

Agreement between subject and verb (2)

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| <p>With any of, each of, either of, neither of, or none of and a plural noun/pronoun we can use a <i>singular</i> or <i>plural</i> verb. However, we are more likely to use a singular verb in careful written English.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I don't think any of them <i>knows</i> (or <i>know</i>) where the money is hidden. <input type="checkbox"/> Neither of the French athletes <i>has</i> (or <i>have</i>) won this year. |
| <p>With a/the majority of, a number of, a lot of, plenty of, all (of), or some (of) and a plural noun/pronoun we use a <i>plural</i> verb. But if we say the number of, we use a singular verb.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> A number of refugees <i>have</i> been turned back at the border. <input type="checkbox"/> The number of books in the library <i>has</i> risen to over five million. |
| <p>After one of and a plural noun/pronoun we use a <i>singular</i> verb. However, after one of + plural noun/pronoun + who we can often use either a singular or plural verb, although a plural verb is more grammatical.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> One of the reasons I took the job <i>was</i> that I could work from home. <input type="checkbox"/> He's one of those teachers who <i>insist/insists</i> on pupils sitting silently in class. |
| <p>With any of, none of, the majority of, a lot of, plenty of, all (of), some (of) and an uncountable noun we use a <i>singular</i> verb.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> All the furniture <i>was</i> destroyed in the fire. <input type="checkbox"/> None of the equipment <i>appears</i> to be damaged. |
| <p>With every or each and a singular noun or co-ordinated noun (<i>x and y</i>) we use a <i>singular</i> verb. (For each of, see above.)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Every room <i>looks</i> over the harbour. <input type="checkbox"/> Every boy and girl <i>takes</i> part in the activity. <input type="checkbox"/> Each child <i>has</i> drawn a picture. <i>but</i> <input type="checkbox"/> The children <i>have</i> each drawn a picture. |
| <p>With everyone, everybody, everything (and similar words beginning any-, some- and no-) we use a <i>singular</i> verb.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Practically everyone <i>thinks</i> that Phil should be given the job. |

When a subject has two or more items joined by **and**, we usually use a plural verb:

- **Jean and David** *are* moving back to Australia.

However, phrases connected by **and** can also be followed by singular verbs if we think of them as making up a single item:

- **Meat pie and peas** *is* Tom's favourite at the moment. (*or ...are...*)
- **The lorry, its cargo and passengers** *weighs* around 35 tonnes. (*or ...weigh...*)

When a subject is made up of two or more items joined by **(either)...or...** or **(neither)...nor...** we use a singular verb if the last item is singular (although a plural verb is sometimes used in informal English), and a plural verb if the last item is plural:

- **Either the station or the cinema** *is* a good place to meet. (*or ...are...* in informal English)
- **The President or his representatives** *are* to attend the meeting.

If the last item is singular and previous item plural, we can use a singular or plural verb:

- **Either the teachers or the principal** *is* to blame for the accident. (*or ...are to blame...*)

In **there + be/have** (see Unit 95) we use a singular verb form with singular and uncountable nouns and a plural form with plural nouns. However, in informal speech we often use a shortened singular form of **be** or **have** (= **There's**) with plural nouns:

- Over the last few years **there** *have* been many improvements in car safety.
- **There's** been lots of good films on lately. (*or There've been...*)

We often do the same with **how/here/where + be/have**:

- **How's** your mum and dad these days? (*or How are...?*)

Complete the sentences with present simple forms of the verb in brackets. If both a singular and plural form are possible, give them both. (A-D)

- 1 Plenty of European football clubs interested in signing Nilsen from Rowham City, but the Rowham manager has said that no-one at the club Nilsen to leave.
(*be/ want*)
- 2 The majority of those questioned that the government's economic policies have failed, although neither the Prime Minister nor the Education Minister indicated that these policies will change. (*think/ has*)
- 3 "It's the first time that either of us been to China, but everyone we've met here been very welcoming and helpful." (*have/ have*)
- 4 Professor Smith and Dr Peters that the wreck of the ship and its cargo a danger to local people fishing near the island. (*claim/ constitute*)
- 5 "Oh, good, sausages and chips my favourite." "Sorry, all the sausages gone, but there plenty of chips left if you want some."
(*be/ has/ be*)

Unit 42

Agreement between subject and verb (3)

A

Some nouns are usually plural and take a plural verb. These include **belongings, clothes, congratulations, earnings, goods, outskirts, overheads, particulars** (= information), **premises** (= building), **riches, savings, stairs, surroundings, thanks**. The noun **whereabouts** can be used with either a singular or a plural verb. The nouns **police** and **people** always take a plural verb, and the noun **staff** usually does:

- The company's **earnings** *have increased* for the last five years.
- Police** *believe* that Thomas is in Brazil, although his exact **whereabouts** *are/is* unknown.
- Staff** *say* that the new computer system has led to greater levels of stress in their work.

