

Some nouns which look plural (e.g. 'news') are in fact singular and take a singular verb. ➡ 530

8

- × The crowd outside the gates of the palace **were** enormous.
- × The class **was** all working hard during the lesson.

- ✓ The crowd outside the gates of the palace **was** enormous.
- ✓ The class **were** all working hard during the lesson.

➡ 147

9

- × Getting letters from old friends **give** me a lot of pleasure.
- × To see her again after so many years **were** wonderful.

- ✓ Getting letters from old friends **gives** me a lot of pleasure.
- ✓ To see her again after so many years **was** wonderful.

When the subject is an *-ing* clause ('Getting letters from old friends') or a *to*-clause ('To see her again after so many years'), the following verb is singular. Compare: 'Cigarettes + *are* bad for you.' 'Smoking twenty cigarettes a day + *is* bad for you.'

10

- × Ten years **are** a long time to spend in prison.
- × 90 miles an hour **were** over the speed limit.

- ✓ Ten years **is** a long time to spend in prison.
- ✓ 90 miles an hour **was** over the speed limit.

When the subject is a period of time, an amount, a distance, a speed, etc., the verb is singular.

11

- × The house had been broken into but **nothing were** missing.
- × **Were** anybody hurt in the accident?

- ✓ The house had been broken into but **nothing was** missing.
- ✓ **Was** anybody hurt in the accident?

The following pronouns are singular and take a singular verb:

another, anybody, anyone, anything, everybody, everyone, everything, nobody, no one, nothing, somebody, someone, something, what, whatever

Note that although these pronouns take a singular verb, many of them are used with *they, their*, etc, especially in informal styles: 'Someone has forgotten *their* umbrella.'

➡ 42.4

12

- × Some of the fruit **were** going bad.
- × Two thirds of the money **were** spent on laboratory equipment.

- ✓ Some of the fruit **was** going bad.
- ✓ Two thirds of the money **was** spent on laboratory equipment.

When the subject consists of **all**, **a lot of**, **any**, **more**, **most**, **some**, a fraction or percentage + noun, the verb agrees with the noun. Compare:

Most/Three quarters of the **machinery** + **was** old-fashioned.

Most/Three quarters of the **letter** + **was** about her holiday.

Most/Three quarters of the **books** + **are** in the library.

13

✗ Neither letter **were** properly addressed.

✗ Every one of us **were** given a prize.

! Neither of the governments **are** willing to give way.

✓ Neither letter **was** properly addressed.

✓ Every one of us **was** given a prize.

✓ Neither of the governments **is** willing to give way.

Each (of), **every (one of)**, **either (of)** and **neither (of)** normally take a singular verb:

Neither child **is** interested in music.

Neither is interested in music.

Neither of our children **is** interested in music.

Note that **neither of** and **either of** may also be used with a plural verb, but NOT in formal styles. In formal styles, the verb is singular. ➡ 523.2

14

✗ How many children **do** Angela have?

✗ Among her achievements **are** winning a medal in the last Olympics.

✓ How many children **does** Angela have?

✓ Among her achievements **is** winning a medal in the last Olympics.

Errors in subject–verb agreement sometimes occur when the subject is not in its normal position (i.e. immediately before the verb).

In questions, the subject normally goes after the first auxiliary verb. This means that, in the first sentence above, **do** has to agree with 'Angela', NOT with 'children'.

When a sentence begins with an adverbial expression, the subject and verb sometimes change places. The subject of the second sentence above is 'winning a medal in the last Olympics', NOT 'her achievements'.

15

✗ Italy and India **has** signed a three-year trade agreement.

✓ Italy and India **have** signed a three-year trade agreement.

When the subject consists of two parts joined by **and** (or by **both ... and**), the verb is normally plural. ➡ .16 below

16

✗ Bread and butter **were** all we had to eat.

✓ Bread and butter **was** all we had to eat.

Sometimes two nouns joined by **and** form the name of a single thing or idea, e.g.

'fish and chips', 'bread and butter' (= bread with butter on it), 'law and order'.
After subjects of this type, the verb is singular.

