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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## 6 Minute Vocabulary

### Ordinal numbers



*This is not a word-for-word transcript*

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#### **Catherine**

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute Vocabulary with me, Catherine.

#### **Neil**

And me, Neil. And today we're talking about ordinal numbers.

#### **Catherine**

Yes. So numbers like **first**, **second** and **third**. So let's start by listening to Laurence. He's talking about his 18th birthday party. While you listen, try to answer this question: What date was his party? Here's Laurence.

#### **INSERT**

##### **Laurence**

For my **18th** birthday last year, I invited about sixty friends and relatives! It was on **the twenty-fifth of** May and it was **the first** time that I've ever had a big party. It was in a restaurant on **the third** floor of a hotel. The food was really delicious and I won **second** prize in the dancing competition!

#### **Neil**

So we asked you: What date was Laurence's birthday party?

#### **Catherine**

And the answer is: **the twenty-fifth of** May.

#### **Neil**

That's right. Now **the twenty-fifth** is an ordinal number like **the first** and **the second**. Ordinal numbers tell us the position of something in a group - the dates in a month, for example.

#### **Catherine**

Or which birthday it is. Laurence said it was his **eighteenth** birthday.

#### **Neil**

Yes, he did. Lucky him! And ordinal numbers are different to cardinal numbers. We use cardinal numbers like **one**, **two**, **three** for counting and to answer the question **how many**.

### **Catherine**

And to make a cardinal number into an ordinal number, add the letters **t-h** to the end of the cardinal number. **Eighteen - eighteenth; sixty - sixtieth.**

### **Neil**

And that works for all the cardinal numbers except for **first, second** and **third** – they're irregular, but for all the others, it's add **t-h**, so that's **fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh...**

### **Catherine**

**Eighth, ninth, tenth.** So that's good but in writing we do have a couple of irregular spellings, such as **fifth**:

### **Neil**

**f-i-f-t-h**

### **Catherine**

**eighth**

### **Neil**

**e-i-g-h-t-h**

### **Catherine**

**ninth**

### **Neil**

**n-i-n-t-h**

### **Catherine**

**twelfth**

### **Neil**

**t-w-e-l-f-t-h**

### **Catherine**

And for numbers ending in **-y** like **sixty**, drop the **-y** and add **-i-e** and **-th** to make **sixtieth**:

### **Neil**

**s-i-x-t-i-e-t-h**

### **Catherine**

Now let's look more closely at dates. Listen for the date in this clip.

## INSERT CLIP 1

It was on **the twenty-fifth of May** and it was **the first** time that I've ever had a big party.

### Neil

**The twenty-fifth of May.** When we say the day before the month, we always use the words **the** and **of**: **the twenty-fifth of May.**

### Catherine

But when we say the month before the day, we don't use the word **of**. It's just **May the twenty-fifth.**

### Neil

We often use the word **the** with ordinal numbers, but we can also use possessives. In this next clip, Laurence uses the possessive adjective **my** before **eighteenth.**

## INSERT 1 CLIP 2

For my **18th** birthday last year, I invited about sixty friends and relatives!

### Catherine

Let's have another clip.

## INSERT 1 CLIP 3

It was in a restaurant on **the third** floor of a hotel. The food was really delicious and I won **second** prize in the dancing competition!

### Neil

So, now we have two more ways of using ordinal numbers: space and quality.

### Catherine

Yes, we do. And **the third floor** tells us about the position of the floors in space. It's the same as when we give directions, for example: **Take the second left after the traffic lights.**

### Neil

And **second prize** tells us about the quality. And a point to make here is that ordinal numbers can be used as adjectives and adverbs without **the**. Like in the phrase **he won second prize. Second** is an adjective.

## IDENT

6 Minute Vocabulary from BBC Learning English.

### Neil

And now it's quiz time! Number one: Which of these is correct? The party's on: a) thirtieth of July b) the thirtieth July c) the thirtieth of July.

**Catherine**

And it's c) the thirtieth of July.

**Neil**

Great! Now, number two. Which word in this list is wrong? First, second, third, ford, fifth.

**Catherine**

The answer's **ford**. It should be **fourth**.

**Neil**

Yes, it should! Number three: Which of these is correct? a) My twenty-first birthday b) My the twenty-first birthday c) The my twenty-first birthday.

**Catherine**

The answer's a) My twenty-first birthday.

**Neil**

Well done if you got them right. But before we go, here's a vocabulary tip. Try saying your own important and memorable dates in English, for example, birthdays, anniversaries and festivals. If the dates are important, you're more likely to remember the English.

**Catherine**

There's more about this at [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com). Join us again soon for more 6 Minute Vocabulary.

**Both**

Bye!

## Vocabulary points to take away:

Ordinal numbers tell us the position of something in a group. They are used for:

### Dates

*It's the twelfth of November*

### The order of events

*Her fiftieth birthday*

### Position in space

*Our apartment's on the first floor*

*It's the third on the right.*

### Order of quality

*The first prize in the competition*

We usually form ordinal numbers by adding **-th** to cardinal numbers:

**four – fourth**

**first, second** and **third** are irregular forms.

**fifth, eighth, ninth, twelfth** and numbers ending in **-y** have irregular spellings:  
**twentieth**

We say dates with **the** and **of**:

**the eighth of April**

**April the eighth**

But we don't write them like that. We write them as:

**8th April**

**April 8th**

**8 April**

**first, second** and **third** have the irregular suffixes **1st, 2nd** and **3rd**.

We usually use the definite article **the** with ordinal numbers:

**on the third day**

**It was the first time I've ever been to France.**

But sometimes we use possessives:

**my thirtieth birthday**

**Julia's second child**

Ordinal numbers are also used as adjectives and adverbs without **the** or a possessive adjective.