Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns refer to non-specific people or things. When an indefinite pronoun is used as the subject of a sentence, it, like any other subject, needs to agree with its corresponding verb. Some pronouns require singular verbs (everyone, each); some require plural verbs (both, many). Other indefinite pronouns can be either singular or plural.

**Singular Indefinite Pronouns**

A singular verb is required when any word in the table below is used as a subject or as an adjective. Even though most of these indefinite pronouns seem to have plural meanings, treat them as singular subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular Indefinite Pronouns</th>
<th>The words in the chart below are always singular and require singular verbs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“-ONE” words</td>
<td>“-BODY” words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anyone</td>
<td>anybody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>everyone</td>
<td>everybody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no one</td>
<td>no body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>someone</td>
<td>somebody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>any one</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>every one</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some one</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Each …**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject: each</th>
<th>Verb: is</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Each physicist, chemist, and biologist is highly intelligent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since all compound subjects with each and every take singular verbs, the singular verb is is required for this sentence.

**Plural Indefinite Pronouns**

Just as there are indefinite pronouns that are always singular, there also are plural indefinite pronouns.
Plural Indefinite Pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Both</th>
<th>few</th>
<th>many</th>
<th>others</th>
<th>several</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Both …

Both of us should decide what our weekend plans are.

Subject: Both
Verb: decide

In this example, the plural subject is both and a plural verb is chosen to agree with this subject.

Singular or Plural Indefinite Pronouns

There are also some unique indefinite pronouns that can be singular or plural, depending on the noun they refer to. The noun can usually be found in a phrase beginning with of. All of the words in the table below can be singular or plural indefinite pronouns.

Singular or Plural Indefinite Pronouns

Depending on their meaning, all of the words in the chart below can be either singular or plural and require singular or plural verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>all</th>
<th>none</th>
<th>any</th>
<th>some</th>
<th>more</th>
<th>most</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Singular Subject All

All of the jewelry is made of genuine gold and silver.

Subject: all
Verb: is

In this example, all (meaning all of the jewelry) is a singular subject and therefore needs the singular verb is to agree with its subject.

Plural Subject All

All of the rings and necklaces are made of genuine gold and silver.

Subject: all
Verb: are

In this example, all (meaning all of the rings and necklaces) is a plural subject and therefore needs the plural verb are to agree with its subject.

Exercise 1: Indefinite Pronouns

First, determine whether the indefinite pronoun subject in each sentence is singular (S) or plural (P). Complete each sentence with a verb that agrees with the given subject.

1. (S) Each flavour of ice cream tastes delicious.
2. ( ) Everybody on the ski hill ____________________________.
3. ( ) Much of the money ________________________________.
4. ( ) Anyone in the newspaper headlines ____________________.
5. ( ) Most of the strawberries ____________________________.
6. ( ) Several students at Humber College ____________________.
7. ( ) No one who was invited to my birthday party ________________.
Nouns Ending in -s

Even though some nouns appear to be plural, they can actually be singular in meaning. Note: An –s ending on a noun does not automatically mean the noun is plural. Therefore, if a noun with an –s ending is singular, it will require a singular verb.

**Plural Word**

| Mathematics is an intriguing field to study since it is closely related to technology. | Subject: mathematics | Verb: is |

**Plural Name**


**Nouns ending in –s**

Nouns which fall into this category can include those which end in –ics, organizational names, geographic names and names of publications and products. These words or names that are plural in form but singular in meaning take a singular verb.

**Exercise 2: Nouns Ending in –s**

Determine which of the plural words and names are singular in meaning. Indicate whether the subject in each sentence is singular (S) or plural (P). Complete each sentence with a verb that agrees with the given subject.

1. (S) The **Solomon Islands** produces cocoa beans, coconuts, palm kernels and rice.
2. ( ) The **Royal Botanical Gardens**
3. ( ) **Trinidad and Tobago**
4. ( ) Kellogg’s
5. ( ) **Economics**
6. ( ) Mathematics and Business

**Collective Nouns/Group Nouns**

A collective noun is a word that is singular in form, but it consists of a group of persons, animals, or things.

**Collective/Group Nouns**

Nouns which fall into this category include army, audience, band, board, cabinet, class, committee, company, corporation, council, crowd, department, faculty, family, firm, group, jury, majority, minority, public, school, society, staff and team.
The noun requires a singular verb when it refers to a group as a whole unit; however, the noun requires a plural verb when the group is being considered as individual members. In some situations, the collective noun can be treated as singular or plural. Use either a singular or plural verb to emphasize a group or a collection of individuals.

**Singular Whole Unit**

| Subject: jury | Verb: provides |
| The *jury provides* a verdict in record time. |

In this example, the *jury* provides a verdict as a group. Thus, the subject of this sentence requires a singular verb.

**Plural as Individual Members**

| Subject: jury | Verb: are |
| The *jury are* arguing amongst themselves. |

In this example, the members of the *jury* are acting separately as individuals. Thus, the subject of this sentence requires a plural verb.

**Singular or Plural**

| Subject: family | Verb: is |
| His *family is* going on a vacation to Switzerland. |

In this example, the members of the *family* are acting as a group. Thus, the subject of this sentence requires a singular verb.

| Subject: family | Verb: are |
| I hope Julie’s *family are* well for the holidays. |

In this example, the members of the *family* are being considered separately as individuals. Thus, the subject of this sentence requires a plural verb. This sentence could also be rewritten: “I hope the members of Julie’s family are well for the holidays.” This sentence more clearly states that the speaker is talking about each individual member of Julie’s family.

**Exercise 3: Collective Nouns**

Determine whether the collective nouns are singular (S) or plural (P) in meaning. Complete each sentence with a verb that agrees with the given subject. The first question has been completed for you.

1. (S) The *company is* recruiting members for its management team.
2. ( ) The council __________________ on the verdict of the case.
3. ( ) The staff __________________ planning an intervention program.
4. ( ) Forty-two kilometers __________________ the length of a full marathon.
5. ( ) My family __________________ each allergic to peanuts.
6. ( ) The rock band __________________ performing a magnificent concert.