Grammar 1: Subject–verb agreement
Workshop objectives

This workshop will assist you in becoming familiar with the use of:

• Countable vs. uncountable nouns
• Subject-verb agreement
• Singular vs. plural nouns
• Indefinite pronouns
Countable + Uncountable

• A **countable** noun is one that can be expressed in plural form (e.g. essay/essays).

• An **uncountable** noun is one that usually cannot be expressed in a plural form (e.g. coffee).
Countable + Uncountable

Some nouns belong to both classes.

**Countable:** concrete and specific meaning

- I’ve had some *difficulties* finding relevant materials for the essay.
- The *talks* will take place in Building 1.

**Uncountable:** abstract and general meaning

- but
- She succeeded at university with little *difficulty*.
- I dislike idle *talk*.
Countable + Uncountable

Classification:
Sometimes a usually uncountable noun (often food) can be understood as one item separate and distinct from other kinds of items from the same category.

There are several Australian wines to choose from. I prefer Sumatran coffees to Colombian. Gardner has a theory of multiple intelligences. ie. varieties of wine, varieties of coffee, types of intelligence
Subject-verb agreement

The way the verb is matched to the subject in terms of number (singular or plural).
There is/are...

In sentences beginning with *There is* or *There are*, the verb agrees with the noun phrase that follows it.

There *are* many questions.
There *is* a question.
There *is* much questioning.
Collective nouns take a singular verb if they refer to a group/unit as a whole.

Collective nouns take a plural verb when the noun is referring to individuals in the group.

The committee want a review of the procedures. They are dissatisfied with the current ones.

Other nouns like this include family, class, team, staff and company.
Nouns ending in ‘s’

Some nouns that always end in s are uncountable and take a singular verb.

The news *is a source of information*. Physics *was* my hardest subject. Measles *is* highly contagious.

Some nouns that always end in s are plural (usually because they come in pairs) and take a plural verb.

These scissors *do not align*. The trousers *are* made of wool. My clothes *are* made of recycled material.
Indefinite pronouns

The words each, each one, either, neither, everyone, everybody, anybody, anyone, nobody, somebody, someone, and no-one are singular and require a singular verb.

Nobody has claimed responsibility.
Everybody has to pay their taxes.

but... Any of the recommended books are worth reading.
Verb+ing as subject

If the subject of a clause is a gerund (verb+ing), a singular verb is required.

Studying at university is a challenge for many.
And: Compound Subjects

When the subject of a sentence is composed of two or more nouns (making them joint operators of the action) connected by *and*, use a *plural verb*.

John and I *work* on our assignments together.
Paraphrasing and summarising *are* important academic writing skills.

*but*...Bacon and eggs *is* a high protein breakfast. However, *it* is a dish which should be eaten in moderation.
Or: Singular or plural

When a subject contains two or more nouns joined by *or* or *nor*, the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is nearer the verb.

The book *or* the pen *is* in the drawer.

Either the doctor *or the nurses* *attend* every day.

Neither the nurses *nor the doctor* *attends* every day.
Agreement

The verb agrees with the subject (head noun).

Do not be misled by a phrase that comes between the subject and the verb.

One of the boxes is open.

The team captain, as well as his players, is anxious

The book, including all the chapters in the first section, is boring.

The woman with those engineers leads the conference.
Complex subjects

A noun phrase can contain two or more nouns. The verb that follows will agree with the head noun.

A book of answers *comes* with the study guide.
Quantity

An amount, quantity or number thought of as a whole takes a singular verb.

- Six years *is* a long time.
- Three dollars *is* not much.
- The number of students on the course *is* less than last year.

A plural verb highlights the individuals in the group.

- A number of *students* *do* not understand the assignment question.
Proportions

With fractions, percentages and indefinite quantifiers (*all, few, many, much, some*, half, none etc.), the verb agrees with the preceding noun.

Two-thirds of the *task* is completed.
Two-thirds of his *articles* are peer-reviewed.
Fifty percent of what he writes *is* undocumented.
Fifty percent of the *computers are* iMacs.
All the *information is* correct.
All the *studies are* current.
Much of the *book seems* relevant to this assignment.
Many *researchers depend on* grants from industry.
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