

## How to Use Singular and Plural Forms (Part Two)\*

This contribution is the second part of the article on how to use singular and plural forms initiated in the previous journal issue. The use of said forms is often context-dependent. The examples provided below are for nouns ending in *-s*. Some nouns with identical plural and singular forms (irregular plurals like *series*, *species*, etc.) can be:

- singular (*a series*, *a species*);
- plural/countable (*different series*, *many species*);
- uncountable (*Balmer series* (physics), *type species* (biology), used in a particular sense).

However, certain uncountable nouns require a singular verb such as:

*billiards*, *darts*, *dominoes*, *mumps*, *news*, *shingles*.

Also, certain plural nouns require a plural verb such as:

*arms*, *clothes*, *contents*, *customs*, *glasses*, *goods*, *groceries*, *jeans*, *means*, *outskirts*, *pants*, *pyjamas*, *scissors*, *spectacles*, *surroundings*, *thanks*, *tidings*, *trousers*.

### Nouns ending in *-nics*

The nouns ending in *-nics* are listed according to their use in a singular/plural context. The following uncountable nouns require a singular verb:

- (ending in *-anics*) *aeromechanics*, *biomechanics*, *humanics*, *hydromechanics*, *mechanics*;
- (ending in *-enics*) *cacogenics*, *calisthenics*, *cryogenics*, *dysgenics*, *eugenics*, *euthenics*, *hygienics*, *irenics*, *transgenics*;
- (ending in *-onics*) *aerophonics*, *animatronics*, *architectonics*, *avionics*, *bioelectronics*, *bionics*, *conics*, *cryonics*, *ebonics*, *electronics*, *geophonics*, *harmonics* (the science of musical sounds), *hedonics*, *hydroponics*, *microelectronics*, *mnemonics*, *nucleonics*, *optoelectronics*, *phonics*, *photonics*, *sonics*, *supersonics*, *tectonics*, *thermionics*, *ultrasonics*.

Some technical nouns are not well described as singular/plural/countable/uncountable in the dictionaries such as *cataphonics* (uncountable, the theory of reflected sounds, a branch of acoustics). Another example is the noun *Centronics* (company, hardware, printer) which originates from a company in Hudson, NH, USA.

Several nouns ending in *-nics* can be used in a plural context:

- *autogenics*, uncountable noun, may be used in a singular or plural context;
- *euphenics*, *gnomonics*, plural noun but singular in construction;
- *cytoarchitectonics*, plural noun but singular or plural in construction;
- *eudemonics*, usually used with a singular verb;
- *histrionics*, used with a singular or plural verb;
- *microphonics*, plural noun;
- *mechatronics*, *radionics*, functioning as singular.

Also, several nouns ending in *-nic* have both singular (*-nic*) and plural (*-nics*) forms:

<i>clinic</i> ,	<i>clinics</i> ;
<i>cynic</i> ,	<i>cynics</i> ;
<i>harmonic</i> (overtone, oscillation),	<i>harmonics</i> ;
<i>Hispanic</i> ,	<i>Hispanics</i> ;
<i>panic</i> ,	<i>panics</i> ;
<i>tonic</i> ,	<i>tonics</i> ;
<i>tunic</i> ,	<i>tunics</i> .

In general, a noun ending in *-ics* can take (Sabin 2010; Ritter 2005):

- a singular verb (most often) when it is considered as the name of a particular science;
- a plural verb (occasionally) when expressing a specific application of the said science.

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The resultant singular/plural forms depend on the corresponding quantifiers and conjunctions within the phrasal constructs (Sabin 2010; Ritter 2005; Isaacs *et al.* 2009).

### **Quantifiers** (Sabin 2010; Ritter 2005; Isaacs *et al.* 2009)

The quantifier ‘*a number of*’ is used with a plural verb.

*A number of parameters are...*

The quantifier ‘*the number of*’ is used with a singular verb.

*The number of variables is...*

The following quantifiers require a singular verb:

- Indefinite form: *any, every*;
- Definite form: *each/each of, either/either of, much of/little of, neither/neither of, one/one of, more than one of*.

The following quantifiers require a plural verb:

- Indefinite form: *all, few, many, most, several, some*;
- Definite form: *a couple of, a great deal of, a few of, a group of, a half of, a lot of, a majority of, many of, most of, a number of, plenty of, several of, some of*.

The following quantifiers require a singular or plural verb depending on the closest noun in the phrase:

*all of, few of, half of, little of, many of, most of, much of, some of, several per cent of*.

A phrase containing a plural noun preceded by ‘*none/none of*’ requires a singular verb which agrees with the quantifier. Note that the informal usage agrees with the plural noun.

### **Conjunctions** (Sabin 2010; Ritter 2005; Isaacs *et al.* 2009)

A plural verb is required for arbitrary subjects joined by ‘*and*’.

*The theory and the experiment are...*

The singular/plural verb for subjects joined by ‘*or*’ or ‘*nor*’ agrees with the closer subject.

*The model or the experiments are...*

### **Plural of an Abbreviation**

The plural of an abbreviation, a capital letter, or a number used as a noun is formed by adding a lowercase ‘*s*’ to the end (Isaacs *et al.* 2009). An apostrophe may precede the lowercase ‘*s*’ for clarity in cases where letters/symbols are referred to as objects (Ritter 2005).

It is internationally accepted that the same abbreviation of a measuring unit is used in both its singular and plural forms (Ritter 2005; Isaacs *et al.* 2009):

1 m,            50 m;  
1 kg,           10 kg;  
1 s,             30 s.

A doubling of the letter occurs in the plural of some single-letter abbreviations (Ritter 2005):

p. (page),        pp. (pages);  
s. (section),     ss. (sections);  
v. (volume),     vv. (volumes).

### **References**

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- Sabin, W.A. 2010. *The Gregg Reference Manual: A Manual of Style, Grammar, Usage, and Formatting*. McGraw-Hill, New York, NY, USA.