



Common Grammar Problems

Singular or Plural

- Should the noun following *any* and *any of* be plural?

Any and *any of* are often used with either uncountable nouns or countable plural nouns.

*I don't have **any money**.*

*She hasn't got **any friends**.*

*I wasn't interested in **any of the lectures**.*

When *any of* is followed by a countable plural noun, the verb can be in either singular or plural form, but a singular verb is more common in a formal style.

*If **any of your friends** **is/are** interested, let me know.*

If *any* means 'it doesn't matter who/which/what', it can be used with singular or plural nouns or uncountable nouns.

*She goes out with **any boy** who asks her.*

*Ask **any doctor** – they'll tell you that alcohol is a poison.*

- Should the noun following *no* and *none of* be plural?

No often goes before a plural noun or an uncountable noun.

*We have **no plans** for the summer.*

If the noun is the subject, the relevant verb will be in plural and singular forms accordingly.

*There **is no time** to talk about it now.*

***No plans were** made for the summer.*

The noun after *no* can also be singular if it makes more sense.

*He has **no wife**.*

None of can be followed by an uncountable noun or a plural noun. If it is followed by a plural noun, the verb can be singular (more formal) or plural.

***None of us speaks** French.*

***None of this cheese is** any good.*

- Should the noun following *every* and *each* be plural?

The noun after *every* and *each* is singular and the verb is also singular.

***Each new day** is different.*

***Every room** is being used.*

The noun or pronoun after *every one of* and *each of* is plural, but the verb is singular.

***Every one of the children** was crying.*

***Each of us** sees the world differently.*

The pronoun that refers to the phrase with *each* or *every* can be singular (formal) or plural (informal).

***Each girl** wore what **she** liked best.*

***Every person** made **their** own travel arrangement.*



- Should the nouns following *either*, *neither*, *either of* and *neither of* be plural?

Either and *neither* are followed by singular nouns.

'Can you come on Monday or Tuesday?' 'I'm afraid **neither day is** possible.'

Come on Tuesday or Thursday. **Either day is** ok.

Either of and *neither of* are followed by plural nouns, but the verbs should be singular.

*I don't like **either of them**.*

***Neither of my sisters is** married.*

- Are *someone/somebody*, *anyone/anybody*, *something*, *anything*, *everything*, *nothing*, *everyone/everybody*, *nobody*, *no one* plural or singular?

These indefinite pronouns are singular in meaning and their verbs are also singular.

Everybody likes her.

There's somebody outside who **wants** to talk to you.

Everything I like **is** either illegal, immoral or fattening.

They, *them* and *their* are often used to refer back to these indefinite pronouns, but this usage is informal.

*If **anybody** wants a ticket for the concert, **they** can get it from my office.*

***Someone** left **their** umbrella on the bus.*

***Nobody** phoned, did **they**?*

Third person singular pronouns, e.g. *he*, *she* or *him*, are sometimes used to refer to the indefinite pronouns in formal English.

***Somebody** shouted and others voices joined **him**.*

*Has **everybody** got **his** or **her** ticket?*

References:

Swan, M. (1995). *Practical English Usage* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

University of Birmingham & Collins Cobuild. (1990). *Collins Cobuild English Grammar*. London: HarperCollins Publishers.