

# SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

In this unit, you will learn about the relationship between a subject and its verb. We need to work on this, because students often make mistakes in identifying whether the subject noun is singular or plural. As a result, mistakes are made in the use of verbs to go with words like jeans, scissors, politics etc. This unit deals with these areas.

## A. Subject - Singular, Plural or Uncountable

**A.1. Read the following dialogue. First, underline the word or words that represent the subject in each sentence of the dialogue. Then circle the verbs that each subject refers to. (One has been done for you as an example)**

Is it true that the students from the Space Research Centre are arriving this evening?

Yes, the study they are conducting needs an elevated location like our campus.

I agree. The constellation they are going to observe is clearly visible from here.

What about the team supervisor? Is he coming?

No, their manager called this morning. The supervisor is busy making arrangements for the committee which is to arrive tomorrow.

I have heard that he is going to join politics.

Yes, this news is true.

But honesty is his policy and politics is a corrupt game these days.

Yes, but that does not mean that good people should not join politics.

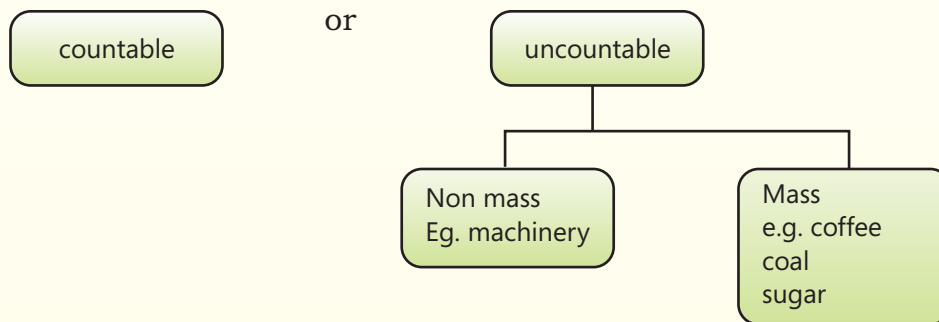
Yes, you are right.

When the pick-up bus that we have sent to the railway station arrives here, we may need help to shift the luggage which, I presume, is going to be very heavy.

### A.2. A subject can be

singular - e.g. a pen, a body, a box  
plural - e.g. children, plates, boxes  
uncountable - e.g. furniture, sugar

Therefore, all nouns can be either



**A.3. List the subjects from the dialogues in A1 under the following headings. One has been done as an example**

COUNTABLE SINGULAR	COUNTABLE PLURAL	UNCOUNTABLE
	students	

**A.4. Work in pairs and decide whether the following are countable singular (cs), countable plural (cp) or uncountable (uc). Write the symbols under each circle. One has been done as an example**

<div>feet</div> <div>cp</div>	<div>person</div> <div></div>	<div>news</div> <div></div>	<div>oxen</div> <div></div>
<div>tooth</div> <div></div>	<div>coffee</div> <div></div>	<div>knife</div> <div></div>	<div>boxes</div> <div></div>
<div>goose</div> <div></div>	<div>gentlemen</div> <div></div>	<div>oil</div> <div></div>	<div>furniture</div> <div></div>

