
FIFA World Cup™: Formats of the final competitions

FIFA World Cup™ South Africa 2010 & Germany 2006

- 32 finalists
- 31 teams qualify by preliminary competition (the current World Cup holder will not automatically qualify)
- Host automatically qualified
- Eight groups of four teams (top two in each group qualify for the knock-out stage in the second round)
- Second round (knock-out stage, winners proceed to quarter-finals - in a case of a draw after extra time penalty shoot-outs will be used to decide)
- Quarter-finals (knock-out stage)
- Semi-finals
- Third-place play-off
- Final

FIFA World Cup™ Korea/Japan 2002

- 32 finalists
- 29 teams qualify by preliminary competition
- Both hosts and World Cup holder automatically qualified
- Eight groups of four teams (top two in each group qualify for the knock-out stage in the second round)
- Second round (knock-out stage, winners proceed to quarter-finals - in a case of a draw after extra time penalty shoot-outs will be used to decide)
- Quarter-finals (knock-out stage)
- Semi-finals
- Third-place play-off
- Final

FIFA World Cup™ France 1998

- 32 finalists
- 30 teams qualified by preliminary competition
- Host and World Cup holder automatically qualified
- Eight groups of four teams (top two in each group qualified for the knock-out stage in the second round)
- Second round (knock-out stage, winners proceeding to quarter-finals - in a case of a draw after extra time penalty shoot-outs were used to decide)
- Quarter-finals (knock-out stage)
- Semi-finals
- Third-place play-off
- Final

FIFA World Cup™ USA 1994, Italy 1990 & Mexico 1986

- 24 finalists
- 22 teams qualified by preliminary competition
- Host and World Cup holder automatically qualified
- Six groups of four teams (top two in each group qualified for the knock-out stage in the second round, together with the four best third-placed teams, the final matches in each group were played simultaneously)
- Second round (knock-out stage, winners proceeding to quarter-finals - in a case of a draw after extra time penalty shoot-outs were used to decide)
- Quarter-finals (knock-out stage)
- Semi-finals
- Third-place play-off
- Final

FIFA World Cup™ Spain 1982

- 24 finalists
- 22 teams qualified by preliminary competition
- Host and World Cup holder automatically qualified
- Six groups of four (top two teams progressing in to four further groups of three)
- Four groups of three (group winners progressing to a semi-final knock-out stage)
- Semi-finals
- Third-place play-off
- Final

FIFA World Cup™ Argentina 1978 & Germany FR 1974

- 16 finalists
- 14 teams qualified by preliminary competition
- Host and World Cup holder automatically qualified
- Four groups of four teams (first two teams progressed into two quarter-final groups – separated by goal-difference)
- Two quarter-final groups (with the winners becoming the finalists and the runners-up meeting in a third-place play-off)
- Third-place play-off
- Final

FIFA World Cup™ Mexico 1970, England 1966 & Chile 1962

- 16 finalists
- 14 teams qualified by preliminary competition
- Host and World Cup holder automatically qualified
- Four groups of four teams (first two teams progressed to quarterfinals - separated for the first time by goal-average)
- Quarter-finals (knock-out stage)
- Semi-finals
- Third-place play-off
- Final

FIFA World Cup™ Sweden 1958

- 16 finalists
- 14 teams qualified by preliminary competition
- Host and World Cup holder automatically qualified
- Four first round pools, winner and second place of each pool progressed to the quarter finals (in a case of equal points a play-off game was played to decide)
- Quarter finals (knock-out stage)
- Semi-finals
- Third-place play-off
- Final

FIFA World Cup™ Switzerland 1954

- 16 finalists
- 14 teams qualifying by preliminary competition
- Host and World Cup holder automatically qualified
- Four first round pools, (with two seeded teams per pool) winner and second placed team of each pool progressed to the quarter finals
- Quarter-finals (knock-out stage)
- Semi-finals
- Final

FIFA World Cup™ Brazil 1950

- 13 finalists
- 11 teams qualifying by preliminary competition
- Host and World Cup holder automatically qualified
- Two pools of four teams, one pool of three teams, one pool of two teams
- Winner of each pool progressed to final pool where all the teams played each other once
- First of the pool was the World Cup winner

FIFA World Cup™ France 1938

- 16 finalists
- 14 teams qualifying by preliminary competition
- Host and World Cup holder automatically qualified - only 15 finally entered, giving Sweden a bye to the second round
- First round (knock-out stage), eight teams proceeded to second round (in case of a draw the game was replayed)
- Second round (knock-out stage), four teams proceeded to semi-finals (in case of a draw the game was replayed)
- Semi-finals
- Third-place play-off
- Final

FIFA World Cup™ Italy 1934

- 16 finalists
- 16 teams qualifying by preliminary competition (host also had to qualify!)
- First round (knock-out stage), eight teams proceed to second round (in case of a draw the game was replayed)
- Second round (knock-out stage), four teams proceed to semi-finals (in case of a draw the game was replayed)
- Semi-finals
- Third-place play-off
- Final

FIFA World Cup™ Uruguay 1930

- 13 finalists (no preliminary competition, teams entered by invitation)
- Three pools of three teams, one pool of four teams (winner of each pool progressed to the semi-final knock-out stage)
- Semi-finals
- Final

FIFA World Cup™: Slots 1930-2010

	1930	1934	1938	1950	1954	1958	1962	1966	1970	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
European Zone	4	12	12	6	12	12 (11.5)	10	10	9	9 (9.5)	10 (10.5)	14	14 (13.5)	14	13	15	15 (14.5)	14	13
South American Zone	7	2	1	5	2	3	5	4	3	4 (3.5)	3 (3.5)	4	4	4 (3.5)	4 (3.5)	5	5 (4.5)	4 (4.5)	4.5
African Zone		1				*			1	1	1	2	2	2	3	5	5	5	6
North, Central American & Caribbean Zone	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	2 (2.25)	3	3	4 (3.5)	3.5
Asian Zone			1		1	*		1	1	0 (0.5)	1 (0.5)	1 (1)	2	2	2	4 (3.5)	4 (4.5)	4 (4.5)	4.5
Oceania Zone										1 (0.5)	0 (0.5)	1 (1)	0 (0.5)	0 (0.5)	0 (0.25)	0 (0.5)	0 (0.5)	1 (0.5)	0.5
TOTAL	13	16	15	13	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	24	24	24	24	32	32	32	32

Due to the later foundation of the confederations, the teams participating in the early editions of the FIFA World Cup were not officially affiliated to any superior organisation, and groupings were loosely based on geographical and continental boundaries.

* 1958 saw a play-off between Wales and Israel, with Israel categorised under the "Asia/Africa" group. Therefore 0.5 of a slot belonged jointly to Asia/Africa, although ultimately neither continent sent any representatives.

In brackets number of slots before the play-offs