

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Subject-verb agreement refers to the relationship between the form of a verb and its subject. A *simple subject* consists of one noun or pronoun (either singular or plural). A *compound subject* consists of two or more nouns or pronouns joined by a conjunction.

Simple Subjects

A verb agrees in form with its subject, even if the subject follows the verb. In sentences beginning with *there is* or *there are*, the word *there* is not a subject and has no effect on agreement:

At the end of the driveway were three new *Cadillacs*.
There **are** *exceptions* to every rule.
There **was** a *fire* on Kenyon Street.

A verb agrees with its subject, not its predicate or complement:

The *Indians* **are** an agricultural people.
It **is** the effects of inflation that concern us.

Some words appear to be plural but are singular in meaning and take a singular verb:

Physics **is** a difficult subject.
The *news* **was** disheartening.

Words that are plural in form but singular in effect (such as plural nouns used in names or titles) take a singular verb:

Badlands **is** playing at the Coronet.
The Seven Sinners **is** the name of our rock group.

Collective nouns (*audience*, *team*, *class*) take a singular verb when they refer to the group as a whole and a plural verb when the reference is to individual members of the group:

The *committee* **is** preparing its report.
The *committee* **have** signed their names to the report.

Modifiers (words, phrases, or appositives) that come between the subject and the verb have no effect on agreement:

The *list* of new subscribers **has** grown.
The first five *minutes* of the movie **were** the best.
Our *club*, the Pythons, **is** holding annual elections.

The pronouns *either*, *neither*, *anyone*, *everyone*, *no one*, *someone*, and *something* take singular verbs. A noun preceded by *each* or *every* is singular.

Everyone **has** a chance to win.
Neither of the prizes **was** awarded.
Every room **contains** a kitchen and private bath.

Compound Subjects

Compounds with *And*. Two singular nouns or pronouns connected by *and* take a plural verb:

Karen and Steve are an attractive couple.
Both the book and the movie were disappointing.

However, if the two nouns refer to the same thing or act as a unit, the verb is singular:

Bread and butter is my favorite snack.
My best friend and business partner is John Tragg.

Compounds with *each* and *every* take a singular verb:

Each and every student was asked to contribute.
Every leaf and rock was examined.

If a phrase beginning with *and* is separated from the rest of the sentence by punctuation (dashes or parentheses), it is not considered part of the subject and has no effect on agreement. Similarly, words other than *and* that suggest addition (*with, along with, including, as well as, like*) are not part of the subject and do not affect the form of the verb:

This study--and all prior research--is considered the property of the institute.
Ken, like his brother, is a research chemist.
My mother as well as my father wants me to attend graduate school.

Compounds with *Or, Nor, or But*. Two singular subjects connected by *or, nor, or but* take a singular verb; two plural subjects so connected take a plural verb. If one subject is singular and one is plural, the verb agrees with the nearer subject:

Neither the President nor the cabinet favors higher taxes.
Neither the President nor the cabinet members favor higher taxes.
Neither the cabinet members nor the President favors higher taxes.
Not the President but the cabinet members are responsible for the leak.

Name _____ Grade _____ Class _____

EXERCISE 1-18. Subject-Verb Agreement--Simple Subjects

Cross out the incorrect verb in each pair and write the correct verb in the blank.

Example: The birth rate over the past two years (has/~~have~~) declined by 4 per cent.

has

1. Pressure from all directions--family, friends, teachers--(burdens/burden) the new college student.

2. Mice (is/are) an irregular plural in English.

3. On the bottom of the document (was/were) the signatures of the entire cabinet.

4. There (has/have) been several reports of unidentified flying objects in the southwestern United States.

5. Statistics (is/are) an exact science.

6. The noise of cars and buses (makes/make) life difficult in the cities.

7. The Jeffersons (is/are) a close-knit family.

8. Neither of these dictionaries (contains/contain) the word *pukka*.

9. Oakland (has/have) won the pennant again this year.

10. As the old saying goes, politics (makes/make) strange bedfellows.

11. Automated assembly lines (was/were) the most important result of the Industrial Revolution.

12. On what day of registration (is/are) freshmen to report to their advisers?

13. The Cleveland Orchestra (arrives/arrive) tonight at City Center.

14. *The Grapes of Wrath* (tells/tell) the story of the Joad family's migration to California.

15. Every student in the class (favors/favor) a pass-fail grading system.

16. What type of animal (is/are) able to live both on land and in water?

17. Philadelphia's hockey team, the Flyers, (is/are) defending the Stanley Cup title.

18. One of the most common side effects of aspirin (is/are) stomach irritation.

19. Everyone we meet (wants/want) to talk about the election. _____
20. There (has/have) been many favorable reviews of Woody Allen's new movie.

EXERCISE 1-19. Subject-Verb Agreement--Compound Subjects

Cross out the incorrect verb in each pair and write the correct form in the blank.

