



Lesson 19: Indefinite Pronouns

What you'll learn in this lesson is what gives grammar a bad name. You think you've learned the rule, then—bam!—along comes an exception. Stick with me. I think we can get through this together.

In the last lesson, you learned that the intervening phrases or clauses (most of them were prepositional phrases) do not affect the verb. You learned to cross out the phrases and look for the true subject so you could figure out if the verb should be singular or plural.

I'm here to tell you that some subjects are not like that. You can't tell by looking at them whether they are singular or plural. You have to take into account the words between the subject and the verb. Take heart. We're talking about only a few special words here.

Those words are *all, any, more, most, some, and none*. They get different treatment when they are the subjects of a sentence, at least when you are trying to figure out if the verb should be singular or plural. These words are called **indefinite pronouns**.

When an indefinite pronoun is the subject of a sentence, the verb will be determined by the intervening phrase or clause. This tactic is the opposite of what you learned in lesson 18. So, instead of crossing out the intervening prepositional phrases, pay attention to them when they follow indefinite pronouns, like this:

Some of the money **is** counterfeit. [*Money* is thought of as one unit.]

Some of the tickets **are** too expensive. [The tickets are thought of as separate units.]

Most of the country **is** experiencing a drought. [one part of a country]

Most of the countries **want** to sign the agreement. [a number of separate countries]

All of my food **tastes** a little off today. [*Food* is singular, thought of as one unit.]



All of my meals **taste** a little funny to me. [*Meals* is plural, something that can be counted.]

None of the exotic spice **is** too hot. [*Spice* is singular]

None of the hot foods **are** too hot for me. [*Foods* is plural.]

None of the emperor penguins **was** ill. [meaning *not one*]

None of the emperor penguins **were** ill. [meaning *not any*]

Some grammar books consider the word *none* **always to be singular**. You may want to adopt that strategy as well.

Exercise 19

Now that you know how tricky indefinite pronouns can be, circle the correct verb in the parentheses. Each correct answer is worth 10 points.

1. All of the emergency workers (agrees, agree) that trying to find the real accident victim on the zombie movie sound stage was almost impossible.
2. Some of the candy bars in my stash (has, have) mysteriously disappeared.
3. Most of the money (is, are) yours.
4. Some of the “unretouched” photos (appears, appear) to have been enhanced.
5. Because of the tornado, all of the students (was, were) crouched down in the halls.
6. None of those who ate Kaylee’s blue-ribbon pie (was, were) admitting it. [*None* in this case means *not one*.]
7. Most of the snowmen (is, are) melted.
8. All of life (is, are) not roses.
9. Only some of the trees (was, were) burned in the fire.

This free lesson download is taken from our eBook on grammar: *Let's Eat Fifi*.



10. All of the salt (clump, clumps) together in this humidity.



Answers

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