

Subject-Verb Agreement

with Indefinite Pronouns, Collective Nouns and Special Cases

Indefinite pronouns

Though sometimes counterintuitive, indefinite pronouns such as *anyone, everyone, everybody, someone, somebody, each, neither, either, no one* and *nobody* are singular subjects grammatically and therefore require singular verbs.

- *Everyone has finished the assignment, but nobody has passed it in.*

Pronouns such as *all* and *some* take either a singular or plural verb form depending on the the phrase that follows. If the thing being referred to by the pronoun is countable and plural, then use the plural verb form; if not, use the singular verb form.

- *All of my essay-writing anxiety is gone.*
- *Some of my spelling mistakes remain.*

Collective nouns

Collective nouns are singular entities composed of two or more individuals. In each sentence, decide if the collective noun is acting as a singular entity or as individuals, and make the verb agree appropriately.

- *The committee speaks with one voice. The committee disagree vehemently.*
- *The jury has agreed upon a verdict. The jury have been unable to agree upon a verdict.*

Special Cases

Some nouns which logically ought to be singular aren't. Though a pair of trousers is one item of clothing, the word is considered grammatically plural, because the item has two parts, just like tweezers and scissors.

- *The tweezers are in the pocket of the trousers which are in the cupboard.*

Other nouns look plural but aren't.

- *Mathematics is my strong point, but politics is more fun.*

Sometimes it's a matter of judgement.

- *Baked beans is my favourite comfort food. (a singular dish)*
- *Baked beans are all over the floor since I dropped the casserole. (plural contents of a dish)*

Measurements are usually singular.

- *Two cups of flour is enough. (one measurement)*
- *Ten dollars is a fair price. (one sum)*

Fractions are singular or plural depending on what is being fractioned.

- *One third of the country votes; one-third of voters vote reluctantly.*

Words borrowed into English from other languages are sometimes confused. *Criteria, phenomena,* and *memoranda* are plural (*criterion, phenomenon,* and *memorandum* are the singular forms.) *Data* and *media* are strictly the plurals of *datum* and *medium*, but are commonly used as singular. Use your judgement to decide between the common and the strictly correct.