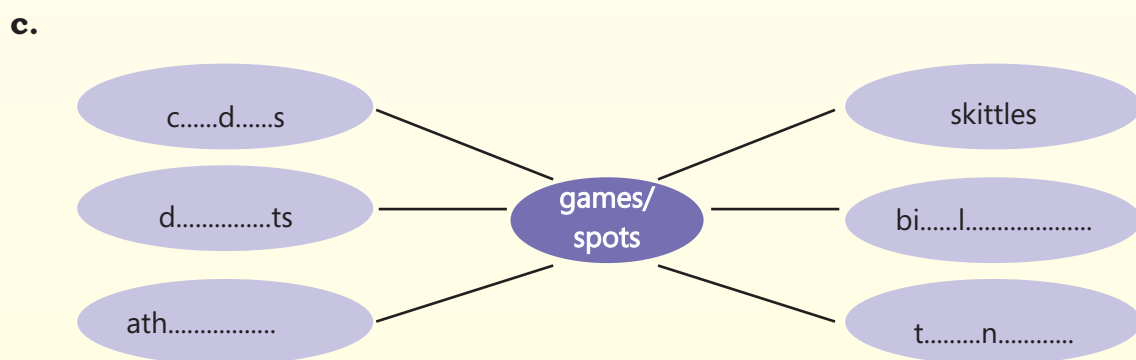
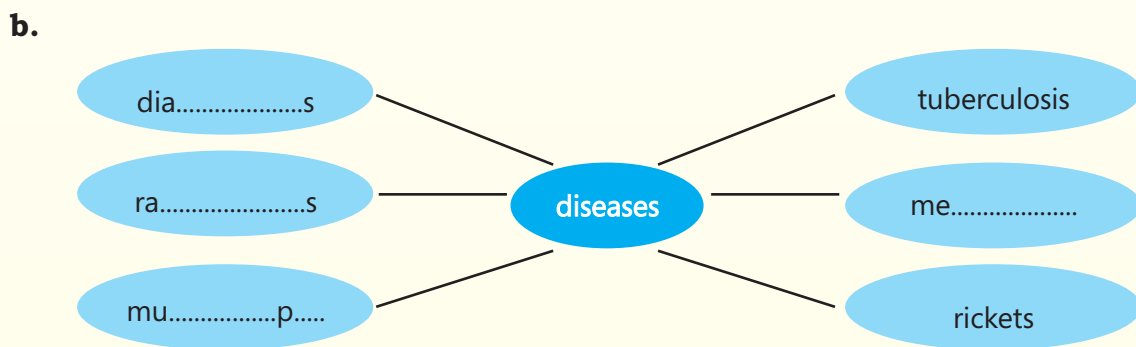
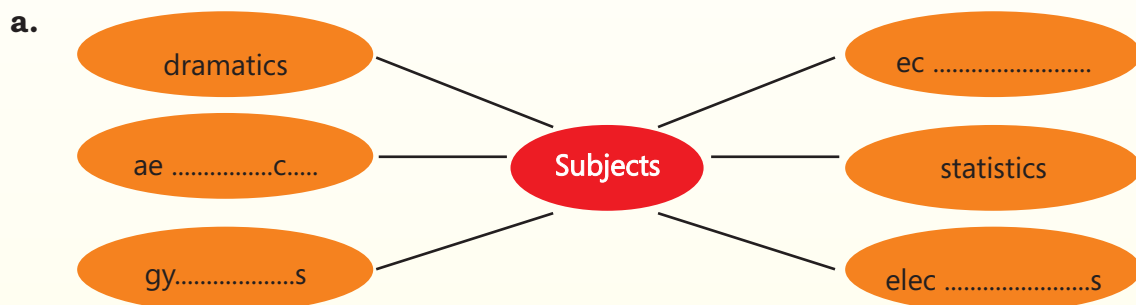
**A.5. Some nouns look as if they are plural, but are in fact singular.**

Economics is an important subject at Senior Secondary level.

**Some other school and university subjects work in the same way. Guess which subjects these are from the clues.**

Clue	Subject
$E = mc^2$	.....
$1+1 = 2$	.....

Work in pairs and complete the following spider diagrams, a, b and c. All the words will be related to the word in the centre. Some clues are given.



All the above nouns look like plurals (i.e. they end in s.) But they are, in fact, singular nouns

**Now, complete the sentence :**

For these nouns we use a ..... verb.

**A.6. Fill in the blanks with appropriate verbs to complete this biography of Rickety Ron.**

**RICKETY RON**

Rickety Ron is a student of statistics, which for many years..... been his favourite subject. Ron has always loved playing with numbers. Dramatics..... his life but every time he takes a role for stage acting, he's mysteriously down with mumps. Mumps ..... always been his undoing! Ron is no good at games and opts for the least exerting sports of all. So, for him, it's skittles, darts and cards. Cards ..... his favourite, though! He loves aerobics too. Aerobics, to him, ..... both relaxation and entertainment.

**A.7. Work in pairs. Take turns to ask and answer the following.**

**Questions**

**Answers**

Example: 1. What are shears used for?



1. They are used .....

2. Have you got the binoculars?



2. No,.....them.....

3. What are pliers made of?



3. They.....

4. How much.....  
.....?



4. .... cost.....

5. Are your socks.....  
.....?



5. Yes, .....

6. What are tongs used for?



6. .... are.....

7. Are your .....  
.....?



7. My goggles.....

8. Which.....

.....?

9. What .....

.....?

10. Can you lend me your compasses?



8. Black slacks are not allowed in school.

9 ..... are used for cutting cloth.

10.....,they.....  
.....

**Now complete the following sentence.**

All the nouns in the above sentences take the \_\_\_\_\_ verb.

