

Collective nouns.

A collective noun is a noun that refers to a 'group' of people, animals or things. A few examples are family, class and team. The confusing part is that we have a choice when using collective nouns, we have the choice to treat them as singular or plural, which means a collective noun can use a singular or plural verb. Like, I can say 'The team plays on Monday' or I can say 'The team play on Monday'. If you want to understand how we use both and what the difference is, I'm going to do that now. But if you want the easiest option, to be sure that you are always understood correctly, just use the singular verb with collective nouns because it's also the most common.

Collective nouns as singular.

Use a singular verb, meaning conjugated for he, she and it, when you are thinking of the collective noun as a group or unit. That means you are not focusing on the individual components or specific members in the group, rather you are putting the emphasis on the structure that classifies and organizes everything under one term.

Like, 'The team plays on Monday'. I am focusing on the team altogether, not the individual members of the team, and I'm basically referring to the team as 'it', so it's like saying, 'The team, it plays on Monday'. It being the team.

'My family is not very political.' I am using the term 'family' to refer to a group, not as individuals in that group, and I'm treating the subject as 'it', like saying, 'My family, it's not very political'. It being my family.

'The class waits for the bell to ring.' I'm focusing on class as a group of students, instead of focusing on them as individuals in the group, and I'm referring to the subject as 'it', so it's like saying, 'The class, it waits for the bell to ring.' It being the class.

Collective nouns as plural.

Use a plural verb, meaning conjugated for we, you and they, when you want to refer more to the individuals in the collective noun and highlight them personally instead of the unit that collects them together. This puts the focus on all the components and pieces inside of a group, and is why we use a plural verb.

Like, 'The team play on Monday'. I am focusing on the individuals now, and not the unit, so it's like saying, 'The team, they play on Monday'. They being the players in the team.

'My family are not very political.' Now family is treated as plural because when I say family, I'm imagining all the specific family members, and it's a plural number of people. 'My family, they are not very political'. They being the individuals in my family.

'The class wait for the bell to ring'. Inside the class are individual students and they are waiting. That is how I understand the term class in this example. The class, they wait for the bell to ring.

In conclusion for collective nouns, both are correct. But the difference is if you think about the noun as one unit that collects things inside of it, which is singular, or if you are thinking about the noun by imagining the individual parts of it, which is plural. For that reason you'll probably use both, most people do, and it depends on how your brain is thinking about the collective noun in that moment.