

## Agreement of Subject and Verb

Verbs can change form in tense, person, and number. The subject and verb of every clause (independent or dependent), however, must agree in person and number. Once you identify the subject and the verb, you can then determine such agreement of the subject and the verb.

There are three persons:

- First person- the speaker
- Second person-the person spoken to
- Third person- the person spoken about

There are two numbers:

- Singular- denoting one person or thing
- Plural- denoting more than one person or thing

Nouns ending in *s* are usually plural.

Verbs ending in *s* are singular.

Singular subjects should be paired with singular verbs and plural subjects should be paired with plural verbs.

- she walks
- the book is
- they want
- Bill, John, and Jane go

### 1. Compound Subjects

Compound subjects joined by *and* normally require a plural verb:

- Hard work and persistence are required in all rewarding accomplishments.
- Where are the pens and paper?

Subjects which include at least two nouns or pronouns connected by *and* should be paired with plural verbs.

- the manager and the employees are
- the cats and the dog run
- the man and the woman are

### 2. Subjects Joined by *Or* or *Nor*

When two or more subject are joined by *or* or *nor*, the verb should agree with the subject part closest to the verb. This also applies to *either/or* and *neither/nor*.

- the professor or her students write
- the students or their professor writes

the boy or the girl walks

### 3. Intervening Expressions

Modifying phrases or clauses that come between the subject and the verb do not change the number of the verb. The number of the verb is determined entirely by the number of the subject:

The assignment, which they submitted to their professor, was incomplete.  
[Assignment is the subject of the verb *was*.]

The new computer classroom, with its many work stations and its sophisticated technology, fills [not fill] a long-felt need. [*Computer classroom* is the subject of the verb *fills*; the phrase *with its many work stations...* has nothing to do with the verb.]

### 4. Verb Preceding the Subject

It is possible for a verb to come before a subject in a sentence. The rules of agreement between the subject and the verb remain the same despite the change in order.

There is in many cities a desire to reduce traffic and pollution. [*Desire* is the subject of the verb *is*.]

There are a stapler, two pens, four books, and a writing tablet on the desk.  
[*Stapler, pens, books* and *writing tablet* are the subjects of the verb *are*.]

Where are *Joan and her daughters* going? [Joan and her daughters are subjects of the verb *are going*.]

### 5. Indefinite Pronouns

The indefinite pronouns or adjectives *either*, *neither*, and *each*, as well as compounds such as *everybody*, *anybody*, *everyone*, and *anyone* are always singular. *None* may be singular or plural. The plural usage is more common.

Each of the cars has its insurance proof in the glove compartment.  
Everyone at the meeting was upset over the policies announced.  
Every employee, supervisor, and executive reveals the operation of a model company.  
Is either of you ready for lunch?  
None of the employees have brought their children to the company dinner.  
None of the students is interested in the research project.  
None--no, not one--is planning to attend the retreat.



## 6. Subjects Plural in Form

Singular verbs are usually used with nouns that are plural in form but singular in meaning.

The following nouns are usually singular in meaning: *news, economics, ethics, physics, mathematics, gallows, mumps, measles, shambles, whereabouts.*

a peanut butter and jelly sandwich is...  
physics is a difficult course...  
statistics is...  
politics is...  
athletics seems...

Nouns such as *gymnastics, tactics, trousers, scissors, athletics, tidings, acoustics, riches,* and *barracks* are usually treated as plural.

His tactics are sneaky.  
The scissors are on the table.  
The trousers are hanging in the closet.

Plural nouns denoting a mass, a quantity, or a number require a singular verb when the subject is regarded as a unit.

Five dollars is too much for her to pay.  
Fifty bushels was all the bin would hold.

Though usage is mixed, phrases involving addition, multiplication, subtraction, and division of numbers usually take the singular form.

Two plus two is four.  
Two times three is six.  
Twelve divided by six is two.

In expressions like *part of the apple, some of the pie, all of the money, the number of part, some,* and *all* is determined by the number of the noun in the prepositional phrase.

Some of the pie has been eaten.  
Some of the pies have been eaten.

## 7. The subject of some form of *To Be*

When one noun precedes and another follows some form of the verb *to be*, the first noun is the subject, and the verb agrees with it and not with the complement even if the complement is different in number.

The only food remaining is mashed potatoes.  
Mashed potatoes are the only food remaining.  
[In the first sentence, *food* is the subject; in the second, *mashed potatoes*.]

## 8. Relative Pronoun as Subject

When a relative pronoun (*who*, *which*, or *that*) is used as the subject of a clause, the number and person of the verb are determined by the antecedent of the pronoun, the word to which the pronoun refers.

This is the professor who is to be hired. [The antecedent of *who* is the singular noun *professor*; therefore, *who* is singular.]

These are the employees who are to be working tomorrow. [The antecedent of *who* is the plural noun *employees*.]

Should I, who am not a student at the school, be allowed to take the class? [*Who* refers to *I*; *I* is first person, singular number.]

