

# General ENGLISH

*For*

**UPSC Engineering Services Examination**

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**GATE Examination**

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**State Engineering Services Examinations**

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**Public Sector Examinations**



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Corporate Office: 44-A/4, Kalu Sarai, New Delhi-16; Noida Office: D-28, Sector-63, Noida, U.P.

Website: [www.madeeasypublications.org](http://www.madeeasypublications.org); Phone: 011-45124612, 0-9958995830

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### **General English**

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1st Edition : 2008

2nd Edition : 2011

3rd Edition : 2012

Re-print : 2013

4th Edition: 2014

**5th Edition: 2015**

**ISBN: 978-93-5147-103-5**

## Preface

The General English Section is an important section of the General Ability Test of IES and various PSUs' entrance tests. General Ability Test comprises of two sections: (i) General English (ii) General Studies. The standard of paper in General Ability Test is such as may be expected of an Engineering/Science Graduate. The question paper in General English is designed to test the candidate's understanding of English and workmanlike use of words.

The Made Easy Book on General English is unique in the way that it provides concrete content review for the test as well as strategies for tackling the tricky questions.

### Features of this book :

- ▶ Strategies and tricks on how to understand evaluate and manipulate Comprehension Passages and Vocabulary. You'll be able to articulate the passage in your own words.
- ▶ Techniques to eliminate 3 wrong choices confidently even if you can't fully comprehend a question or a passage.
- ▶ Gist of ten types of grammar errors and help you develop a strong sense of both grammar and the conventions of English language.
- ▶ Keywords searching tips to find what you need to look for when you are answering the questions. You will not waste time re-reading the whole passage. Techniques to locate facts, trace an author's line of logic, and map the structure of a passage.
- ▶ This book briefs you on the different aspects of Grammar, Vocabulary-in-context and Reading comprehension questions giving you key tips on how to tackle these important types of questions.
- ▶ Made Easy book on General English offers you enough material for a year-long study program as well as for a short duration preparation module so that you don't have to settle for last-minute cram sessions. Pace yourself as you work your way through the wealth of practice exercises designed for you.
- ▶ It contains high-frequency word list, incorporating vocabulary from actual IES and Various PSUs General English section of the last 10 years' papers.
- ▶ Practice questions with explained answers to prepare you for the spotting the errors, sentence completion and reading comprehension questions. Practice exercises have been organized according to level of difficulty with dozens of clear, helpful pointers and several new questions modelled closely on questions appearing in IES, GATE and various PSUs entrance papers.
- ▶ MADE EASY Book on General English takes you through the very basics of General English to the toughest questions that might be tested in IES, GATE and PSUs papers.

This latest edition of Made Easy Book on General English is a sign of MadeEasy's on-going commitment to make this publication India's outstanding guide to prepare for IES, GATE & various other PSUs papers. It has benefited from the dedicated labours of the editorial staff of Made Easy, and from the research and writing skills of our authors. We are greatly indebted to them.

**We wish you all the best for your preparation!!!**

## • How to use this book? •

1. All the areas discussed in the book like Grammar, Vocabulary, Comprehension and many more are very important areas coming under General English section of IES and various PSUs entrance examinations. Take all these areas seriously and go through all the fundamentals in detail.
2. The book is divided in Units which deal with particular problems coming under one category so start your preparation in the same order.
3. Every Section has been divided into Chapters covering different topics from that particular segment.
4. Once you have completed a particular chapter; do the practice exercises given in it and then take the tests. Analyse your score and re-read the questions that you went wrong with.
5. Once you have completed all the units and feel confident about taking model papers then you can confidently attempt the five mock papers provided at the end of the book.
6. Take full advantage of the questions from the last few years' IES General English papers which have been discussed in every chapter. Understand the paper pattern and trends of IES.
7. Once again revise the fundamentals before your exam.



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## Overview

The General English Test of the ESE examination tests your skills in verbal aptitude and expression. Half of the multiple choice questions of the General Ability Section appear in the General English section. You are provided 60 minutes time to answer 60 verbal questions in these formats: Reading Comprehension, Spotting Errors, Vocabulary, Ordering of Sentences, and Selecting of Words etc. These types of questions are mingled throughout the English section. The General English section has the following sub-sections requiring different solution strategies.

Sl.	Types of Questions	No. of Questions asked in ESE : 2015
1.	Spotting Errors	7
2.	Antonyms	4
3.	Synonyms	5
4.	Reading Comprehension	15
5.	Sentence Improvement	9
6.	Selecting Words	6
7.	Ordering of Sentences	14
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>60</b>

There are certain other sections which have been appearing in ESE General English section but were not a part of ESE 2015 paper. Here is the list:

Sl.	Topic
1.	Ordering of words in sentences
2.	Relationships
3.	Idioms

### What does the General English Section test?

- **Spotting Errors & Sentence Correction:** This type tests you on your understanding and analytical ability of evaluating the grammatical structures of different sentence types. Correct grammatical and stylistic errors and improve expressions by changing the structure of a sentence.
- **Reading Comprehension:** Answer interpretive and analytical questions that pertain to a passage that is provided.
- **Vocabulary:** This type of questions tests your aptitude on general words in English language and their usage by questioning you on synonyms, antonyms and sentence completion based questions.
- **Ordering Sentences and words:** This pattern is purely based on testing your logical reasoning skills.
- The sentences are supposed to be arranged in an order to form a coherent paragraph out of those.