Example: Neither management nor the unions (~~is~~/are) in favor of pay freezes.

are

1. The governor of Kansas, together with ten other state officials, (is/are) flying to Washington to meet with the President. _____
2. Every morning the foreman and his work unit (discusses/discuss) job-related problems. _____
3. Country and western (has/have) always been my favorite type of music. _____
4. Before penicillin was discovered, either quinine or sulfa drugs (was/were) used to stop infections. _____
5. The coach and general manager of the New York Knicks (is/are) Red Holzman. _____

6. Neither heredity nor environment totally (determines/determine) intelligence.

7. High winds and rain (is/are) expected this evening.

8. Blood, Sweat, & Tears (was/were) a popular rock group in the late 1960s.

9. Each and every person (has/have) a job to perform.

10. Neither the United States nor the other members of NATO (wants/want) additional military cutbacks in Europe.

11. The professor as well as her assistant (comes/come) to class late every morning.

12. Apple pie and ice cream (is/are) America's most popular dessert.

13. The elderly woman, along with ten other survivors, (was/were) rushed to the hospital.

14. Something is wrong with this recipe: either the cloves or the cinnamon (is/are) missing.

15. United Foods (reports/report) a ten percent decrease in earnings.

16. Under company regulations, either protective goggles or a plastic helmet (is/are) required in the machine shop.

17. Not Sheila but her two older sisters (attends/attend) Howard University.

18. Ken Rosewall and Rod Laver (is/are) the best doubles team in men's tennis.

19. The forests and topsoil in the Appalachian area (has/have) been destroyed by strip mining.

20. My history teacher and faculty adviser, Dr. Jeanne Kepler, (meets/meet) with me three times a month.

- 13. Neither they nor their descendants was prepared for the results of their sale. _____
- 14. These results is all too obvious from the air. _____
- 15. The once beautiful ridges of forests now bears many unsightly wounds. _____
- 16. There are now acres of yellow soil showing among the trees. _____
- 17. Even worse, one frequently sees a ridge completely barren of trees except on its crown. _____
- 18. The ecologists knows about damage other than loss of beauty. _____
- 19. The sulfur in the exposed rocks oxidize. _____
- 20. The rains, of course, washes the sulfur into a mild solution of sulfuric acid. _____
- 21. Pools of this solution collects and eventually drains into the water table. _____
- 22. Soil, as well as streams, is affected. _____
- 23. Once-rich bottom land now support only marsh plants. _____
- 24. Fish and other aquatic life is killed. _____
- 25. David Nevin's essay "These Murdered Mountains" tell the story of the pathetic results of strip mining in eastern Kentucky. _____

VERBS: S/V: Subject-Verb Agreement

A singular subject (one person, place, or thing) always takes a verb with an "s" ending in the present tense:

The bird sings.

The car runs.

The man is here.

The news is on the television.

A plural subject (more than one person, place, or thing) takes a verb with no "s" ending in the present tense:

The birds sing.

The cars run.

The men are here.

The machines do not work.

NOUN SUBJECTS:

Mathematics, physics, economics, politics, news, and textiles are always singular:

The news is on television at 5 p.m.

Textiles is an industry in need of import quotas.

Type, part, series, and portion are always singular:

A series of directions is given to each manager.

A large portion of the book was devoted to grammar.

Titles of books, plays, poems, etc. are always singular:

Romeo and Juliet is my favorite play.

Trousers and scissors are always plural:

The scissors need sharpening.

Compound subjects (subjects of more than one thing) are usually plural:

The girls and the boys are outside playing.

But some compound subjects are considered a unit and are therefore singular:

Cake and ice cream is my favorite dessert.

Amounts of money are singular when thought of as a unit, plural when thought of as several units:

Ten dollars is in my wallet.

If you need change, fifty dollars are in the office.

Words like jury, committee, senate (collective nouns) are usually singular, but may be plural when the individuals composing the group are in mind:

The jury is deliberating now.

The jury have reached an impasse.

PRONOUN SUBJECTS:

All personal pronouns take verbs with no "s" endings, except he, she, it (these take verbs with "s" endings):

I	do	have	walk	am	was
You	do	have	walk	are	were
We	do	have	walk	are	were
He, she	<u>does</u>	<u>has</u>	<u>walks</u>	<u>is</u>	<u>was</u>

Indefinite pronouns are singular subjects: each, every, everyone, nobody, either, neither, one, anyone, someone, somebody, none, etc.

Each student has a notebook.

Some, all, more, and most are considered singular when they describe an uncountable mass, but they are plural subjects when they describe countable units:

Most of the water is undrinkable.

Some of these papers are very good.

Correlative conjunctions: in neither . . . nor, either . . . or constructions, the verb agrees with the subject nearest the verb:

Neither Jack nor Jill climbs the hill. (Jill climbs).

Either the boy or the girls are dancing (the girls are).

Relative pronouns (who, which, that, whom, why) + verb. The verb agrees with the antecedent (noun or pronoun coming before the relative pronoun):

It is he who owns this building. (he . . . owns)

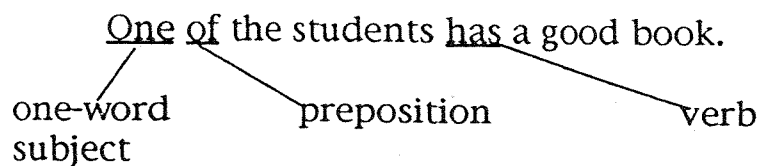
That is a question which baffles everyone. (question . . . baffles)

She is one of those employees who are rarely absent. (employees . . . are)

Steel is one of those industries that are hardest hit by high energy cost. (industries . . . are)

Locating the Subject:

The one-word subject, which determines the form of the verb, is never directly preceded by a preposition.



In this sentence, "the students" are not the subject, because "students" are preceded by the preposition "of".

