

Collective Nouns

What is a collective noun?

A collective noun is a word used to describe a **group of people, animals, or things as one unit**.

For example:

- People: a **team** (of players), a **class** (of students), a **family** (of five)
- Animals: a **herd** (of cows), a **flock** (of birds), a **pack** (of wolves)
- Things: a **bunch** (of flowers), a **collection** (of stamps), a **fleet** (of ships)

Note: The words in parentheses are just examples — other options are possible.

Sometimes we put "of [noun/number]" after a collective noun, and sometimes we do not.

For example:

- A **family of five** lives in that house.
- A **family** lives in that house.
- A **flock of seagulls** ate my lunch.
- The **audience** enjoyed the show.

Are collective nouns singular or plural?

We usually treat collective nouns as singular nouns, but there are some exceptions. Here are the important rules.

Note:

If we treat a collective noun as singular, we use third person singular verbs (*is, plays, etc.*) and the possessive determiner **its**.

If we treat a collective noun as plural, we use third person plural verbs (*are, play, etc.*) and the possessive determiner **their**.

1. Groups of People: Singular or Plural

Most collective nouns that are used for people can be used as either singular or plural nouns. Sometimes it is not important if we use singular or plural verbs.

For example:

Singular	Plural
The team is very happy about its victory.	The team are very happy about their victory.
The class has bought a present for its teacher.	The class have bought a present for their teacher.
Her family goes to Sydney every Christmas.	Her family go to Sydney every Christmas.

However, if we are definitely thinking of the group as one unit, we usually treat it as a singular noun. If we are thinking of the group as individuals, we usually treat it as a plural noun.

For example:

Singular	Plural
My family is large.	My family are all doing different things.
The committee has made a decision.	The committee have disagreed with each other.
Our staff was small.	Our staff were at home with their families.

2. Groups of Animals: Usually Singular

Collective nouns that are used for animals are usually used as singular nouns.

For example:

- The herd **is** moving towards the river.
- The flock **spends** a lot of time in this park.
- A swarm of bees **was** flying around the bush.

However, we sometimes use them as plural nouns if the emphasis is on the individual animals.

For example:

- The herd **are** moving in different directions.

3. Groups of Things: Usually Singular

Collective nouns that are used for things are usually used as singular nouns.

For example:

- His collection **is** very valuable.
- Where **was** that set of keys?
- This bunch of flowers **smells** amazing.

4. Always Plural

A small number of collective nouns are always plural (e.g. **police**, **cattle** and **vermin**).

For example:

- The police **are** looking for information.
- The cattle **were** grazing in the fields.

What are some common collective nouns?

Note: The words after **of** are just examples — other options are often possible.

People

- **group:** a group of people
- **team:** a team of players
- **family:** a family of relatives
- **class:** a class of students
- **committee:** a committee of members
- **government:** a government of ministers
- **staff:** a staff of employees
- **audience:** an audience of spectators
- **crowd:** a crowd of people
- **jury:** a jury of jurors
- **crew:** a crew of workers/sailors
- **band:** a band of musicians
- **orchestra:** an orchestra of musicians
- **choir:** a choir of singers
- **board:** a board of directors
- **panel:** a panel of experts
- **council:** a council of members

Animals

- **group:** a group of animals
- **herd:** a herd of cattle/elephants
- **flock:** a flock of birds/sheep
- **pack:** a pack of wolves/dogs
- **school:** a school of fish
- **swarm:** a swarm of bees/insects
- **colony:** a colony of ants/penguins
- **pod:** a pod of dolphins/whales
- **litter:** a litter of puppies/kittens

Things

- **bunch:** a bunch of flowers/grapes
- **bouquet:** a bouquet of flowers
- **bundle:** a bundle of sticks
- **stack:** a stack of papers/books
- **pile:** a pile of papers/books/clothes
- **set:** a set of tools/keys
- **series:** a series of events
- **collection:** a collection of paintings/stamps/coins
- **range:** a range of products
- **fleet:** a fleet of ships
- **chain:** a chain of islands/stores
- **batch:** a batch of documents/cookies

What are some more advanced and less common collective nouns?

People

- **congregation:** a congregation of worshippers
- **company:** a company of actors/soldiers

Animals

- **brood:** a brood of chicks
- **pride:** a pride of lions
- **troop:** a troop of monkeys
- **gaggle:** a gaggle of geese
- **murder:** a murder of crows
- **parliament:** a parliament of owls
- **drove:** a drove of pigs/cattle
- **shoal:** a shoal of fish
- **nest:** a nest of snakes
- **leash:** a leash of greyhounds

Things

- **string:** a string of pearls
- **array:** an array of objects
- **cluster:** a cluster of stars