In order to tackle the English section of the IES and various PSUs, it is essential that you learn some strategies. Effective use of strategies can maximize your correct responses and reduce the time you spend on any one problem.

Now, we provide you with the approaches and tips for attacking the questions of the sub-sections discussed so far. These are simple guidelines to tackle the English section of the IES. In order to achieve a high score in English, practice and study often. Utilize your study guides and feel comfortable with the test before you actually take the test.

Section

1

# Spotting Errors & Sentence Correction



# Introduction to English Grammar

## Introduction

This chapter is intended as a basic and simple guide to English grammar. IES General English Test is a moderate level difficulty test, your score depends more on accuracy than on speed. In the Sentence Improvement & Spotting Errors section of the IES and PSUs, the questions are basically on Grammar which appear to be difficult questions at times, but they are not so difficult by their basic nature.

## Relevance of the section

English Grammar is one of the most important sections from the perspective of General English section of IES and various other PSUs papers. The chart below provides you the distribution of Grammar based questions in the last few years' papers of IES General English.

Year	Spotting Error	Sentence Improvement	Total No. of Qs. based on grammar
2000	10	10	20
2001	10	10	20
2002	10	10	20
2003	9	07	16
2004	11	—	11
2005	6	—	6
2006	8	—	8
2007	8	—	8
2008	6	—	6
2009	7	—	7
2010	10	—	10
2011	10	10	20
2012	10	10	20
2013	—	10	10
2014	10	19	29
2015	7	6	13

So, to increase your General English score, you should be very familiar with all the items on this list:

1. Subject-Verb agreement
2. Verbs, Tenses, the different Structures of Sentence
3. Conditional Sentences
4. Direct & Indirect Speech
5. Active & Passive Voice
6. Modifiers
7. Parallelism
8. Use of Pronouns
9. Idioms & Phrasal Verbs

## The directions for these questions look like this:

In this Section a number of sentences are given. The sentences are underlined in three separate parts and each one is labelled as (a), (b), (c). Read each sentence to find out whether there is an error in any underlined part. No sentence has more than one error. When you find an error in any one of the underlined parts (a), (b) or (c), indicate your response on the Separate Answer Sheet at the appropriate space. You may feel that there is no error in the sentence. In that case letter (d) will signify a "No error" response.

You are to indicate only one response for each item in your Answer Sheet. Errors may be in grammar, word usage or idioms. There may be a word missing or they may be a word which should be removed.

You are not required to correct the error. You are required only to indicate your response on the Answer Sheet.

## Sample Questions from last few years of IES General English:

1. Many a student in our college  
(a) (b)  
are extremely fond of the new game. No error  
(c) (d)

2. During India's struggle for freedom  
(a)  
Many brilliant students  
(b)  
gave up their studies by Mahatma Gandhi's call.  
(c)  
No error  
(d)
3. He opposed the scheme at first  
(a)  
but when it was fully explained  
(b)  
he came to our views. No error  
(c) (d)
4. The world we live presents an infinite variety  
(a) (b)  
of experience everyday. No error  
(c) (d)
5. Any meaningful discussion of national integration  
(a)  
must take stock about the tendencies  
(b)  
which threaten it. No error  
(c) (d)
6. The lion told the fox the he is very weak  
(a) (b)  
and that he had no appetite. No error  
(c) (d)
7. The traveler was so hungry  
(a)  
that he gulped all the food  
(b)  
placed over the table. No error  
(c) (d)
8. You may have to regret later  
(a)

if you do not start living  
(b)

within your mean No error  
(c) (d)

9. She was ashamed when she remembered  
(a) (b)  
that she did not visit her mother for a year.  
(c)

No error  
(d)

10. Tell me what all you know about it  
(a) (b)  
before I take a decision in the matter. No error  
(c) (d)

### Answers

1. (c)	2. (c)	3. (c)	4. (a)	5. (b)
6. (b)	7. (c)	8. (c)	9. (c)	10. (b)

### The Approach of attempting Spotting the Error Questions:

Read the complete sentence. Go through the entire sentence without breaking it in three different segments, because context may be important in determining the correct answer. If you cannot find any error, grammatical or otherwise, in the entire sentence, choose D, and move on. If you don't find an error in the underlined portion, or if you're not sure, work with the **approach of elimination**.

The IES General English Section tests only a limited number of grammar error types. After you've read the sentence, look for clues indicating what grammar rule the question is testing. Always look for one or more of these errors:

1. Subject-Verb agreement: Do they agree?
2. Tenses, the different Structures of Sentence. Active- Passive Voice, Reported Speech etc.
3. Use of Pronouns
4. Modifiers: Look for introductory phrases set off by a comma: is the modifier used correctly?

