

## Collective Nouns

A **collective noun** refers to a whole group as a single entity but also to the members of that group. A **collective noun** names a group of individuals or things with a singular form. Examples of collective nouns are: faculty, family, and team. There are **collective nouns** for people, animals, objects, and concepts.

### Should I use a singular or a plural verb with a collective noun?

The use of a singular or plural verb depends on the context of the sentence:

- If one is referring to the whole group as a single entity, then the *singular verb* is best: The school board has called a special session.  
When a group noun is used with a singular determiner (e.g., a/an, each, every, this, that), *singular verbs* and pronouns are normal: The team is away this weekend
- There are other contexts where the **plural verb** is more natural: My family are always fighting among themselves. When the individuals in the collection or group receive the emphasis, the **plural verb** is acceptable.

### What happens if you can't decide whether a collective noun is singular or plural?

You can use different words to compose your sentence to be sure there is no agreement error. For example, you can insert the word “members” after a collective noun or use a different word such as “players” instead of “team” or “zebras” instead of “herd” or “students” instead of “class.” Reread what you have written to be sure it sounds natural, and give yourself some time to practice.

### American and British

Generally, in American English, **collective nouns** take **singular verbs**. In British English, however, **collective nouns** are more often treated as plurals that take **plural verbs**.

### List of Common Collective Nouns

- **Herd**– A group of herbivore animals
- **Pack**– A group of canine animals such as wolves or dogs; also used to describe playing cards and packages containing multiple objects
- **Flock**– A group of birds; also used to discuss small hooved animals such as sheep or goats
- **Swarm**– A group of insects
- **Shoal**– A group of fish
- **Group** – A very general term used to describe people, places, things, and animals
- **Crowd** – Usually used to describe a group of people

- **Gang** – Usually used to describe a group of criminals; also used to describe a group of workers, particularly sailors or dock workers
- **Mob** – Normally used to describe an angry or unruly group of people; also used to describe a group of kangaroos
- **Staff** – A group of people who work in the same place
- **Crew** – Usually used to denote a group of workers; also used to describe aircraft and ships personnel
- **Choir** – A large, organized group of singers
- **Orchestra** – A large, organized group of instrumentalists, led by a conductor
- **Panel** – A group of experts
- **Board** – A group of people, usually professionals, who take on an advisory role
- **Troupe** – A group of actors or acrobats; also used to describe a group of monkeys
- **Bunch** – Usually a group of smallish objects such as grapes, flowers, keys, or bananas
- **Pile** – An untidy collection of items such as rubbish
- **Heap** – A mounded collection of items; used interchangeably with “pile”
- **Set** – A tidy group of matched objects such as dishes; also used to describe rules or a social group of people
- **Stack** – A group of items neatly laid one on top of another; i.e., a stack of books
- **Series** – Used to discuss movies, books, or events that follow one after another, i.e. Star Trek or Harry Potter
- **Shower** – Usually used to describe rain, although it can be used to describe gifts or compliments
- **Fall** – Often used to discuss weather, such as rain, snow or hail



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