B

Some nouns always end in -s and look as if they are plural, but when we use them as the subject they have a singular verb:

- The **news** from the Middle East *seems* very encouraging.

Other words like this include **means** (= 'method' or 'money'); some academic disciplines, e.g. **economics, linguistics, mathematics, phonetics, physics, politics, statistics**; some sports, e.g. **athletics, gymnastics**; and some diseases, e.g. **diabetes, measles, rabies**. However, compare:

| <i>academic subject</i> | <i>general use</i> |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Politics <i>is</i> popular at this university. | <input type="checkbox"/> Her politics <i>are</i> bordering on the fascist. (= political belief) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Statistics <i>was</i> always my worst subject. | <input type="checkbox"/> Statistics <i>are</i> able to prove anything you want them to. (= numerical information) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economics <i>has</i> only recently been recognised as a scientific study. | <input type="checkbox"/> The economics behind their policies <i>are</i> unreasonable. (= the financial system) |

C

Although the words **data** and **media** (= newspaper, television, etc.) are plural (with singular forms **datum** and **medium**), they are commonly used with a singular verb. However, in formal contexts such as academic writing a plural verb is preferred. Notice that other similar plurals such as **criteria** and **phenomena** (with singular forms **criterion** and **phenomenon**) are always used with plural verbs. Compare:

- All the **data** *is* available for public inspection. (*or ...are available...*) *and*
- I agree that the **criteria** *are* not of equal importance. (*not ...the criteria is not...*)

D

With a phrase referring to a measurement, amount or quantity we usually prefer a singular verb:

- Only **three metres** *separates* the runners in first and second places. (*rather than ...separate...*)
- The **fifty pounds** he gave me *was* soon spent. (*rather than ...were...*)

and a singular verb must be used when the complement is a singular noun phrase (e.g. a long time):

- **Three hours** *seems* a long time to take on the homework. (*not Three hours seem...*)

After **per cent** (also **percent** or **%**) (*of*) we use a singular verb if the **per cent** phrase refers to a singular or uncountable noun and a plural verb if it refers to a plural noun. Compare:

- **An inflation rate** of only 2 per cent *makes* a big difference to exports. *and*
- I would say that about 50 per cent *of the houses* *need* major repairs.

However, where we use a singular noun that can be thought of as either a whole unit or a collection of individuals, we can use either a singular or plural verb:

- Some 80 per cent *of the electorate* *is* expected to vote. (*or ...are expected...*)

Do even numbers only.

42.1 Make any necessary corrections to the underlined verbs. (A–D)

- 1 Dr Jones's whereabouts has been kept a closely guarded secret by his family.
- 2 Bill Clinton's politics was inspired by John Kennedy.
- 3 Phenomena such as sun spots have puzzled scientists for centuries.
- 4 Some 30 per cent of the milk drunk in the country are imported.
- 5 When the soldiers got lost in the jungle, their only means of survival were to eat berries.
- 6 Over the last decade the company's overheads has increased dramatically.
- 7 The research data was collected during the period 12th–29th July 2002.
- 8 You don't need much sugar for this pudding; ten grams are enough.
- 9 Modern linguistics is often said to have begun at the start of the 20th century.
- 10 Congratulations goes to Richard Branch for his excellent exam results.
- 11 The coastal surroundings of the village is particularly attractive.
- 12 Nowadays politics seem to be more about saving money than changing society for the better.
- 13 He feels that the media have criticised him unfairly.
- 14 I know people often have to wait for hospital treatment, but two years seems ridiculously long.
- 15 Measles have killed a large number of children in the Nagola region.
- 16 Further particulars about the house are available from the owner.
- 17 Around 90 per cent of the concert audience was over 60 years old.
- 18 Ten kilometers are a long way to run if you're not fit.
- 19 If athletics are neglected in schools, this will have a big impact on future national teams.
- 20 People says the house is haunted.
- 21 Recent statistics provide firm evidence of a rapid increase in living standards in Asia.
- 22 About 60 per cent of the people questioned wants cars to be banned from the town centre.