5. Parallelism: Look for commas separating words in a list, as well as expressions such as not only...but also, both.... and, either...or, neither...nor: is everything parallel?
6. Idioms and Phrasal Verbs
7. The error of conditional sentences.

After you have scrutinized the question, compare answer choices and note how they differ. Look for the answer choice that preserves the meaning of the original sentence without creating new errors. Eliminate answer choices without grammar errors.

### Concentrate on the answer choices and Eliminate

Spotting the Errors and Sentence Improvement are the most mechanical question types in the General English Section. Speed is of the essence, and the best way to gain speed is to eliminate the answer choices confidently. The question set below presents a typical structure. Notice how two choices are different from each other.

Let us see some **Illustrative Examples:**

1. Many a student in our college  
(a) (b)  
are extremely fond of the new game. No error  
(c) (d)

[IES-2010]

**Correct Answer Choice: (c)**

'Many a' is an indefinite pronoun which always takes singular verb with it. It would have been right to say, "Many students in our college are extremely fond of the new game".

Alternatively you can say "Many a student in our college is extremely fond of the new game".

2. During India's struggle for freedom  
(a)  
many brilliant students gave up their studies by  
(b) Mahatma Gandhi's call. (c)  
No error  
(d)

[IES-2010]

**Correct Answer Choice: (c)**

The correct sentence will be, "During India's struggle for freedom many brilliant students gave up their studies on Mahatma Gandhi's call".

3. Lalita Sharma, broke and  
confused, wandered away from her keepers,  
(a)  
however she soon found a campaign manager  
(b)  
and successfully ran for governor. No error  
(c) (d)

**Correct Answer Choice: (a)**

However can't legally join two sentences. According to the grammar rules, the comma in front of *however* should be a semicolon.

The key to spotting the errors questions is to assume for a moment that the underlining doesn't exist. Just read the sentence to see what sounds wrong, and then look for the letter. If nothing comes in your mind on first reading, check each underlined portion carefully. Still no mistake? Go for (D), which is always *no error*.

The following helpful do's and don'ts can make answering spotting the errors questions much easier:

- **Do keep an eye open for incorrect punctuation.** Always check apostrophes and commas.
- **Do look for vocabulary mistakes.** Spotting errors questions sometimes contain mistakes in vocabulary. Words that are commonly confused (*affect* and *effect*, for example) or non-existent but still popular (such as *irregardless*) may show up.
- **Don't worry about spelling and capitalization mistakes.** They never appear in the spotting errors sentences. Assume that the words are spelled correctly and that the capital letters are in the right spots.
- **Do watch out for verbs.** Verb tense is a big deal, as is subject-verb agreement (choosing a singular or plural verb). Refer to the chapter on Subject Verb Agreement in the book.
- **Do pay attention to pronouns.** The paper-setters often mix singular and plural forms incorrectly.
- **Don't waste time figuring out how to correct the error.** Just find it, mark the answer choice and move on. The next question is waiting for you. It is important that you maintain a good speed.
- Don't be afraid to choose **no error** if you can't find anything wrong.

# Basics of English Grammar

## What is a word?

A word can be divided into its **Root** (the basic part of the word containing its meaning) and its **Prefixes / Suffixes** (the things added at the beginning of or ending of the root to indicate things like a noun is plural or a verb is in the past tense).

Examples:

- (i) Root: **dog**  
Suffix: **s** in **dogs**
- (ii) Root: **run**  
Suffix: **s** in **runs**

## What is a Sentence?

A Sentence comprises of the following:

### Subject:

The subject is the doer/ performer of the action which is taking place in the sentence. It may be a person, thing or topic which the sentence deals with. To discover the subject, ask **who** or **what** before the verb.

For example in the sentence **The Sky is blue.**, *what is blue?* Answer: **The Sky.**

### Predicate:

The predicate is the entire part of the sentence except the subject.

Examples: The Sky is **blue.**

**"Is blue"** is the **predicate** here.

### Object:

The object is that part of the sentence on which the action is being done. It is the person or thing on which the action of the verb is carried out by the subject. To discover the object, ask **who** or **what** after the verb, e.g.

Rohit cheated me.

Rohit cheated who?

Answer: me.

Examples:

I saw the **movie.**

Mukul sees **himself in the mirror** carefully.

Certain times a sentence can have two objects. Where one of these can alternatively be expressed by placing to before it, it is called the **indirect object**.

For example, instead of **Kunal gave me the cash** we can say **Kunal gave the cash to me.** Here **the cash** is the direct object and **me** the indirect object.

## Complement

Whatever comes after the verb 'to be' is the complement. After the verb **to be (is / am / are in Present Tense and was /were in Past tense)** there is no object since the noun which follows refers to the same thing as that which precedes the verb (the subject). The noun following the verb **to be** is called the complement.

