

Agreement

I. The main rule

II. Exceptions to the rule

III. Special cases of agreement

I. The main rule:

A **singular countable subject** and an **uncountable subject** are followed by a **singular verb**; a **plural countable subject** is followed by a **plural verb**.

His colleague writes all his papers in English.

His colleagues write all their papers in English.

The water was heated to 50°C.

II. Exceptions to the rule

1. Nouns in –ics denoting academic subjects (mathematics, physics, statistics, economics ...) and **news** are followed by a **singular verb**.

Statistics is taught at several faculties.

What's the news?

Economics and statistics take a **plural verb** when

economics = the way in which money influences whether or not a plan/business will work effectively (ekonomická stránka)

statistics = a set of numbers which represent facts or measurements (statistické údaje)

What are the economics of this project?

There is no doubt that the statistics are incomplete.

For more on nouns of this kind see A Remedial Course in English Grammar: Count and uncount nouns.

2. Nouns of countries, books, films referring to a **single unit** are followed by a **singular verb**.

The United States of America is a country with a great diversity of both people and landscape.

"My Father's Tears and Other Stories" was written by John Updike.

3. Nouns in phrases expressing the idea of a **whole amount** also take a **singular verb** when referring to **duration**:

money: *Five thousand pounds is a lot of money.*

distance: *For a small child two miles is quite a long distance.*

4. Although "a/the majority/minority of, a number of, a lot of, plenty of" are singular in form, they take a **plural verb** because their meaning is plural.

The majority of our foreign students are from France and Turkey.

I'm afraid that plenty of/a lot of the experiments have failed.

Distinguish between:

A number of our experiments **are** performed in the Škoda laboratories. (= řada)

The number of experiments performed in the Škoda laboratories **has**

increased in the last few years. (= počet)

5. The following **nouns denoting groups** can be used with either a **singular verb** (when talking about the group as a whole) or a **plural verb** (when thinking about the members who form the group):

audience, class, committee, company, department, government, group, team, staff.

The team works/work under the guidance of a senior lecturer.

Note:

“People” and “police” are always used with a **plural verb**.

How many people in this group speak English?

III. Special cases of agreement

1. After per cent/percent/%

the verb is singular when it refers to a **singular** or **uncountable noun** and **plural** when it refers to a **plural noun**.

At present 10% of the country's energy comes from renewable sources.

Only 10% of the students speak German.

But: What is the percentage of students dropping out every year?

2. “There is” is used when the following **noun** is **singular** or **uncountable**.

There is a desk near the window.

It is also used when **the first noun in a group is singular**.

There is a desk and some chairs near the window.

“There are” is used with a **plural noun** and also before: - **“a lot, a number, a few”**

- **numbers beginning with “a”**

(a hundred, a thousand, ...)

There are two desks near the window.

There were a few students waiting outside the Dean's Office.

There were a thousand people gathered in the square.

3. Agreement with “and” and “or”.

Subjects joined by **“and”** require a **plural verb**.

Both the author and his two co-authors were at the conference.

Subjects joined by **“or”** require a **singular verb** if the **last noun is singular**, and

a plural verb if the **last noun is plural**.

I don't remember whether the two co-authors or the author was at the conference.

I don't remember whether the author or his two co-authors were at the conference.

4. Agreement with “any, none, either, neither of”.

“Any, none of” can take either a **singular verb** or a **plural verb**.

I don't think that any of our students makes/make such mistakes.

There are several foreign students in our department but

none of them is/are British.

“**Either, neither of**” take a **singular verb** in **formal writing**; in **conversation** they are often followed by a **plural verb**.

Either/Neither of these two methods is applicable in this case.

(formal)

Either/neither of them speak French.

(informal)

EXERCISE

Underline the correct form of the verb.

1. In that country, more than 50% of the country's energy consumption **is/are** covered by renewable sources of energy.
2. A number of economists **believe/believes** that another recession is inevitable.
3. Your supervisor or a senior staff member **are/is** the one you should ask.
4. The police **was/were** called.
5. Three hours **are/is** the time needed for this experiment.
6. Statistics **show/shows** that 20% of students fail in their first year.
7. The Netherlands **is/are** famous for its wind mills and tulips.
8. A number of solutions **was/were** suggested.
9. None of the students present **was/were** interested in the offer.
10. One of the students or the lab technicians **is/are** to blame for the failure of the experiment.
11. There **is/are** a dozen reasons for not going there.
12. Our team **support/supports** the project manager's decision.
13. The number of economists who believe that another recession is inevitable **are/is** growing.
14. There **is/are** a number of solutions to this problem.
15. There **is/are** one British and two American students in our class.
16. The majority of our employees **has/have** university degrees.
17. Sometimes people **don't/doesn't** know what's best for them.
18. Five miles **is/are** an easy walking distance.
19. Economics **study/studies** the way in which wealth is produced and used.
20. Only 20% of your answers **was/were** right.
21. What we need **are/is** more money.
22. The United States **are/is** still the world's biggest economic power although China is rapidly catching up with **them/it**.
23. The economics of that scheme **needs/need** to be carefully examined.
24. 50,000 Czech crowns **were/was** the biggest sum they were ready to pay for that device.
25. Statistics **is/are** a branch of mathematics.
26. More than 30% of Americans **is/are** obese.
27. Linguistics **is/are** the study of language in general and of particular languages, their structure, grammar, and history.
28. Only a minority of people **support/supports** the proposed reforms.
29. Either the lab technician or the students **are/is** to blame for the failure of that experiment.

30. There **are/is** two Americans and one Brit in our class.
31. Neither of these two solutions **is/are** feasible.
32. There **is/are** a hundred programmes to choose from.
33. Either of their two proposals **is/are** acceptable.
34. The selection committee **decides/decide** whether the applicant fulfils the requirements.
35. The number of solutions **are/is** limited.
36. There **is/are** a few questions that remained unanswered.
37. 50% of the country's car production **are/is** exported.
38. Unfortunately, neither of our partners **keeps/keep** the deadlines.