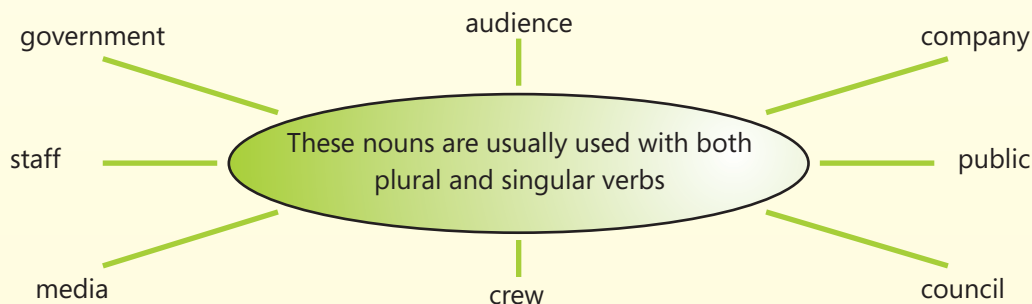
## **B Verbs - singular or plural**

**Look at the following two sentences. Which one is correct?**

- a) The jury were divided in their opinion.
- b) The jury was unanimous in their decision.

Jury is a collective noun. Whenever there is a sense of unity, we use singular verb with collective nouns but when it is used in the sense of separation, we use plural verb with them, so both are correct in different situations.

Here are some more such words.



If you use plural verbs, you will always be correct, but if you use a singular noun, you may be wrong. So - to be safe - use plural verbs with these nouns.

**B.1. Work in pairs. Write five questions using some of the nouns given in B. above.**

**When you have finished writing them, ask another pair of students to answer your questions.**

**B.2. Tick the correct form of the verb in the following sentences:**

1. Summons was/were sent for his arrest.
2. The media has/have become more responsible nowadays.
3. This news were/was broadcast from All India Radio.
4. Politics is/are not meant for students.
5. To an outsider the economics of this company seem/seems to be in a shambles. (Hint: economics here refers to the company's financial status)
6. The staff is/are happy with their working environment.
7. Skittles is/are a popular game in India these days.
8. Harsh's spectacles was/were lost on his journey to Manipal.
9. Mathematics is/are a compulsory subject for under-graduation in most of the science and commerce streams.
10. The public was/were jubilant when Sachin Tendulkar scored his 50th century.

**B.3. Will the following take a plural or a singular verb? Why?**

The United States of America, 500 rupees, a number of people, the Arabian Nights, a couple of friends, half of us, the majority of the members of the committee, a gang of robbers, a herd of cattle

#### B.4. Circle the subject and connect it with a verb which follows it

The birds which migrated from the Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary were found in a new location.  
Clue: What has been located? (Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary? The birds?)

1. The boy whom you saw walking on the road yesterday while returning from school is my brother.
2. The book you wanted to read is not available right now.
3. The furniture which was bought in the auction is made of solid teak-wood.
4. The team which won four matches this year has been nominated for the President's award.
5. A visit to the various monasteries provides an insight into Buddhism.

#### C. Subject - Verb Agreement - Summary.

Read the following sentences. Each of them contains one error. Correct the error and complete the statements that are marked \*:

1. One of my friends have gone to Canada.
2. Every one of the managers have applied for leave today in protest against the management.
3. Neither of the boxers were able to score a decisive victory:

Statement \*: Subjects containing 'one of', 'each of', 'every one of' and 'neither of' are followed by \_\_\_\_\_ verbs.

4. Tobacco and alcohol is injurious to health.
5. He and I was at Patna University together.
6. Oil and water does not mix.

Statement \* : Two or more Singular Nouns connected by 'and' are normally followed by a \_\_\_\_\_ verb.



7. Age and experience bring wisdom to man.
8. Slow and steady win the race.
9. Bread and Butter are what the poor want.

Statement \*: When two Singular Nouns connected by 'and' express one idea, they are followed by a \_\_\_\_\_ verb.

10. My uncle and guardian want me to start my own business.
11. The Collector and District Magistrate are away.
12. The notable patriot and orator are no more.
13. The industrialist and the politician has been invited to the function.

Statement \*: When two Singular Nouns are connected by 'and' and a determiner is used before only one noun, they are followed by a \_\_\_\_\_ verb. If the two nouns refer to two different things/ persons, the determiner should be repeated and the verb should be used in the \_\_\_\_\_.

14. Neither Raju nor Sheela have come first in the race.
15. No scholarship or reward were given to the student who stood first in the examination.
16. Either China or Malaysia have the chance to win the world cup in badminton.

Statement \* When Singular Subjects are connected by 'or', 'neither..... nor' and 'either..... or', they are followed by a \_\_\_\_\_ verb.

17. Neither he nor I has any objection to your plan.
18. Either you or Rashmi have to own the responsibility for the mishap.

Statement \* : When the subjects connected by 'or' or 'nor' are of different persons, the verb should agree in person with the subject \_\_\_\_\_ to it.