Examples:

She is a **girl.**

This is **the Sudoku Puzzle.**

## PARTS OF SPEECH

Parts of Speech are the basic formative parts of English without which understanding of the nuances of any language cannot be developed. They are the "building blocks" of the language. Consider them as the parts of a house. As a house cannot be constructed without all the necessary ingredients, similarly English Grammar cannot be understood without understanding Parts of Speech. When we want to build a house, we use concrete to make the foundations or base. We use bricks to make the walls. We use window frames to make the windows, and door frames to make the doorways. And we use cement to join them all together. Each part of the house has its own job. And when we want to build a sentence, we use different types of words. Each type of word has its own job.

In English, we can categorize parts of speech (can be understood as parts of a sentence) into 8 basic types or classes. These classes are called “parts of speech”. It's quite important to recognize the parts of speech. This helps you to analyse sentences and understand them. It also helps you to construct good sentences.

Traditional Grammar divides Parts of Speech into 8 parts; some modern Grammarians define 9 or 10 parts of speech also. However we will go with the traditional Grammar Approach. Here is the classification:

Part of speech	Purpose	Examples	Sentences using the Part of Speech
<b>Verb</b>	action or state	(to) be, have, do, like, work, sing, can, must	I <b>go</b> to my MadeEasy Classes.
<b>Noun</b>	thing or person	pen, dog, work, music, town, London, teacher, John	This is my <b>dog</b> . He lives in my <b>house</b> . We live in <b>Delhi</b> .
<b>Adjective</b>	describes a noun	a/an, the, some, good, big, red, well, interesting	My dog is <b>big</b> . I like <b>big</b> dogs.
<b>Adverb</b>	describes a verb,	quickly, silently,	My dog eats <b>quickly</b> .
	adjective or adverb	well, badly, very, really	When he is <b>very</b> hungry, he eats <b>really</b> quickly.
<b>Pronoun</b>	replaces a noun	I, you, he, she, some	Tara is Indian. <b>She</b> is beautiful.
<b>Preposition</b>	links a noun to another word	to, at, after, on, but	We went <b>to</b> school <b>on</b> Monday.
<b>Conjunction</b>	joins clauses or sentences or words	and, but, when	I like dogs <b>and</b> I like cats. I like cats <b>and</b> dogs. I like dogs <b>but</b> I don't like cats.
<b>Interjection</b>	short exclamation, sometimes inserted into a sentence	oh!, ouch!, hi!, well	<b>Ouch!</b> That hurts! <b>Hi!</b> How are you? <b>Well,</b> I don't know.



# Subject Verb Agreement

**Subject** is the person who performs the action. It can also be a thing which is being talked about. In other words, subject is the doer/performer of the action and **Verb** is the action itself. **Subject-Verb Agreement** simply implies that there should be an agreement between the subject and the form of the verb. There is an agreement between the subject and the verb in a sentence when their forms match. The subject and verb of a sentence must agree. Agreement between a subject and a verb occurs when both are singular or both plural, that is, a singular subject should be followed by a singular verb. And the same applies to the plural subject.

- Rule: A singular subject should be followed by a singular verb and a plural subject should always have a plural verb with it.
- In Simple Present Tense, along with a singular subject always add s/es in the main verb. For example, go becomes 'goes', talk becomes 'talks' etc.
- In Simple Present Tense, along with a plural subject, I and You, there should not be any s/es. For example, I go (and not goes). They talk (and not talks).

## Examples:

**My uncle stays** in Gurgaon, **he** is a working professional.

**My relatives stay** in Gurgaon, **they are** working professionals.

## Sample Questions from the last few Years' ESE & PSUs' Papers

1. A block of commercial projects  
(a)  
are coming up in Noida near our house.  
(b) (c)  
No error  
(d)

2. The boss, along with his assistants  
(a)  
are going on a foreign trip. No error  
(b) (c) (d)
3. A Series of plants have been growing  
(a) (b)  
along the path. No error  
(c) (d)
4. Concerti are the plural form of concerto.  
(a) (b) (c)  
No error  
(d)
5. Chemistry has never been exactly  
(a) (b)  
my cup of tea. No error  
(c) (d)

## Answers:

1. Correct Answer: B  
In the sentence the subject is 'A block of commercial projects' which is a singular unit, so it should be followed by a singular verb 'is'. Remember the sentence doesn't refer to the 'commercial projects' as a subject so the verb cannot be 'are'.
2. Correct Answer: B  
The subject of the sentence is 'the boss'. 'The boss' is the main subject. 'The assistants' has been added over the main subject as an additive, which doesn't make any difference to the verb. Remember, the answer would have been plural if the subject had been, "The boss and his assistants".
3. Correct Answer: B  
Subject of the sentence is 'a series of plants' and not 'plants'. It would have been right to say, "Plants have been growing along the path". Or

"A series of plants has been growing along the path".

4. Correct Answer: D

Concerti are the plural form of concerto.

5. Correct Answer: D

Chemistry has never been exactly my cup of tea.

When a subject is plural or it refers to more than one thing or persons, it should be followed by a plural verb. The 'subject' of a sentence is the noun /person to which the verb in the sentence refers, and the subject and the verb should always agree in number. This agreement should apply to all the forms of the subjects and verbs. Singular subjects must be used with singular verbs; and plural subjects, with plural verbs. Though it may sound simple, the General English Test uses tricky questions and phrasings that make these questions seem far more complicated than they actually are.

