**Collective Nouns**

**What is a collective noun?**

**Collective nouns** are nouns that refer to a collection or group of multiple people, animals, or things. However, even though collective nouns refer to multiple individuals, they still usually function as singular nouns in a sentence. This is because they still are technically referring to one thing: the group as a whole. Here are some examples of collective nouns:

* **group** – A group is a single unit that is made up of a number of individuals, whether people or things.
* **collection** – A collection is a single unit that typically consists of many similar things organized together, such as paintings.
* **tribe** – A tribe is a single unit that is made up of a group of tribe members.
* **fleet** – A fleet is a single unit that is made up of several vehicles or vessels, such as ships.
* **band** – A band is a single unit that consists of a number of different musicians.

Collective nouns are used in sentences to refer to a group of people, animals, or things. Here are some examples of collective nouns being used in sentences:

* “The **flock** of birds flew south for the winter.”
* “The **organization** voted to revoke the rules that it had previously approved.”
* “The **set** of tablecloths had disappeared. ”

**Similarity to plural nouns**

Collective nouns are very similar to plural nouns. Plural nouns are nouns that refer to multiple people, places, or things, and they primarily (but not always) end in “-s,” “-es,” or “-ies.” They are derived from singular nouns, and so are truly plural in form and function. For example, the following words are all plural nouns:

* dogs
* cities
* tables
* oceans
* sleds

Both plural nouns and collective nouns can refer to multiple things. The difference is that collective nouns refer to a group of individuals in a single unit, whereas plural nouns refer to multiple individuals. To understand the difference, consider the following sentence:

* “The **musicians** played the song beautifully.”

This sentence contains the plural noun *musicians*. This word lets the reader know that there are multiple musicians who played the song beautifully. Now let's look at a similar sentence:

* “The **orchestra** played the song beautifully.”

This sentence contains the **collective noun** *orchestra*. This word lets the reader know that there is a group of musicians that played the song beautifully. However, it also lets the reader know that the multiple musicians are arranged into a single group. The plural noun *musicians* in the first sentence does not do that.

Here are two more examples:

* “The **soldiers** marched very swiftly.” (plural noun)
* “The **platoon** marched very swiftly.” (collective noun)

As in the previous examples, both *soldiers* and *platoon* indicate multiple people. However, only *platoon* lets the reader know that the soldiers are organized into a collective unit.

**Singular vs. Plural Use**

Collective nouns usually function as singular nouns in a sentence, but they are occasionally used as plurals, too. Whether they are used in a singular or plural manner can impact which verbs and pronouns should be associated with the word.

The way we determine in which manner the collective noun should be used is to consider whether the members of the collective noun are being regarded as a single, whole unit, or as multiple individuals. If they are functioning as a whole, then you use singular verb tenses and pronouns; if they are acting individually, then you use plural verb tenses and pronouns.

For example, the following sentence demonstrates singular use of a collective noun:

* “The **offense** *hopes* to score a touchdown on its next play.”

Here, the collective noun *offense* refers to the members of the team’s offensive unit functioning as a whole; therefore, it acts as a singular noun in the sentence. As a result, the verb *hopes* and the pronoun *its* are also singular.

Compare this to the next sentence, which demonstrates plural use of a collective noun:

* “The **jury** *eat* their lunches before they deliberate.”

In this sentence, the collective noun, *jury*, refers to the jury members acting individually. As a result, *jury* functions as a plural noun in the sentence. This means that the plural pronouns *they* and *their* are used, as is the plural form of the verb *eat.*

Finally, it is worth noting that in **British English**, it is more common for collective nouns to function as plurals in all instances.

**Plural-only collective nouns**

Certain collective nouns can only be plural, such as “police.” For example:

* “The **police *are*** investigating the matter.” (correct)
* “The **police *is*** investigating the matter.” (incorrect)

However, we can make the noun countable by adding more information to the sentence. If we want to specify a single member of the police, we could say:

* “**A police officer *is*** investigating the matter.”

Here are some other examples of collective nouns that can only be plural:

* people
* children
* poultry
* vermin
* cattle

**Collective Nouns and Animals**

In the English language, there are many different types of collective nouns that refer to different groupings of animals. There are hundreds of different collective nouns used to describe animal group names, but here are a few common ones:

* **flock** of birds
* **pod** of whales
* **pack** of wolves
* **pride** of lions
* **gaggle** of geese
* **band** of coyotes
* **gatling** of woodpeckers
* **huddle** of penguins
* **mob** of kangaroos

**school** of fish