17

× For most writers, a typewriter or a word processor are indispensable.

✓ For most writers, a typewriter or a word processor is indispensable.

When the subject consists of two singular count nouns linked by **or**, the verb is singular.

18

× Either the landlord or his wife were not telling the truth.

✓ Either the landlord or his wife was not telling the truth.

× Neither the principal nor his assistants is in favour of the proposal.

✓ Neither the principal nor his assistants are in favour of the proposal.

In formal styles, when the subject consists of two nouns joined by **or**, **either ... or**, or **neither ... nor**, the verb usually agrees with the second noun. In the first sentence above, 'wife' is singular and so the verb is singular. In the second sentence, 'assistants' is plural and so the verb is plural.

When just one of the nouns is plural, it is usually placed last: 'Either the child or the parents **have** to adjust.' (NOT 'Either the parents or the child has to adjust.')

Note that in everyday conversation many speakers use a plural verb, even when the last noun is singular.

19

× There is two countries that I have always wanted to visit.

✓ There are two countries that I have always wanted to visit.

× In the kitchen there were a table and two chairs.

✓ In the kitchen there was a table and two chairs.

⇒ 786.3

aid

45

× Poorer countries in the region are to receive more foreign aids.

✓ Poorer countries in the region are to receive more foreign aid.

When **aid** means 'money, equipment, food,' etc, it is an uncountable noun and does not have a plural form.

aim

46

1

× The medical team has been sent with the aim to train local staff.

✓ The medical team has been sent with the aim of training local staff.

An action is taken **with the aim of doing** something. Compare: 'Their aim is to train local staff.' 'They aim/are aiming to train local staff.'

2

× When I turned round, he was aiming a gun to me.

✓ When I turned round, he was aiming a gun at me.

We **aim** a weapon **at** someone or something.

aircraft

47

× The museum contains some of the oldest aircrafts in the world.

✓ The museum contains some of the oldest aircraft in the world.

The plural form of **aircraft** is the same as the singular form: 'one aircraft', 'two aircraft'. ➡ 181.5

alive

48

× Inside the basket there was an alive snake.

✓ Inside the basket there was a live snake.

We do not use **alive** in front of a noun (➡ 16.1). Instead, we use **live** when we are talking about animals or things: 'a **live** mouse', 'a **live** broadcast', 'a **live** match'. When we are talking about people, we use **living**: 'He is the world's greatest **living** opera singer.'

all

49

1

× By the end of the race, all the runners was exhausted.

✓ By the end of the race, all the runners were exhausted.

It is the noun after **all** that decides the number of the verb. Since 'runners' is plural, the verb must be plural. Compare: 'All the **tickets have** been sold.' 'All the **money has** been spent.' ➡ 44.12

2

× I meet all the kinds of people in my work.

✓ I meet all kinds of people in my work.

× All of the living creatures need food.

✓ All living creatures need food.

We do not use **the** or **of the** after **all** when we refer to people or things in general. ➡ 640.2

3

× All of computers have been repaired.

✓ All (of) the computers have been repaired.

➡ 640.1

4

- × Thank you again for all.
- × All thanked me and called me a hero.

- ✓ Thank you again for everything.
- ✓ Everyone thanked me and called me a hero.

All is not normally used on its own (i.e. as a pronoun) to mean 'everything' or 'everyone'. When used as a pronoun, **all** is followed by a qualifier: 'Thank you again for *all you have done*.' 'All I'm trying to do is help you.'

5

- × All the letter was about her holiday in Italy.

- ✓ The whole/entire letter was about her holiday in Italy.

All is not normally used with a singular count noun ('letter'). Compare:

All the money has been spent. ('money' = uncountable)

He answered **all** the questions. ('questions' = plural count noun)

I read the **whole/entire** book in one day. ('book' = singular count noun)

Note, however, the use of **all** + singular count noun in time expressions: 'The baby cried **all night**.' 'All my life I have wanted to live by the sea.'

6

- × We gave all them a present.

- ✓ We gave them all a present.
- ✓ We gave all of them a present.

