Subject verb agreement: further information



One of these cheeses is mild; the others are strong.

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Singular nouns are followed by a singular verb and plural nouns by a plural verb:

> **A client from Romania was at the seminar.**
> **Among those present at the seminar were our Romanian clients.**

But sometimes it is not so easy to choose the correct form:

When the subject is a clause

<?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />	Singular verb	Plural verb
We regard the contents of the clause as a singular entity and use a singular verb most of the time.	Wherever you want to eat is fine with me. To work for a big, multi-national company was always her dream. Forgetting someone's name feels terrible.	
However, in a 'what' clause, it depends on the noun that comes after the verb.	What I love most about this job is the salary. What we need is a new approach. Note that although a plural verb is correct with a plural noun, you might hear a singular verb in informal conversation. For example: What I love most about this job is the people. [informal, conversational]	What I love most about this job are the people. What annoys me are the hundreds of emails I get every day.

Nouns that can be singular or plural

Nouns that refer to a group, company or organisation can be used with either a singular or plural verb. Usually, there is little or no difference in the meaning and it doesn't matter which we use although singular verbs are preferred in formal English. <?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />

However, we sometimes use a singular verb when we consider the group as a single entity and a plural verb when we see it as a collection of individuals - it depends what we want to say about them:

The IT team is based in Lyon. [the whole team]
The team is/are going to lunch at 1 o'clock. [the whole team or each member]

A British jury consists of twelve people. [the whole thing]
The jury have all made their decision. [each person separately]

Other examples include: audience, class, company, crowd, department, family, government, population, school and the names of companies or organisations such as the BBC, Apple, the Stock Exchange and the World Health Organisation.

Note that

1. **Most of the time, we do not make a clear and deliberate distinction between singular and plural use. Sometimes both are possible:**

   My family live/lives in Ireland.

   Or it is clear from the context which to use.

   The crowd is getting bigger. ✔
   The crowd are getting bigger. ✖

2. **There are other nouns which are always plural, such as 'police':**

   The police have arrested two men in connection with the robbery.

   And some which are plural most of the time, such as 'staff':

Staff who want to leave early have to ask permission first.

Nouns ending in 's'

The choice of verb depends on the noun. Here are some examples: <?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />

	Singular verb	Plural verb
Those we see as a single entity, including the names of countries and the titles of films and publications are followed by a singular verb.	**Jaws is one of the best films of the 1970s.** **The United States wants to promote democracy.** **The Sunday Times has been published since 1821.**	
Some appear to be plural but are not - these include the names of some sports and illnesses. **They also include some academic subjects but see below.**	**The news wasn't good.** **Gymnastics is her favourite sport.** **Rabies is a life-threatening disease.** **Physics includes the study of heat and light.**	
Some names of academic subjects also have a second, more general meaning.	**Statistics was the most difficult part of the course.** **Politics seems to be a more popular subject nowadays.** **Economics isn't my favourite subject.**	**Reliable statistics are essential in market research. [information]** **His politics have changed as he's got older. [political beliefs]** **The economics of this industry need to be considered. [its financial system]**

Some have no singular form and always take a plural verb.		**His clothes are really unfashionable.** **His earnings have shot up.** **Thanks were given to all the participants.** **Other examples include:** · **belongings** · **outskirts** · **goods** · **premises**
Some have the same form in the singular and plural.	**My favourite means of transport is the train.**	**Several means of dealing with the situation were discussed.**

Irregular plural nouns

Some common irregular plural nouns are nowadays treated as singular. For example:<?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />

This data is unreliable.
Is it a strong bacteria?
What was the criteria for the decision?

Another example is 'the media' - a collective term for different methods of broadcasting the news - although some people prefer a plural verb:

The media was/were responsible for influencing public opinion.
The media has/have been accused of invading people's privacy.

In other contexts, 'media' is clearly plural:

Various media for delivering the training courses are being considered.

Measurements, amounts and quantities

<?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />	Singular verb	Plural verb
A singular verb is preferred.	The Â€200 he offered isn't enough. I think 75km is too far to travel to work every day.	
With percentages, it depends whether the noun in the sentence is singular or plural.	40% of his time is spent in meetings.	10% of the employees want to work in a different department.

More than one subject

We usually use a plural verb: <?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />

My sister and I are going to Italy next year.

But if we see the items as a single entity, we use a singular verb:

Blackcurrant crumble and ice cream is my favourite dessert.
Health and Safety has to be a priority for us.

When the subject is a phrase

Be careful to match the noun to the verb:<?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />

The manager of the European teams has retired. [the manager, not 'teams have']
The emails from the customer have all been dealt with. [the emails, not 'customer has']

This is an important point to consider if you take a test in English.

'One of'

'One of' is followed by a plural noun but does not take a plural verb because it refers to 'one of a pair or group':<?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />

One of my colleagues is sick. ✔
One of my colleagues are sick. ✖

An exception is when we add a relative pronoun. In this case, we can use either a singular or a plural verb. Here are some examples:

+ plural noun	+ plural noun + 'who'/'which'/'that'
singular verb:	**plural or singular verb:**
One of the best things about the film was the music.	**He's one of those people who expect/expects perfection.**
One of my friends speaks fluent Japanese.	**It's one of the decisions which is/are very difficult to make alone.**

See also Quantifiers and plural nouns.

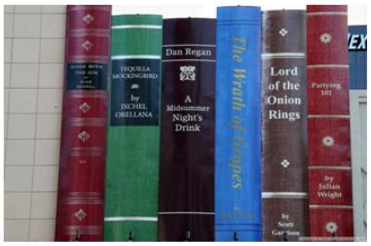
Examples



The goods are loaded onto ships by crane.



My family like/likes getting together at the weekend.



"Angels and Demons" is Dan Brown's second novel.



Two hours wasn't enough to discuss all the items on the agenda.



Moules frites is a popular French dish.



The outskirts of the city are much quieter than the centre and it's cheaper to rent a flat.

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Last update: **2023/02/14 14:32**