

1 Here's the Idea

Sometimes the number of a subject can be hard to determine. To decide whether the subject takes a singular or a plural verb, ask yourself, Does it refer to a number of individuals or to a single unit?

Collective Nouns

- ▶ **Collective nouns, which name groups of people or things, can take either singular or plural verbs, depending on how they are used.**

Examples of collective nouns include *committee*, *family*, *team*, *crowd*, and *herd*.

The **family** of Samuel S. Must of Fryburg, Pennsylvania, **consists** of 824 living descendants.

Family refers to a unit, so it takes a singular verb.

The **family** **have** gone their separate ways.

Family refers to individuals, so it takes a plural verb.

For more information about collective nouns, see p. 6.

Phrases and Clauses

- ▶ **Phrases or clauses used as subjects always take singular verbs.**

Infinitive Phrase

To have grown fingernails totaling 241 inches on his left hand **is** Shridhar Chillal's claim to fame.

Gerund Phrase

Finding herself in *The Guinness Book of Records* **was** a life-changing experience for Sandy Allen, the tallest woman in the world at 7 feet 7¼ inches.

Noun Clause

What is hard to believe **is** that Michel Lotito of France has eaten 18 bicycles, 15 supermarket carts, 7 television sets, 6 chandeliers, a small airplane, and a computer since 1966.

Singular Nouns That End in S

- ▶ **Some nouns that end in s look plural but are actually singular. When used as subjects, these nouns take singular verbs.**

Examples include *news*, *mumps*, and *economics*.

The news reports that a 42-year-old Canadian woman swallowed 2,533 objects—including 947 bent pins.

Some words that end in s and describe a thing with two equal parts—such as *scissors*, *pants*, *trousers*, *binoculars*, and *tweezers*—take plural verbs.

Tweezers are the instrument the doctor used to remove all those objects from the woman’s stomach.

Numerical Amounts and Titles

- ▶ **Numerical amounts and titles often look like plurals. However, they usually refer to single units and take singular verbs.**

Seventeen years and ten months was the age at which Balamurali K. Ambati earned his M.D. degree.

The Guinness Book of Records includes a special feature about Dr. Ambati.

A fractional number can take either a singular or a plural verb, depending on its meaning in the sentence.

Nine-tenths of the Guinness Book of Records is about people.

Refers to an amount, so the verb is singular

Nine-tenths of my friends have read it.

Refers to a number of individuals, so the verb is plural

Relative Pronouns as Subjects

- ▶ **When the relative pronoun *who*, *which*, or *that* is the subject of an adjective clause, its number is determined by its antecedent.**

Delia Gray is a British ballerina who is famous for doing 166 spins on one leg without stopping.

Has a singular antecedent, so it takes a singular verb

It was Wayne Sleep's 158 leaps in two minutes that have landed him in *The Guinness Book of Records*.

REFERS TO

Has a plural antecedent, so it takes a plural verb

For more information on relative pronouns and adjective clauses, see pp. 81–82, 168–169.