The smart looking young **gentleman was wearing** a business suit.

Subject: gentleman

Verb: was wearing

## What is agreement?

The Subject Verb Agreement rule simply means that the subject and the verb of a sentence must match – "agree with" – one another. What exactly does this mean? When you change the form of a word to make it fit properly into the sentence, like changing the ending of a masculine adjective to feminine because the noun it modifies is feminine – that's agreement. Agreement helps us to understand who's doing what in a sentence in a clear and unambiguous manner. Because along with the sentences being grammatically correct they should be clear, unambiguous & precise in their construction. Without such a method of clarification – of indicating which adjectives in a sentence modify which nouns, or which nouns are governed by which verbs – clear expression, in writing and speech alike, would be very difficult.

## Types of Agreement

In English Grammar, Subject Verb Agreement is applicable to several different kinds of groups: nouns and their verbs; pronouns and their verbs; adjectives and the nouns they modify; prepositions and the verb(s) they govern. Depending on the nature of the pairing, agreement is needed in terms **of the following cases:**

- (i) Tense,
- (ii) Number or
- (iii) Case.

Tense and number apply to verbs; number applies to verbs, nouns, and pronouns; and case applies to nouns, pronouns, and modifiers:

**Tense:** shows the time of the action. In other words, it indicates when an action happened, is happening, or will happen

**Number:** shows the number or the unit. It indicates "how many" - singular (one) or plural (more than one)

**Case:** shows what role the word is playing in the sentence like, a noun, pronoun etc. It indicates role of noun or pronoun in sentence. In English, nouns only change form for the possessive case, while pronouns have different forms for the possessive, subjective, and objective cases.

Just to simplify, you can also say, singular nouns agree with singular verbs, plural nouns with plural verbs, and so forth. For an agreement the subject and a verb of a sentence match in as many of these ways as possible: for example, a noun and verb can agree in terms of number (singular or plural) only, while a noun and a pronoun can agree in terms of both **number** (singular and plural) and **case** (possessive or otherwise). But more complex sentences - those containing several nouns, verbs, and/or pronouns can sometimes make even the simplest applications of agreement confusing.



A singular subject should have a singular verb and Plural subject should have a plural verb with it.

## Examples:

- **Rajesh** is a doctor.
- **Doctors** are examining his case.
- **Rajesh treats** his patients. (Simple Present Tense)
- **Doctors treat** their patients. (Simple Present Tense)



- **I treat** my patients. (In Simple Present Tense, I and You are treated as Plural subjects, which means for I or You the verb should not use s/ es at the end of it).

## Subject Verb Agreement Rules

### Rule 1: Use of Compound Subjects

When a sentence has a subject made up of a group of words that are adjoined with the help of conjunction '**and**', it is considered a plural subject and needs to be matched with a plural verb.

- **Ram and Shyam are** studying together.

The subject is **Ram and Shyam**.

The verb is **are**, instead of **is**. **Is** would be a singular verb for a singular subject

### Rule 2: Subject and verb may be separated by an accompanying phrase without changing the agreement.

Certain examples of these accompanying phrases can be

- Along with, together with, as well as, in addition to, besides, accompanied by etc.
- **Hina, as well as her friends, is** watching the movie.

This sentence is grammatically correct. When a phrase sandwiched by commas comes between a subject and a verb, the subject and verb must still agree, even if the sandwiched phrase contains other nouns. The accompanying phrase "her friends" only provides extra information and does not alter in any way the grammatical relationship between the subject (Hina) and the verb (is watching).

In order to answer such sandwich phrase Questions correctly, pay special attention to the doer/performer of the action indicated by the verb, and make sure it agrees with the verb. Ignore everything else.

- **Professor Sharma, accompanied by his students, was** in the lab.

Since Professor Sharma, a singular proper noun, is the subject of the sentence, not his students, a singular, not plural, noun is required: **Sharma was** in the lab.

In Spotting the Error questions of General English section of your test, don't remember to check for agreement in every question you see, and be aware of the different ways the error can come up. You should also know how to handle – or even identify – a subject-verb agreement error without obvious isolating commas.

### Rule 3: Phrases or words separated by 'and' are plural.

**Phrases separated by *or* or *nor* are singular.**

- **My family, friends and I are** going to temple.

In this example, we can see three subjects. Because these subjects – family, friends and I - are separated by the word "**and**", the plural form of the verb is used, according to the rule stated above. It's an extremely straightforward grammatical construction: the subject is plural because it refers to more than one person (or place, or thing, or event), and plural subjects require plural verbs.

### Rule 4: The use of Collective Nouns

Collective nouns, such as **bouquet, bunch, panel, herd, archipelago, Cache, family, majority, audience, and committee** are referred as a **singular entity** when they act in a collective fashion or represent one group. They are plural when the members of the collective body act as individuals. Collective nouns will usually be singular in Sentence Correction sentences. The difficulty of these questions lies in identifying a noun as a collective noun.

