



Video 9 – Real Vocabulary: is *data* singular or plural?

Hi there! Should I say the *data is*, or the *data are*?

This is a question that a lot of people wonder about. Let's have a look at these two sentences:

"The data *was* collected over a period of six months."

or

"The data *were* collected over a period of six months."

Now, both sentences are correct. The word *data* comes from Latin, and in Latin it's a plural form – the singular is *datum*. Because of this, some prescriptivists insist that *data* should be treated as a plural noun in English too. According to that view, "the data are" is correct and "the data is" is wrong. But – as we pointed out in our earlier question about *decimate* – English and Latin are different languages, and many words that originally come from Latin behave in a different way in English.

A good example is the word *agenda*: this comes from Latin, too, and in Latin it is a plural noun (it means "the things that need to be done"). But *agenda* is always singular in English, and it has a normal English plural form too – *agendas*.

The case of *data* is a little different: corpus evidence shows that "the data is..." is almost three times as frequent as "the data are...", but both uses are common and equally acceptable. If there is a difference, there is some evidence that using *data* with a plural verb is more frequent in technical or scientific writing.

But when it comes down to it, *the data is* and *the data are*, are both correct.

In my next video I will cover the question: what does the word *momentarily* mean?

Thanks for watching!