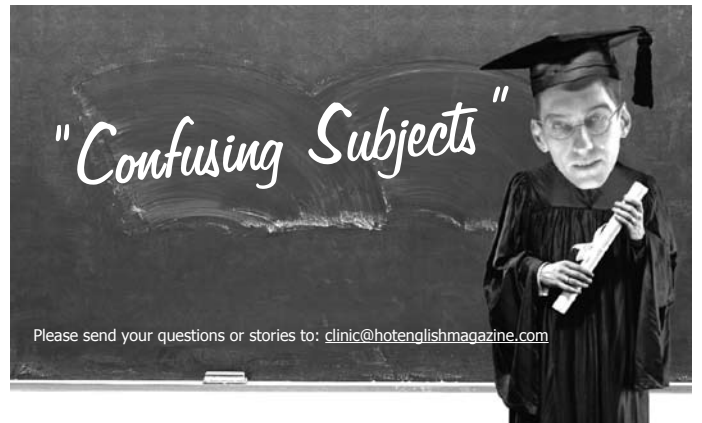


# Dr Fingers' Grammar Clinic



Please send your questions or stories to: [clinic@hotenglishmagazine.com](mailto:clinic@hotenglishmagazine.com)

CD track 12 - pompous BBC accent

EXERCISE

Dear Dr Fingers,

I have some language problems. Please help me because I don't understand this sentence:

*"One of the great benefits is the low production costs."*

It looks funny to me with the plural word "benefits" and the singular verb "is". Is it correct?

Please, please, please, please, please, please help me,  
Mr Bafoon (by e-mail)

Dear Mr Bafoon,

Thank you so much for your e-mail. Of course, I would be delighted to answer your question. OK, let's go.

## Grammar Rules

One of the fundamental rules of grammar is that the parts of a sentence should agree with each other. Basically, this means that the subject of a sentence must agree with the verb of a sentence. For example, "The boy is...", "The boys are..."

However, there are times when this gets complicated. A plural noun right in front of a singular verb can confuse you. So, in your example, you notice the plural word "benefits" next to the singular verb "is". However, the subject of this sentence is "one (benefit)" so it has to be singular. With "one of" we often use a singular verb, even when it's next to a plural noun. For example:

- a) One of my earrings has fallen off.
- b) One of the most interesting things about it is the parties.
- c) One of the boxes is open.
- d) Any one of the articles is available.

Now let's look at some more examples of confusing verb/subject agreement.

## Parts & Wholes

When you talk about parts or fractions of a single thing, you should use a singular form of a verb. For example:

- a) Half of our work is to design programmes. (The single thing is "work".)
- b) Two fifths of the forest was removed. (The single thing is "forest".)
- c) Three quarters of the boat is under water. (The single thing is "boat".)

However, when you talk about parts or fractions of a group of things, you use a plural form of the verb. For example:

- a) Two fifths of the houses have more than six people per room. (The plural thing is "houses".)
- b) A quarter of the students were seen individually. (The plural thing is "students".)

## Finding the subject

In some cases, it is very difficult to find the subject. Consider the following cases:

- a) Among the constitutional rights we cherish is freedom. (In this case, the subject is "freedom".)
- b) The annual rituals of the group are strange. ("Rituals" is the subject.)
- c) His jacket (not his shirt or his socks) always seems to match his trousers. ("Jacket" is the subject, the expression in brackets ( ) doesn't affect the verb.)
- d) The explanation provided by the agencies was pathetic. ("Explanation" is the subject.)

Well, I'm sorry but I'm going to have to stop there. There is a lot more to cover, and I think I'll have to continue with this topic next month. Anyway, I really hope my explanations have helped you. Yours, Dr Fingers.



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