#### **Certain Examples of Common Collective Nouns:**

- Group, Team, Staff, Government, chain, archipelago, Cache, Class, Senate, Parliament, Society, Faculty, Family, Council, Herd etc.
- The **bunch** of flowers **looks** beautiful.
- The **flowers** of the **bunch** look beautiful.

These collective nouns usually appear plural, but are in fact singular because they are referring to a group of those units and not those units individually. For an example:

- **The team has** taken the decision with consensus.
- **The team members are** divided over the issue.



If you face some problem identifying whether a noun is singular or plural, it might be helpful to visualize what's actually going on in the sentence. Ask yourself these questions: Is the sentence talking about something that acts as one unit? Or, is it talking about the individual elements within that entity?

In the sentence above we are presented with the noun "bunch". The "bunch of flowers" contains several flowers; however, they are represented only as a bunch, not as individual flowers. There is no indication that the sentence is referring to the flowers in the bunch – even though it comprises several flowers, the "bunch" acts as one – as a singular entity - and therefore requires a singular verb, "looks."

- The **committee** **has** taken the decision unanimously.
- The **committee members** **are** fighting over the bylaws amendment bill.

Now you have an example of a collective noun that requires a plural verb. It's helpful to illustrate the importance of reading the entire sentence and visualizing what it describes every time you come across a confusing noun.

The sentence above describes the fighting that occurs between the individual members of the committee. Because "committee" refers to several individual members, it is a plural noun, and therefore requires a plural verb - "are" - as a result.

#### **You should be able to:**

- Recognize the collective noun.
- Visualize what's going on in the sentence to make sure it is a collective noun.

These questions are included in the General English Test not because they are very complex, but because test papers setters assume that most of the students will not be familiar with the rules of collective nouns.

### **Rule 5: Rule of Proximity**

This rule applies to certain correlative conjunctions such as, either....or, neither....nor.

**If two subjects are joined by any of the two:**

- (i) **Either....or**
- (ii) **Neither... nor**
- (iii) **Or**
- (ii) **Not only... but also**

**The verb should agree with the subject that is closer to it.**

If the conjunction **neither...nor** appears in a sentence or the conjunction **either...or**, the verb form is decided on the basis of the closer subject. That is, if you see "neither" followed by "nor," or "either" followed by "or," you can't automatically assume that the verb should be singular. In these constructions, "neither" and "either" are no longer the subjects of their sentences. Instead, they function as conjunctions, working in pairs with "nor" and "or" to join two other subjects in the sentence. When this occurs, **the verb agrees with whichever subject is closer to it.**

- **Either** the commander **or** his **juniors** **are** taking in charge.
- **Either** the juniors **or** their **commander** **is** taking in charge.
- **Neither** the commander **nor** his **juniors** **are** taking in charge.
- **Neither** the juniors **nor** their **commander** **is** taking in charge.

This "either...or" sentence contains two subjects: "commander," and "juniors." In these situations, the subjects are the two nouns immediately following the words "either" and "or."-Since the latter subject, "juniors," is plural, we therefore need a plural verb, too. The plural verb "were" is correct. Don't forget to apply this rule only when both items of the pairs "neither/nor" and "either/or" are present in the sentence.

### **Rule 6: The use of Indefinite Pronouns: they are always singular.**

**Indefinite Pronouns always take a singular form of the Verb**, irrespective of the form of any noun close to them.

Some of the commonly used Indefinite Pronouns are:

- **Either**
- **Neither**
- **Each**
- **Everybody, Everyone**
- **Somebody, Someone, Something**
- **Anybody, Anyone, Anything**
- **Nobody, No one**
- **Many a**
- **Whatever, Whoever**
- **Neither** of the **students** **is** intelligent.

Here we have an example of a sentence in which the word “neither,” not the plural noun “students” is the subject of the sentence. As per the stated rules above, **“Neither” takes a singular verb when it acts as the subject of the sentence.** Therefore, the singular verb “is” is correct. The sentence requires no changes.

Let us have another example of an indefinite pronoun:

**Either** of the **staff members has** completed the project work.

In this sentence, the word “either” acts as the subject, or therefore requires a singular noun. Always remember in case of either....or, the verb agrees to the closer subject. In case of either, the verb always takes a plural form. If you are not confident, a helpful tip is to think of the word “either” as an abbreviation of the phrase “either one”. Once you do so, it’s easier to see that the phrase “of us” is just filler (that you can cross it out). The subject of the sentence is “either (one)”, and so this sentence therefore requires a singular verb: “is”

### Rule 7: Exceptions of Indefinite Pronouns.

The following indefinite pronouns could be either singular or plural depending on the context in which they are used:

- **None**
- **Any**
- **All**
- **Some**
- **Most**
  - **Some** of the **sugar** is contaminated.
  - **Some** of the **people are** voting for the secular government.
  - **Most** of the **apples are** rotten.
  - **Most** of the **apple is** rotten.