She is one of those tough professors who are always expecting the best from students. [The antecedent of *who* is *professors*.]

If sentences such as the last one give you trouble, try beginning the sentence with the "of" phrase, and you will readily see that the antecedent of *who* is persons and not one.

Of those tough professors who are always expecting the best from students, she is one.

## 9. Collective Nouns

Some nouns are singular in form but plural in meaning. They are called collective nouns and include such words as *team*, *class*, *committee*, *crowd*, and *crew*. These nouns may take either a singular or plural verb; if you are thinking of the group as a unit, use a singular verb; if you are thinking of the individual members of the group, use a plural verb.

When referring to a group as a single unit, a singular verb is used.

The public is...

The family is...

The class is demanding...

When referring to a group's members as individuals, a plural verb is used.

The committee fight among themselves.

The student body are talking with each other.

The class are writing.

## 10. Nouns with Foreign Plurals

Some nouns retain the plural forms peculiar to the languages from which they have been borrowed: *alumni*, *media*, *crisis*. Still other nouns occur with either their original plural forms or plural forms typical of English: *aquaria* or *aquariums*, *criteria* or *criteria*. If you are in doubt as to the correct or preferred plural form of a noun, consult a good dictionary.

Note: Be careful not to use a plural form when you refer to a singular idea. For instance:

He is an alumnus [not *alumni*] of this school.

### Subject Verb Agreement Practice

Mark the appropriate verb choice for each of the following sentences.

1. The noisy students (have, has) to leave after two warnings.
2. She is the only one of the students who (have, has) failed the test.
3. The crying baby (irritate, irritates) them.
4. The longest of the presentations (is, are) the next group.
5. The students and their teacher (is, are) traveling to the competition.
6. Either one of the choices (is, are) going to disrupt the schedule.
7. This is the stereo system that (have, has) been purchased most often in our store.
8. Nobody (dare, dares) to challenge the teacher when she is wrong.
9. The players or their coach (is, are) holding a press conference.
10. Neither of the students (has, have) been to Europe.
11. The problems (was, were) due to a misunderstanding.
12. Which (is, are) more interesting, the red jackets or the blue sweaters?
13. (Has, Have) the manager or the assistant manager approached you?
14. Joan, as well as my sister, (is, are) in college now.
15. Several of the students (has, have) left.
16. Both of the children (has, have) red notebooks.
17. One of the best known love stories (is, are) *Romeo and Juliet*.
18. Mathematics (is, are) very difficult for many students to master.
19. She is one of the girls who (have, has) long hair.
20. She or her sisters (is, are) going.

### Subject Verb Agreement Practice

Mark the appropriate verb choice for each of the following sentences.

1. Each of the exercises (take, takes) about twenty minutes to complete.
2. The ladies and the child (is, are) planning to have pizza for lunch.
3. The teacher, along with her students, (is, are) determined to have a good year.
4. Please tell me when John and Mary (go, goes) to the store.
5. The class (watch, watches) a movie every Friday night.
6. The number of issues (seem, seems) to be increasing.
7. The husband and his wife (drive, drives) a convertible.
8. Hardly anyone (speak, speaks) to her.
9. He or his sister (want, wants) to visit Europe next summer.
10. She (take, takes) her dog for a walk each evening.
11. The brother and sister (want, wants) to visit their aunt and uncle.
12. The high school senior, along with his parents, (is, are) upset over the sudden policy change.
13. The songs they sing (stay, stays) in my mind all day.
14. Ten dollars (is, are) too much to charge for such a small item.
15. She and her mother (talk, talks) on the phone almost every day.
16. The blue ones (seem, seems) to match best.

17. Teenagers and their parents (see, sees) things very differently.
18. She, against her aunt's wishes, (have, has) decided to go skiing instead.
19. When the two of them (go, goes) together, they always have fun.
20. He and his girlfriend (love, loves) to go camping.

### **Subject Verb Agreement Practice**

Circle the correct form of the verb tense and indicate the rule that determines the correct answer.

- \_\_\_ 1. Formal trousers (is, are) required for this dinner party.
- \_\_\_ 2. Her friend and mentor (were, was) one of her college professors.
- \_\_\_ 3. Neither a dog nor a cat (offer, offers) the same companionship as another person.
- \_\_\_ 4. On the other side of the street (are, is) a restaurant and a clothing store.
- \_\_\_ 5. In the back seat of his car (was, were) three books and his briefcase.
- \_\_\_ 6. Three hours (are, is) not going to be enough time to travel that distance.
- \_\_\_ 7. The pressure of academic life can sometimes (tempt, tempts) students to cheat.
- \_\_\_ 8. Everyone in the group (was, were) supposed to meet at the front gate at 7:00.
- \_\_\_ 9. Each of these books (was, were) useful in my grammar review.
- \_\_\_ 10. The professor, along with many of his students, (is, are) preparing for the end of the semester.
- \_\_\_ 11. I don't think either of these cars (are, is) reliable enough for a long road trip.
- \_\_\_ 12. The criteria for passing the exam (are, is) becoming more difficult.
- \_\_\_ 13. (Are, Is) Lois or Kate your choice for the promotion?
- \_\_\_ 14. Algebra and geometry (is, are) the only math courses being offered this semester.
- \_\_\_ 15. Athletics (have, has) been a matter of increasing interest among women.
- \_\_\_ 16. Every one of the guests (have, has) had an opportunity to wish the couple well.
- \_\_\_ 17. The results of the latest standardized exams (indicate, indicates) an increase in standards at the school.
- \_\_\_ 18. According to the newspaper, there (were, was) three main suspects questioned.
- \_\_\_ 19. (Have, Has) the spring training programs begun yet?
- \_\_\_ 20. My favorite literature to read (are, is) modern American poetry.

