

Subject-Verb Agreement



In the present tense form, subjects and verbs should agree in number (singular or plural) and in person (first, second, or third).



Explanation

- If the subject is singular then the verb must be singular too. Likewise, if one is plural then the other should be in plural form as well.
 - Ex.: The commentary *was*... not The commentary *were*...
- Often a singular verb in the present form ends with a “s” while the subject does not, such as the verbs *gives, takes, receives,, modifies,* etc.
 - Ex.: If an elephant knows how strong he is, he *takes* advantage of the situation.
- Also when there is a plural subject, the verb should be plural as well.
 - Ex.: As always, they *require* more funds.
The waterfall and mountain *are* glorious this time of year.



Other Verb Forms

- These rules are only used concerning third person verb forms. First and second person verb forms do not work this way. In these situations, it is best just to learn the different tenses as they follow no set rule.
 - **Ex.:** When the horse comes running by, you (singular) *need* to move out of the way.
 I *am* the first student to finish!



Words between Subject and Verb

- Make the verb agree with its subject, not with a word or words that come between. Mentally cross out the interrupting word/words, so you can identify the subject
 - e.g. All students in the class need to submit their reports by Monday (The subject is *students* and not *class*).



Singular Subjects in Plural Form

- Words such as athletics, economics, mathematics, physics, statistics, measles, and news are usually singular, despite their plural forms
 - e.g. Statistics is one of the most dreaded classes in the program.
- Exception: when those words describe separate items rather than a collective body of knowledge, they are considered plural (e.g. The statistics on the students' success rate is outstanding).



Word Order

- Make the verb agree with its subject even when the subject follows the verb
 - e.g. In the supply room under the boxes is the missing invoice. (The subject is *invoice*, not *boxes*.)
- Make the verb agree with its subject, not with a subject complement
 - e.g. A tent and a sleeping bag are the required equipment. (*Tent and bag* is the subject, not equipment.)
- Titles of works, company names, and gerund phrases are singular
 - e.g. *Lost Cities* describes the discoveries of many ancient civilizations.



Compound Subjects

- Treat most subjects joined with *and* as plural
 - e.g. Jason and his cousin work for the same company.
 - Exception: When the parts of the subject form a single unit or refer to the same person, treat the subject as singular (e.g. My friend and neighbor, Mr. Smith, is moving away soon).
- With subjects connected by *or* or *nor* (or by *either...or* / *neither... nor*), make the verb agree with the part of the subject nearer to the verb
 - (e.g. Neither the teacher nor the students were in class./ The students or the instructor is taking responsibility).



Collective Nouns

- Treat collective nouns such as *jury*, *committee*, *audience*, *couple* as singular unless the meaning is clearly plural
 - e.g. The committee meets once every three weeks.



Practice

- 1) The unique blend of herbs and spices (**brings** / bring) out the flavor of the food.
- 2) Under the file cabinets (**lies** / lie) the missing document.
- 3) The mayor of Minneapolis, along with those of other major cities, (**has** / have) asked the President for assistance.
- 4) One of our managers (**is** / are) preparing the budget.
- 5) The company, in addition to the employees, (**is** / are) hoping there will be no strike next week.
- 7) The students, including Matt, (hopes / **hope**) there will be a party soon.
- 8) The company (**is** / are) planning (**its** / their) annual Christmas party.
- 9) No one (**wants** / want) (**his or her** / their) GPA to go down.
- 10) The students, as well as the instructor, (keeps / **keep**) very busy.
- 11) The administrators, who wrote the books, (sticks / **stick**) to the rules.
- 12) The *Pirates of the Caribbean* (**is** / are) released next week.
- 13) A driver's license or two credit cards (is / **are**) required.
- 14) A number of the excuses (seems / **seem**) unacceptable.



Practice

- 1) Mathematics (**was** / were) never my favorite school subject.
- 2) Each of the plants (**has** / have) been sold.
- 3) Some of the rocks (is / **are**) slippery.
- 4) Neither of the teachers (**is** / are) interested in excuses.
- 5) Dr. Barker knew that Frank was the only one of his sons who (**was** / were) responsible enough to handle the family business.
- 6) The statistics (indicates / **indicate**) that crime is decreasing in the city.
- 7) Each tree, shrub, and vine (need / **needs**) to be trimmed.
- 8) Jill's natural ability and her desire to help others (has / **have**) led to a career in the ministry.
- 9) There (is / **are**) surprisingly few children in our neighborhood.
- 10) High levels of air pollution (causes / **cause**) damage to the respiratory system.
- 11) Neither the students nor their teacher (**wants** / want) to postpone the exam.
- 12) Everyone (**is** / are) hoping that (**he or she** / they) may leave school early on Friday.