Both sentences are equally correct, though they convey two different meanings. The first requires a plural verb and the second a singular verb because in the first sentence, ‘most’ refers to several distinct objects.

If we have, say, ten apples, then “most of the apples” means either two apples, or three apples, or four or

five or six – in any case, many individual apples. But in the second sentence, “some” refers to part of **one** object.

One part of one apple is rotten. In this sentence, “most” means “part” – which is singular.

This very same rule works for the words like “some,” “all,” “any,” and “most”. For “any,” the verb will usually appear before the noun, but the same principle applies: if “any” is followed by a singular noun, use a singular verb; if it’s followed by a plural noun, use a plural verb.

### Rule 8: Certain Plural Pronouns

Unlike Indefinite Pronouns, there are a few pronouns which are always used in the **plural form**. Such as:

**Both**  
**Several**  
**Few**  
**Many**  
**Others**

**Both, Ram and Mohit, are** planning to attend the party tonight.

As both refers to the two subjects, hence will take a plural verb form.



- Two or more than two nouns adjoined with the help of and always take a plural verb.  
Example: Ram and Shyam are studying together.
- Subject and verb may be separated by an accompanying phrase without changing the agreement.  
Example: Professor Sharma, accompanied by his students, was in the lab.
- Phrases or words separated by ‘and’ are plural.  
Example: My family, friends and I are going to temple.
- Collective nouns, such as bunch, panel, family, majority, audience, and committee are referred as a singular entity when they act in a collective fashion or represent one group.

Examples: The committee has taken the decision unanimously.

The committee members are fighting over the bylaws amendment bill.

- If two subjects are joined by Either....**or** Or Neither... nor the verb should agree with the subject that is closer to it.

Examples: Either the commander or his juniors are taking in charge.

Either the juniors or their commander is taking in charge.

- Indefinite Pronouns such as, Either, Neither, Each, Everybody, Everyone,

Somebody, Someone, Something, Anybody, Anyone, Anything, Nobody, No one, Many a, Whatever, Whoever are always Singular.

Example: Neither of the students is intelligent.

- None, Any, All, Some, Most may take singular or plural verb form depending on the noun that follows them.

Examples: Some of the sugar is contaminated.

Some of the people are voting for the secular government.

- Both, Several, Few, Many, Others are always plural.

Examples: Both, Ram and Mohit, are planning to attend the party tonight.

## PRACTICE EXERCISE 1

**Mark the correct answer choice out of the two options given:**

1. The world (change, changes) so rapidly that we can hardly keep up.
2. People (is, are) often ten or twenty years behind the times in their knowledge of the world.
3. People who (live, lives) in poverty often do not even have television or newspapers.
4. He (doesn't, don't) want to be killed.
5. Life (is, are) very complicated
6. Traditionally, college students (has, have) been very active in politics.
7. There (is, are) both men and women at the meeting.
8. The students in my class (has, have) very poor work habits.
9. Each of you (has, have) an equal chance to make good grades.
10. All of the children (was, were) searching for flowers in the garden.
11. A notebook and a pen (is, are) lying on the desk in the library.
12. My son, along with two friends, (is, are) coming for the weekend.
13. Sitting on the sofa (was, were) two students from Thailand.
14. Either the workers or the manager (is, are) coming to the conference.
15. Not only the students, but also the teacher (has, have) been unhappy.
16. Everybody (hate, hates) to take tests.
17. Knowledge gained after long study (disappear, disappears) rapidly from our minds.
18. One of my greatest worries in college (was, were) that I would study hard and still flunk important tests.
19. The Bombay University (provide, provides) some scholarships for the students.
20. The news about Afghanistan (is, are) shocking, isn't it?



# PRACTICE EXERCISE 2

## Mark the choice which is grammatically correct

1. Either the photographer or her companions was/ were the first to see the gorilla.
2. Rahul's natural ability and his desire to help others has/ have led to a career in the ministry.
3. Everybody who signed up for the ski trip was/ were taking lessons.
4. Some of our luggage was/ were lost.
5. None of his advice make/ makes sense.
6. One out of every three sunsets was/ were covered with clouds.
7. A ship and a plane has/ have recently disappeared in the Pacific Ocean.
8. The teeth in a crocodile's mouth is/ are sharp.
9. The leaders of the expedition was/ were looking for a campsite.
10. The lions and the photographer was/ were face to face.
11. During the trip bread and butter was/ were the favourite meal for the two drivers.
12. Measles is/ are a contagious childhood disease.
13. On the side is/ are political correspondents hoping for an interview.
14. The trunk of the elephant and the belly of the hippo make/ makes me laugh.
15. A group of students was/ were blocking the road.
16. Arvind and Harish, members of a racing team, drives/ drive across Nepal.
17. The samples on the tray in the lab need/ needs testing.
18. Mohan swim/ swims in the cold water often.
19. The Whale Shark, the largest of all sharks, grow/ grows up to 38 feet long.
20. The board of trustees meet/ meets in Delhi on the first Tuesday of each month.



