

UTS:HELPS

HIGHER EDUCATION LANGUAGE AND PRESENTATION SUPPORT

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Does my verb need –s or not?

You are writing a paper and have written:

Accounting standards developed by the AASB, IASB, and FASB _____ not always agree.

What do you write – *do* or *does*?

How about these?

Any of these sentences _____ confusing. (is/are)

Every boy, girl, man and woman _____ important. (is/are)

Salt and pepper _____ always on the table. (is/are)

Rice and curry _____ my favourite dish. (is/are)

The instructions _____ that 300 grams of salt _____ to be added. (say/says; is/are)

Physics _____ the science of matter and energy. (is/are)

Two fish or a cat _____ what I want for a pet. (is/are)

**Her family _____ very hospitable. (is/are)*

**None of the universities _____ going to open a campus in Antarctica. (is/are)*

If any of these ~~is~~ are confusing, then this guide is for you.

Subjects and verbs in (formal) English

The basic rule in English is that your verb is always determined by the subject of your sentence.

My **class** is interesting. And My **classes** are interesting.

These are the basic guidelines for determining whether your verb should have –s at the end:

1. The subject and verb might have many words between them. The subject still controls the verb:

This **university**, which is made up of many students, teachers, and others, **is** large.

The **colours** of a gas spectrum **tell** its chemical composition.

The effect which these reactions caused during the last three weeks **is** insignificant.

2. Subjects with two or more parts joined by ‘and’ usually require a plural verb:

Krypton and neon are noble gasses.

Salt and pepper are always on the table.

BUT!!! If two subjects are thought of as a single thing, then use a singular verb:

Fish and chips is my favourite dish.

3. Subjects with two or more parts joined by *or*, *nor*, *neither. . . , nor. . . , either. . . or. . . , not only. . . , but also. . .* require the verb to agree with the final noun:

Salt or pepper is always on the table.

Real estate or securities are a suitable investment at this time.

Neither stocks nor real estate is a good investment at the moment.

4. In sentences that begin with *here* or *there*, the subject is after the verb, and determines the verb:

There **are four students** in my presentation group.

There **is a single main idea** in my first paragraph.

5. Certain groups of words look plural, but are singular. This is especially true for subjects and disciplines, and for illnesses:

Physics is the science of matter and energy.

Diabetes is a terrible disease.

Other words in these categories include *economics*, *electronics*, *mathematics*, and *measles*, *mumps*, and *shingles*.

6. When writing about measurements, the singular verb is usually used:

Four kilograms of kryptonite was deadly to Superman.

7. The indefinite pronouns *everybody*, *everyone*, *everything* take singular verbs:

Everything in chemistry is explainable in atomic terms.

8. However, plural determiners like *few*, *many*, *several*, *both*, *all*, *some* take plural verbs:

Many of my fellow students are ready for their presentations today.

Few things at university are more valuable than making good friends.

9. Collective nouns often take singular verbs:

My family is very supportive of my studies here.

However, they also may take plural verbs:

My family are very supportive of my studies here.

Which is correct? Often it depends on how you think of the group: *My family* as a single unit, or *My family* as several individuals. Other collective nouns like this include **team**, **class**, **cohort**, **government**, **crowd**, and **orchestra**.

10. *All of*, *any of*, *enough of*, *more of*, *most of*, *none of*, *some of*, *a quantity of*, and similar subjects can take a singular or plural noun. The best guide is to look at the object of the preposition *of*:

None of this material is suitable for industrial applications.

None of these materials are suitable for industrial applications.

11. Titles take singular verbs. This is for books, movies, songs, stories, and the like:

The Regulations of the Senate is a very important document.

The Annals of the Australian Historical Society is edited by Dr Proctor.

Adapted from:

Collins Cobuild English Grammar 1990, William Collins & Sons, London.

Style manual: for authors, editors and printers 2002, 6th edn, John Wiley & Sons Australia, Milton, Queensland.

Your Dictionary 2012, *20 rules of subject verb agreement*, LoveToKnow Corp, viewed 19 September 2012,
<<http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/sentences/20-Rules-of-subject-verb-agreement.html>>.

