

# Expressions of Quantity: Special Cases of Subject-Verb Agreement

Subject-verb agreement is generally quite straightforward in English. Check any handbook for the general rules. However, with subjects that introduce the idea of quantity, some additional rules of thumb are needed. Here are a few that are useful for academic writing.

## 1. With fractions, percentages and indefinite quantifiers (e.g., *all, few, many, much, some*), the verb agrees with the preceding noun or clause:

With a **singular or non-count** noun or clause, use a singular verb:

One-third of *this article* **is** taken up with statistical analysis.

Much of *the book* **seems** relevant to this study.

Half of *what he writes* **is** undocumented.

Fifty percent of *the job* **is** routine.

All *the information* **is** current

With a **plural** noun, use a plural verb:

One-third of *the students* **have** graduate degrees.

Many *researchers* **depend** on grants from industry.

Half of *his articles* **are** peer-reviewed.

Fifty percent of *the computers* **have** CD-ROM drives.

All *the studies* **are** current.

With a **collective** noun, use either a singular or a plural verb, depending on whether you want to emphasize the single group or its individual members:

Half of *my family* **lives/live** in Canada.

All of *the class* **is/are** here.

Ten percent of *the population* **is/are** bilingual.

## 2. The words *majority* and *minority* are used in a variety of ways:

When *majority/minority* mean an **unspecified number** more or less than 50%, use a singular verb:

*The majority* **holds** no strong views.

*A small minority* **indicates** it supports the proposal.

When *majority/minority* mean a **specific percentage**, you may use either a singular or a plural verb:

*A 75% majority* **have/has** voted against the measure.

*A 10% minority* **are/is** opposed to the measure.

When *majority/minority* refers to a **specified set of persons**, use a plural verb:

A majority of *Canadians* **have** voted for change.

A minority of *the students* **are willing** to pay more.

## 3. Expressions of time, money and distance usually take a singular verb:

*Ten dollars* **is** a great deal of money to a child.

*Ten kilometres* **is** too far to walk.

*Six weeks* **is** not long enough.

## 4. Adjectives preceded by *the* and used as plural nouns take a plural verb:

*The rich* **get** richer.

*The poor* **face** many hardships.

## 5. Expressions using the phrase *number of* depend on the meaning of the phrase:

They take a singular verb when referring to a **single quantity**:

The number of *students registered in the class* **is** 20.

They take plural verbs when they are used as **indefinite quantifiers** (see rule 1 above):

A number of *students* **were** late.