# PRACTICE EXERCISE 3

## Spot the error:

1. The college Board, as well as the local citizens, were pleased with the plans for the new college. No error  
 (a) (b) (c) (d)
2. The intelligence of many wild animals is indeed amazing. No error  
 (a) (b) (c) (d)

3. Freedom and justice were the two cornerstones of the democracy from the beginning. No error  
(a) (b) (c) (d)
4. Every man, woman, and child were taken from the town. No error  
(a) (b) (c) (d)
5. Either a certified cheque on deposit or a valid major credit card is required for one to bid on the goods.  
(a) (b) (c)  
No error  
(d)
6. Neither the coach nor the students wants to do another water-color. No error  
(a) (b) (c) (d)
7. One of, these detergents, have proved to be harmful  
(a) (b)  
for the delicate skin of the house wife. No error  
(c) (d)
8. Several in the audience were beside themselves with anger at what the speaker had said. No error  
(a) (b) (c) (d)
9. Some of Manish's time was taken up settling disputes among the workers. No error  
(a) (b) (c) (d)
10. Ninety per cent of the trees were scheduled for harvest. No error  
(a) (b) (c) (d)
11. None of the soldiers was able to pass the physical fitness test. No error  
(a) (b) (c) (d)
12. The principal was displeased to learn that none of the foreign students is  
(a) (b)  
majoring in education or Chemistry. No error  
(c) (d)
13. The combined family have been arriving two or three at a time Since last weekend. No error  
(a) (b) (c) (d)
14. For the fourth time this year, the committee are going to consider increasing the dues. No error  
(a) (b) (c) (d)
15. Here comes the trainers and the players consider for both teams. No error  
(a) (b) (c) (d)
16. Beside the old gymnasium stand an elm, several maples, and a huge Indian. No error  
(a) (b) (c) (d)
17. Each organization has its own selected officers, who conduct the business of the organization. No error  
(a) (b) (c) (d)
18. This Master book concludes with pages that contain lists of American colleges and universities.  
(a) (b) (c)  
No error  
(d)

19. To Hussain's way of thinking, fancy dinners is not a luxury. No error  
 (a) (b) (c) (d)
20. My favourite lunch is sausage, eggs, slice, and a green salad. No error  
 (a) (b) (c) (d)

## Solutions • PRACTICE EXERCISE • 1

- |            |                |          |              |          |
|------------|----------------|----------|--------------|----------|
| 1. Changes | 2. Are         | 3. Live  | 4. Doesn't   | 5. Is    |
| 6. Have    | 7. Are         | 8. Have  | 9. Has       | 10. Were |
| 11. Are    | 12. Is         | 13. Were | 14. Is       | 15. Has  |
| 16. hates  | 17. disappears | 18. was  | 19. Provides | 20. Is   |

## Solutions • PRACTICE EXERCISE • 2

- |           |          |           |           |           |
|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Were   | 2. Have  | 3. Was    | 4. Was    | 5. Makes  |
| 6. Was    | 7. Have  | 8. Are    | 9. Were   | 10. Were  |
| 11. Was   | 12. Is   | 13. Are   | 14. Make  | 15. Was   |
| 16. Drive | 17. Need | 18. Swims | 19. Grows | 20. Meets |

## Solutions • PRACTICE EXERCISE • 3

1. (b)  
The College Board, as well as the local citizens, was pleased with the plans for the new college.
2. (d)  
The intelligence of many wild animals is indeed amazing.
3. (d)  
Freedom and justice were the two cornerstones of the democracy from the beginning.
4. (b)  
Every man, woman, and child was taken from the town.
5. (d)  
Either a certified check on deposit or a valid major credit card is required for one to bid on the good.
6. (c)  
Neither the coach nor the students want to do another water-color.
7. (a)  
One of, these detergents, has proved to be harmful for the delicate skin of the house wife.
8. (d)  
Several in the audience were beside themselves with anger at what the speaker had said.

9. (d)  
Some of Manish's time was taken up settling disputes among the workers.
10. (d)  
Ninety per cent of the trees were scheduled for harvest.
11. (d)  
None of the soldiers was able to pass the physical fitness test.
12. (b)  
The principal was displeased to learn that none of the foreign students is majoring in education or Chemistry.
13. (a)  
The combined family has been arriving two or three at a time since last weekend.
14. (b)  
For the fourth time this year, the committee is going to consider increasing the dues.
15. (a)  
Here come the trainers and the players for both teams.
16. (d)  
Beside the old gymnasium stand an elm, several maples, and a huge Indian.
17. (d)  
Each organization has its own selected officers, who conduct the business of the organization.
18. (d)  
This Master book concludes with pages that contain lists of American colleges and universities.
19. (c)  
To Husain's way of thinking, fancy dinners are not a luxury.
20. (d)  
My favourite lunch is sausage, eggs, slice, and a green salad.
21. (b)  
Swimming across the Taksuna Lake is still a major accomplishment.
22. (d)  
Whether we were great motivators or ordinary persons really makes little difference later on.
23. (d)  
Frames Unlimited do most of the work for the art gallery.