⇒ 640.6

7

- × The children all were very excited.
- × We all have seen a road accident at some time in our lives.

- ✓ The children were all very excited.
- ✓ We have all seen a road accident at some time in our lives.

⇒ 640.7–8

8

- × All of the trees didn't have any leaves.

- ✓ None of the trees had any leaves.

⇒ 512.6

allow

50

1

- × The driver would not allow that I take the goat on the bus.

- ✓ The driver would not allow me to take the goat on the bus.

We **allow** someone **to do** something.

⇒ 839.1

also

53

1

- × The car had also four new tyres.
- × I also have invited Lisa's brother.
- × There also are people who do not want to get married.

- ✓ The car also had four new tyres
- ✓ I have also invited Lisa's brother.
- ✓ There are also people who do not want to get married.

⇒ 29.1–2

2

- × I don't like cricket and I don't like baseball also.

- ✓ I don't like cricket and I don't like baseball either.

After a negative word (e.g. *no*, *not*, *never*, *rarely*), we use **either**, NOT **also**, **as well** or **too**. Compare: 'He speaks French and he **also** speaks German.' 'He doesn't speak French and he doesn't speak German **either**.'

Note the alternative with **neither/nor**: 'I don't like cricket and **neither/nor** do I like baseball.' This is slightly more formal.

although

54

1

- × Although it is only a small town, but it is very popular with tourists.

- ✓ Although it is only a small town, it is very popular with tourists.
- ✓ It is only a small town, but it is very popular with tourists.

We do not use **although** and **but** together in the same sentence. To link two clauses, we use just one conjunction (NOT two). ⇒ 169.2

2

- × Although all these problems, I have continued to work on my thesis.

- ✓ Despite all these problems, I have continued to work on my thesis.
- ✓ Although I have had all these problems, I have continued to work on my thesis.

Although is a conjunction, NOT a preposition.

⇒ 882.7

always

55

1

- × I know always when it is going to rain.
- × He always is asking if he can borrow something.

- ✓ I always know when it is going to rain.
- ✓ He is always asking if he can borrow something.

⇒ 29.1

2

× Mr Lim always does not leave the office before five o'clock.

✓ Mr Lim never leaves the office before five o'clock.

Instead of saying 'always ... not', we use **never**.

amaze

56

× I amazed when I heard that he was out of prison.

✓ I was amazed when I heard that he was out of prison.

The verb **amaze** requires an object: 'The news that he was out of prison **amazed me**.' (⇒ 838.1) To describe how someone feels, we use **be amazed**: 'The team of inspectors **were amazed** at what they saw.'

amount

57

1

× The amount of tourists increases every year.

✓ The number of tourists increases every year.

Before the plural form of a countable noun ('tourists'), we use **number of**. We use **amount of** before uncountable nouns. Compare: 'The **amount of traffic** has been steadily increasing, especially the **number of cars**.'

2

× Since the death penalty was abolished, the amount of crime in Hong Kong have almost doubled.

✓ Since the death penalty was abolished, the amount of crime in Hong Kong has almost doubled.

After **an amount of** and **the amount of**, the verb is singular. Compare: 'Large **amounts** of paper **are** being wasted every day.'

and

58

1

× She never ate and slept properly after her husband died.

✓ She never ate or slept properly after her husband died.

× Taboos abound during Lunar New Year – no crying, quarrelling and accidents.

✓ Taboos abound during Lunar New Year – no crying, quarrelling or accidents.

After **no**, **not**, **never**, etc, we normally use **or** (NOT **and**).

Note that **and** may be used after a negative when the linked items are closely related or are considered as a single thing: 'We didn't bring any knives **and** forks.' 'The regulation does not apply to husbands **and** wives.'

2

- × He said he was looking for a tall and blond girl called Anna.
 × Inside the box there was a cheap and plastic watch.

- ✓ He said he was looking for a tall blond girl called Anna.
 ✓ Inside the box there was a cheap plastic watch.

