

mixed singular and plural

group nouns In British English, singular words for groups of people and organisations (e.g. *team, family, choir, government, bank*) are often used with plural verbs and pronouns.

My family are furious with me. They think I have let them down.

This happens particularly when we are thinking about personal kinds of activity. Compare:

The team really want to win the cup this season.

A rugby union team consists of fifteen players.

In American English, plural verbs are uncommon with group nouns.

1 Choose plural verb forms and pronouns (in seven sentences) or singulars (in three sentences).

- 1 The choir *has / have* thrown me out because *it says / they say* I can't sing.
- 2 The hospital *is / are* sending John home next week.
- 3 Our committee *has / have* twelve members.
- 4 A group of Dutch musicians *is / are* visiting Ireland.
- 5 The hospital *is / are* closing next month for building work.
- 6 Most of my family *lives / live* in Scotland.
- 7 The bank *closes / close* early on Fridays.
- 8 Our bank *is / are* always very friendly and helpful.
- 9 The team *is / are* getting desperate; *it hasn't / they haven't* won a game this year.
- 10 The golf club *is / are* putting the subscription up again.

a number of, the majority of etc + plural noun have plural verbs and pronouns.

A number of people have criticised our decision.

The majority of his students are pleased with their courses.

plural expressions of quantity are often treated as singular.

Thirty miles is a long way to run.

We often use a/an before **adjective + plural expression of quantity**.

I waited for a good two hours. We'll need another four tables.

Common fixed expressions with and are often treated like singular nouns.

Toast and marmalade isn't enough for breakfast, in my opinion.

2 Correct the mistakes or write 'Correct'!

- ▶ The majority of members has now voted. *have*
 - ▶ Can you give me back that 20 euros I lent you? *Correct*
- 1 A number of people has tried unsuccessfully to find the treasure.
 - 2 Two hundred euros are too much to pay for an hour's consultation.
 - 3 Can you get other three packets of butter while you're out?
 - 4 Fish and chips are a very popular British meal.
 - 5 A couple of unexpected problems has arisen.
 - 6 I've had another busy few weeks.
 - 7 Fifteen hours are a long time to drive non-stop.
 - 8 Who are those three people?
 - 9 The majority of the new MPs is 40 or younger.
 - 10 £5 doesn't buy as much as it used to.

singular noun, plural modifying expression When a singular noun is modified by a plural expression, the verb is normally singular.

A good knowledge of three languages is needed for the job. (NOT ... are needed)

one of; more than one Note these structures:

One of my friends is getting married. (NOT One of ... are ...)

More than one person is/are going to be disappointed.

people doing/having the same thing To talk about several people each doing or having the same thing, we normally use a **plural** noun for the repeated idea.

The students can use dictionaries. (MORE NATURAL THAN ... a dictionary.)

We almost always use **plurals** after **possessives** in this case.

Tell the kids to blow their noses. (NOT ... their nose:) Six people lost their lives.

3 Correct or improve these sentences.

- ▶ One of you are going to have to stand. ^{is}.....
- 1 Experience of working with handicapped children are an advantage.
 - 2 I know more than one student that are certain to fail the exam.
 - 3 Tell everybody they can leave their coat in the cloakroom.
 - 4 I think one of my earrings have fallen off in the car.
 - 5 John's interest in tropical animals and birds are becoming an obsession.
 - 6 Most of the people who were at the barbecue came on a bike.
 - 7 One of those children have gone into the wrong classroom.
 - 8 All of my friends have got a really small room.
 - 9 John and Henry both came with their wife.
 - 10 Over a hundred MPs lost their seat in the last election.
 - 11 The structure of animal societies are often very complex.

NOTES

After one of the ... who etc singular and plural verbs are both common.

She's one of the few women who has/have climbed Everest in winter.

After any/none/neither/either of, singular or plural verbs are possible (see page 169).

None of my friends know(s) where I am.

subject and complement If a verb is a long distance from the subject, people sometimes make it agree with a following complement instead of the subject, but this is not generally considered correct. Compare:

The biggest problem is the holiday dates. (NOT ... are the holiday dates.)

The most interesting thing on television last week, in my own opinion, was/were the tennis championships.

(Was is more correct.)

A **plural** verb is, however, common in structures beginning **What**.

What we need is/are more people like Jeannie.

countries Plural names of countries have singular verbs.

The United States is coming out of recession.

here's etc In informal speech we often use *here's*, *there's* and *where's* before a plural noun.

Here's your gloves. There's two policemen outside. Where's those letters?