

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Subjects and verbs must agree in number, which means that a singular subject requires a singular verb whereas a plural subject requires a plural verb. Study the following examples which illustrate this principle:

I am here. (singular)	You are here. (sing/pl)	He is here. (singular)	We are here. (plural)
I do yoga. (singular)	You do yoga. (sing/pl)	She does yoga. (singular)	We do yoga. (plural)
I have pets. (singular)	You have pets. (sing/pl)	Joe has pets. (singular)	We have pets. (plural)
I play piano. (singular)	You play piano. (sing/pl)	One plays piano. (singular)	We play piano. (plural)
I was first. (singular)	You were first. (sing/pl)	It was first. (singular)	We were first. (plural)

**** Note: The third person singular form (he, she, Joe, one, it above) in the present tense is the only verb form that requires an "s" ending (The past tense "was" is an exception to this rule.)**

The following rules/suggestions should help you determine correct subject-verb agreement.

1. Connecting subjects with "and" usually makes them plural; therefore, to check for proper agreement you can substitute the pronouns "they" or "we" for plural subjects. (Exceptions include pairs of words that are considered to be one thing. Peanut butter and jelly is my favorite sandwich.) For example:

Mary and Jack are friends. The **car** and the **truck run** well. **He and I** are friends.
 (They are friends) (They run well.) (We are friends.)

2. Connecting subjects with "or" or "nor" can require either a singular verb or plural verb; use the subject closer to the verb to decide which form is correct. For example:

Neither she nor **I am** going Neither Jack nor **Mary is** going Joe or his **brothers are** on call.
 Either Jane, Maria, Anne, Cassandra, or **Ann has** the tickets. His dog or my **cats have** to go!

3. Prepositional phrases never contain the subject of the sentence. In most cases, you should ignore the prepositional phrase when trying to determine the correct verb form to use. For example:

One of the flowers **is** dying The **coach**, along with the players, **is** celebrating.
Neither of those boys **has** graduated. **Either** of those dresses **looks** fine.
Both of the books **were** on sale. Every **one** of the glasses **is** broken.

4. Singular indefinite pronouns require singular verbs. Examples of singular indefinite pronouns include the following: one, anyone, everyone, someone, nobody, anybody, everybody, somebody, nothing, anything, everything, something, each, either, neither.

Everyone is happy. **Each** of the sacks **was** full. **Nobody was** leaving. That **one costs** too much.

5. A few indefinite pronouns can be singular or plural, depending upon their use in the sentence. Often information in a prepositional phrase can help you decide whether the pronoun is singular or plural. These "two-way" pronouns are as follows: all, some, any, none, most, more, enough.

All of the pie **was** eaten. **Most** of the roof **is** finished. **None** of the snow **has** melted.
All of the pears **were** eaten. **Most** of the trees **are** dying. **None** of the boys **have** passed.

6. The words "here" and "there" are not used as subjects. When they start a sentence, you must look elsewhere for the subject. Also, you must be careful to find the correct subject when dealing with questions because the subject will often not be the first word of the question. Study the following (subjects are underlined):

There **go** my two best friends. Where **has** she gone? Here **is** your math book.
Why **are** you **doing** this? What **are** their names? There **seem** to be problems.

7. Some nouns that end in "s" are singular in meaning and require a singular verb. Other nouns that end in "s" are singular in meaning but require a plural verb. Consider these examples:

Mathematics is easy. **Measles is** a contagious disease. **Physics is** complicated.
The **scissors are** sharp. My **pants need** to be washed. Those **shorts are** torn.

8. Collective nouns such as "class" or "team" may be singular or plural depending upon how they are used: emphasis on the group takes a singular verb; emphasis on members acting individually requires a plural verb.

The **class was** dismissed. The **class are presenting** their reports this week.
(The whole group as one.) (The class members individually will give the reports.)

9. In an adjective clause, the verb agrees with the antecedent of the relative pronoun (who, which, that), which is usually the nearest noun. When "only one" is emphasized among a larger number, always use "one" as the singular antecedent. Consider the following examples (the antecedents are underlined):

I like a dog **that is** friendly. I like dogs **that are** friendly. One of the dogs **that are** sick is mine.
Only one of the girls who is coming is single. That is the **only one** of the dogs **that is** still sick.

10. Weights, measures, time, and money can be either singular or plural. If they are thought of as whole quantities, they are singular; if they are countable, separate units, then they are considered plural.

Fifty feet of hose **is** enough. (singular) Ten one-dollar bills **are** on the table. (plural)

1. Joe and Jim (have, has) been friends for a long time. They (is, are) neighbors and (play, plays) in a band.
2. Neither Jan nor I (were, was) able to attend the meeting. We (were, was) sorry we had to miss it.
3. Each of the barrels (is, are) full. Each one (need, needs) to be inspected. They (is, are) from Italy.
4. There (has, have) been two tornadoes near here this year. They (frighten, frightens) me.
5. The stories in this book (doesn't, don't) interest me, but my wife and son (enjoy, enjoys) them.
6. The nurse or the secretary (come, comes) in on Saturday. Much work (needs, need) to be done.
7. One of those sentences (don't, doesn't) make sense to me, but my classmates (weren't, wasn't) confused by it.
8. None of the tests (has, have) been graded, but all of the homework (has, have) been checked.
9. Anyone who (want, wants) to try out (need, needs) to make an appointment.
10. The doctor and her husband (take, takes) a trip to Mexico each year.
11. This class, together with math and biology, (keep, keeps) me extremely busy.
12. Here (come, comes) the meanest kids on the block. Why (do, does) they act so bad?
13. Every one of the shoes (seems, seem) to need a shine. Neither of us (was, were) ready to do it though.
14. Jason, Timothy, Sandra, or I (am, are) responsible for closing the store on the weekend.
15. Forty dollars (seem, seems) too high a price. There (has, have) to be better bargains somewhere in town.