vv0\* Collocates verb.BASE

+ 4 3 2 1 0 0 1 2 3 4 +

Find collocates Reset Help

☐ Sections ☐ Virtual ☐ Sort/Limit ☐ Options

Step 2:

COCA SEARCH FREQUENCY CONTEXT HELP

SEE CONTEXT: CLICK ON WORD [HELP...] iWeb THERE

	CONTEXT	FREQ
1	SEEM	360
2	REMAIN	221
3	APPEAR	219
4	EXIST	216
5	SAY	203
6	LIVE	110
7	NEED	103

Step 3: Select the frequently used words (the top 5) and click the button 'context'

Step 4: Read the sentences carefully, identity the existential sentences, and find the verbs used.

1. <b>There seem</b> to be fewer and fewer people who have time to volunteer.	9. <b>There seem</b> to be three issues that can affect a student's achievement of the final.
2. <b>There seem</b> to be very different approaches the departments take.	10. <b>There appear</b> to be five keys to improving technology education learning experiences for girls and young women
3. 37 percent of likely republican voters <b>there say</b> they would never vote for him.	11. Maschi said, <b>there appear</b> to be few studies on the issue of sentencing elderly offenders
4. <b>There appear</b> to be low expectations for the talks between the government and opposition.	12. <b>There remain</b> several critical issues where Moscow and Washington continue to interact.
5. <b>There appear</b> to be a lot more attempts. But schools are working very diligently.	13. <b>There exist</b> plenty of apps designed specifically for the task of managing your schedules

6. <b>There exist</b> reasons behind reasons.	14. <b>There remain</b> more questions than answers as to what brought down the plane.
7. Police <b>there say</b> all three attackers who stormed the Agriculture Training Institute have been killed.	15. Today the Muslim, Croat, and Serb communities <b>there live</b> in relative harmony
8. 37 percent of likely republican voters <b>there say</b> they would never vote for him.	16. Officials <b>there say</b> now 127 people have died in five days of Israeli airstrikes

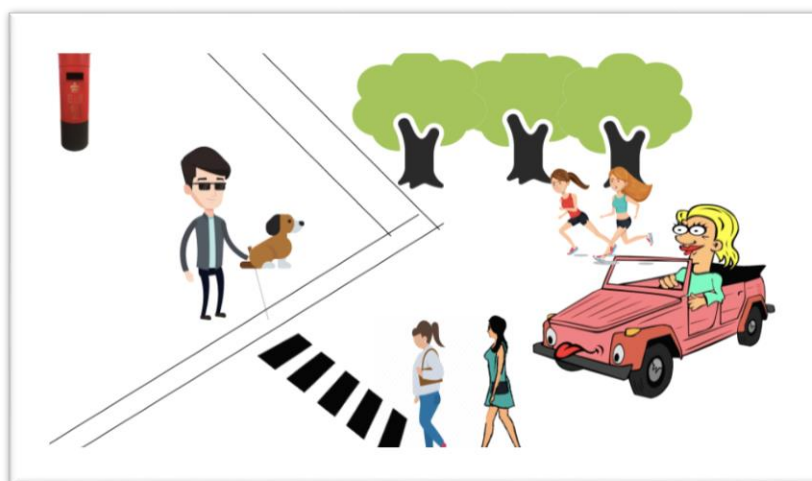


### G. Spot the differences

- Form a group of four.
- 3 students will receive the same picture, and 1 student will get a similar picture with slight differences.
- Students have to take turns to describe their own picture using one existential sentence. Listen to others' descriptions carefully and do not repeat what your group members have said.
- After finishing all the descriptions, list all the differences in the two pictures.



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## Knowledge Top-up Station



### Sentence examples:

There is a four-storey library, which is connected to every teaching building in the school, so it is convenient for teachers and students to get to the library.

There exists a plant room where we can grow and observe plants.

There is a large swimming pool lying in the southern part of the school. Students are free to swim there whenever they want to.

### Vocabulary on schools:



- |                       |                      |                         |                            |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. office             | 8. language lab      | 15. bleachers           | 21. lunchroom monitor      |
| 2. nurse's office     | 9. chemistry lab     | 16. track               | 22. cafeteria worker       |
| 3. guidance office    | 10. teachers' lounge | 17. principal           | 23. driver's ed instructor |
| 4. cafeteria          | 11. gym/gymnasium    | 18. assistant principal | 24. teacher                |
| 5. principal's office | 12. locker room      | 19. (school) nurse      | 25. coach                  |
| 6. classroom          | 13. auditorium       | 20. guidance counselor  | 26. custodian              |
| 7. locker             | 14. field            |                         |                            |

Source: <https://www.easypacelearning.com/all-lessons/learning-english-level-1/1428-school-vocabulary-with-pictures-english-lesson>