When two adjectives are used before a noun, they are linked with **and** only if they belong to the same class. Compare:

- blue **and** white sheets (colour + colour)
 cotton **and** nylon sheets (material + material)
 BUT blue nylon sheets (colour + material)

For more information about linking parts of a sentence with **and**, ➡ 178

angry

59

- × His parents were getting more and more angry at him.

- ✓ His parents were getting more and more angry with him.

➡ 60

annoyed

60

- × I was annoyed about John for arriving late.

- ✓ I was annoyed with John for arriving late.

We are **annoyed/angry about/at** something but **with** someone. Compare: 'I was **annoyed about** wasting so much time.' 'I was **annoyed with** him for wasting my time.'

another

61

1

- × We need another information before we can reach a decision.

- ✓ We need more information before we can reach a decision.

We use **another** with countable nouns (NOT with uncountable nouns): '**another** chair' BUT '**more** furniture'; '**another** fact' BUT '**more/further** evidence'. Compare: 'We need **another piece of** information before ...' ➡ 2.2

2

- × This is another steps along the road towards peace.

- ✓ This is another step along the road towards peace.

Another ('one more') cannot come immediately before a plural form. Compare:

Another glass has been broken.

Another of the glasses has been broken.

3

× Apart from the fish market, there are another developments being planned for the area.

✓ Apart from the fish market, there are other developments being planned for the area.

We use **another** ('one other') before a singular form. Before a plural form, we use **other**. Compare: 'She has **another reason** for giving up the job.' 'She has **other reasons** for giving up the job.'

answer

62

× I always answer to your letters as soon as I can.

✓ I always answer your letters as soon as I can.

× There are answers for all the questions at the back of the book.

✓ There are answers to all the questions at the back of the book.

We **answer** a person, letter, question, etc, (WITHOUT **to**). Compare: 'I received **an answer to** my letter today.' We use **to** after the noun but not after the verb.

⇒ 677

anxious

63

1

× I was getting anxious for the long delay.

✓ I was getting anxious about the long delay.

When something causes us to feel worried or nervous, we are **anxious about** it (NOT **for** it): 'They are **anxious about** the shortage of drinking water.'

2

× She was anxious for getting home before dark.

✓ She was anxious to get home before dark.

If we want to do something very much, we are **anxious to do** it.

any

64

1

× You can use my computer if you don't have any.

✓ You can use my computer if you don't have one.

We use **any** with plural count nouns (e.g. 'chairs', 'computers') and uncountable nouns (e.g. 'furniture', 'milk'). With singular count nouns (e.g. 'chair', 'computer'), we normally use **one**.

2

× Do you have any ticket for the concert?

✓ Do you have a ticket for the concert?
✓ Do you have any tickets for the concert?

Any is not normally used with a singular count noun ('ticket'). It is normally used with plural count nouns (e.g. *tickets, books*) and uncountable nouns (e.g. *traffic, information*).

When we use **any** with a singular count noun, it means 'it doesn't matter which':
'**Any** doctor is better than no doctor.' 'You can borrow **any** book you like.'

anybody/anyone

65

× Were anybody hurt in the accident?

✓ Was anybody hurt in the accident?

⇒ 44.11

apologize

66

× I apologized her for arriving so late.

✓ I apologized to her for arriving so late.

× He apologized all the trouble he had caused.

✓ He apologized for all the trouble he had caused.

We **apologize** (**to** someone) (**for** something).

appeal

67

× I didn't know that you appealed to classical music.

✓ I didn't know that classical music appealed to you.

When **appeal** means 'to be attractive to someone', we put the source of the attraction in subject position. Instead of saying 'I like the idea of being my own boss', we might say 'The idea of being my own boss **appeals** to me.' Compare: 'The police have **appealed** to witnesses to come forward with information.'

appear

68

1

× There is appearing to be a shortage of skilled staff.

✓ There appears to be a shortage of skilled staff.

When **appear** means 'to seem', it is not used in progressive tenses. ⇒ 627.3

2

× In some hospitals appears to be a shortage of beds.

✓ In some hospitals there appears to be a shortage of beds.

Appear must always have a subject. When we mention the existence of something, we use **there** as an empty subject.

⇒ 787