Lesson 4: “Percent”: When Should It be a Singular or Plural Verb?

Using good English grammar and proper punctuations can often make the difference between a paper being accepted or outright rejected. When reviewers/editors find papers with poor English writing, they get frustrated and tend to have a negative view of the article—thus, it tends to get rejected. This lesson is one of many to come on some common writing errors.

For some words it is difficult to know if a singular or plural verb is correct. **Percent:**

1. Percent takes a singular verb when “standing alone”
   Ex: I was told that 50% is not a good yield on my investment (percent has no reference to a singular or plural word)

2. Percent takes singular verb when a singular word follows “percent of” sentence structure.
   Ex: I was told that 50% of the yield on my investment is good (“yield” is singular; “percent of” plus singular noun)

3. Percent takes plural verb when a plural word follows “percent of” sentence structure.
   Ex: I was told that 50% of the stocks in my investment made money (“stocks” is plural: “percent of” plus plural noun).

For other words indicating “Portions”, as examples: fraction, part, majority, some, all, none, remainder, etc., the same rules apply. If the noun following “of” (called object of the preposition) is singular, use a singular verb; if the noun following “of” is plural, use a plural verb.

Ex: “Majority of the animals are fat”: “animals” is plural and thus the verb is plural (“are”)

Ex: “Majority of the money is in dollar bills”: “money” is singular and thus the verb is singular (“is”).

**Nouns that are always considered plural (despite referring to a single thing)—and thus a plural verb is used—are the following nouns:**

- Assets
- Credentials
- Dues
- Earnings
- Goods
- Odds
- Premises
- Proceeds
- Riches
- Savings
- Thanks
- Winnings

Thomas T. Yoshikawa, MD
AXIS Function/Core Leader for Research and Education
Editor in Chief, Journal of the American Geriatrics Society