### **Subject Verb Agreement Practice**

Circle the correct form of the verb tense and indicate the rule that determines the correct answer.

- \_\_\_ 1. I am certain that both Catherine and Lucy (is, are) coming to visit this weekend.
- \_\_\_ 2. The scissors (is, are) kept in the top desk drawer.
- \_\_\_ 3. Neither the twins nor their older brother (have, has) ever seen snow.
- \_\_\_ 4. Some of the fruit (have, has) already begun to ripen.
- \_\_\_ 5. The news reported by the president of the college (are, is) considered bad by most people.

- \_\_\_ 6. The media (are, is) planning elaborate coverage of the event.
- \_\_\_ 7. Neither of my neighbors (invite, invites) me over very often.
- \_\_\_ 8. My aunt, as well as all of my cousins, (have, has) been sick this past week.
- \_\_\_ 9. Over twelve gallons of gas (are, is) used each week because of our commute to work.
- \_\_\_ 10. How much (is, are) twenty times fourteen?
- \_\_\_ 11. He is one of the professors who (attract, attracts) a large number of students.
- \_\_\_ 12. The major concern, which is why we changed our plans, (are, is) the children.
- \_\_\_ 13. Most of the school corridors, which are extremely old, (are, is) in need of paint.
- \_\_\_ 14. When the rain begins to fall harder, every swimmer (are, is) told get out of the water.
- \_\_\_ 15. One hundred dollars (is, are) being offered for information about the crimes.
- \_\_\_ 16. Their high pressure sales tactics (is, are) resented by many people.
- \_\_\_ 17. The phenomenon that surprised many people (were, was) explained by the leading scientist in the field.
- \_\_\_ 18. None of the Southern states (have, has) ever experienced much snow.
- \_\_\_ 19. There (are, is) very strict criteria for passing the exam.
- \_\_\_ 20. The commercial states that every product they sell (are, is) superior to their main competitor's products.

### Subject Verb Agreement Practice

Select the sentence that has an error in subject verb agreement.

1. A. Both Christine and Heather have published their stories in major journals.  
 B. Neither student has the assignment completed.  
 C. The problems take them all evening to complete.  
 D. He is one of the students who has taken the exam.
2. A. He and his girlfriend talk on the phone constantly.  
 B. Neither she nor her mother wants to go to the dinner.  
 C. The professor or one of her research assistants is at every meeting.  
 D. The longest of the meetings are the first one of the semester.
3. A. The young couple has a new home in a beautiful neighborhood.  
 B. Either the professor or his students have prepared the grant submission.  
 C. Has an instructor or one of the lab assistants come to help you?  
 D. Neither the students nor their professor are going to the meeting.
4. A. The jury are taking their seats in the courtroom now.  
 B. The number of students are increasing.  
 C. Each of her daughters has developed a unique style.  
 D. Neither Suzi nor her sister has been able to find the missing earring.
5. A. There seem to be a growing interest in that class.  
 B. Either the students or their parents have spoken to the board.

- C. When all of the tests are finished, the scientists will have more information.
  - D. Everyone except the lead suspect has given a statement to the police.
6. A. Two books, a pen, a steno tablet, and some candy was found in the briefcase.  
B. Someone in the class or Sara critiques each presentation.  
C. The child's demands irritate the parents.  
D. Each of the students wears a white shirt with blue pants.
7. A. Each of the applicants completes an entrance exam, which requires an essay.  
B. Every member of the chorus was complemented on the production.  
C. The children, the mother, and the father were there supporting the team.  
D. There has been problems with the outdated policy.
8. A. The time the classes are offered have made it difficult for many students.  
B. The worker's tasks have not been neglected.  
C. Dr. Jones, as well as Ms. Griffin, attends the conference every year.  
D. One of the members has not returned from the recess.
9. A. The new system of taking messages have helped our response time tremendously.  
B. Neither one of the children has agreed to come to the meeting.  
C. The student, as well as her parents, was pleased with the grade report.  
D. Either the student or his parents have collected his books.
10. A. Neither John nor his sisters has completed an information form.  
B. A book, a pen, and paper were on the desk.  
C. Either the student or one of the panel members respond to each question.  
D. The committee debate the issues among themselves after each open session.