

SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT

Subject	A word that represents the doer or agent of an action or set of actions in a sentence. It can be either a noun (e.g., book, cars, Maria, etc.) or a pronoun (e.g., they, she, etc). It can be either singular or plural.
Verb	The word(s) that represents the action of a sentence (e.g., is, went, will place, have taken, will have been observed, etc.).

In English grammar, the verb of a sentence must agree with the subject. Therefore, when the subject is singular, the verb is singular and when the subject is plural, the verb is plural. We say that the form of the verb (i.e., its ending) shows this **agreement** with the subject.

How to make the subject and verb agree:

1. Identify the subject (which should be either a noun or a pronoun).
2. Determine if the subject is singular or plural. A single subject means that there is one person or object. A plural subject means that there is more than one person or object.
3. Next, determine the form of the verb that matches the subject (singular or plural). Think about which verb you would use with 'he', 'she' or 'it' (this is the singular form) and which verb you would use with 'they' (this is the plural form) NOTE: putting an "s" at the end of a verb does not make it plural.

Guidelines For Making Subjects and Verbs in a Sentence Agree:

Guideline	Example
1. When the subject of a sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by 'and', use a plural verb.	She and her friends are at the conference.
2. When two or more singular nouns or pronouns are connected by 'or' or 'nor', use a singular verb.	The book or the pen is in the drawer.
3. When a <u>compound subject</u> contains both a singular and a plural noun or pronoun joined by 'or' or 'nor', the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is nearer the verb.	a. The student or his friends study every day. b. His friends or the student studies every day.
4. 'Doesn't' is a verb contraction of 'does not' and is used only with a singular subject. 'Don't' is a contraction of 'do not' and should be used only with a plural subject. The exception to this rule: With the first person ('I') and second person pronouns ('you') use the contraction 'don't'.	a. He doesn't like it. b. They don't like it. a. I don't like this exam schedule. b. You don't have any money left to buy that text book.

<p>5. If there is a phrase between the subject and the verb, the verb still agrees with the subject, not with a noun or pronoun in the phrase.</p>	<p>a. One of the boxes is open b. The people who listen to that music are few. c. The team captain, as well as his players, is anxious. d. The book, including all the chapters in the first section, is boring. e. The woman with all the dogs walks down my street.</p>
<p>6. The words 'each', 'each one', 'either', 'neither', 'everyone', 'everybody', 'anybody', 'anyone', 'nobody', 'somebody', 'someone', and 'no one' are singular and require a singular verb.</p>	<p>a. Each of these hot dogs is juicy. b. Everybody knows Mr. Jones. c. Either is correct.</p>
<p>7. Nouns such as 'civics', 'mathematics', 'dollars', 'measles', and 'news' require singular verbs.</p> <p>Note: the word 'dollars' is a special case. When talking about an amount of money, it requires a singular verb, but when referring to the dollars themselves, a plural verb is required.</p>	<p>a. The news of the bridge collapse is on the front page of the newspaper. b. Mathematics is my favourite subject. c. A million dollars is needed to renovate that building. d. Civics is a subject that deals with the rights and responsibilities of a citizen. e. Measles usually occurs in childhood.</p> <p>a. Five dollars is a lot of money. b. Dollars are often used instead of rubles in Russia</p>
<p>8. Nouns such as scissors, tweezers, trousers, and shears require plural verbs. (There are two parts to these things.)</p>	<p>a. These scissors are dull. b. Those trousers are made of wool. c. The shears used for trimming the rose bush need sharpening.</p>
<p>9. In sentences beginning with 'there is' or 'there are', the subject follows the verb. The verb agrees with the subject even if it is placed after the verb.</p>	<p>a. There are many questions. b. There is a question.</p>
<p>10. Collective nouns are words that imply more than one person but that are considered singular and take a singular verb. These words include: group, team, committee, class, and family.</p> <p>In some cases, a sentence may call for the use of a plural verb when using a collective noun.</p>	<p>a. The team runs during practice. b. The committee decides how to proceed. c. The family has a long history. d. The class was unruly today.</p> <p>e.g. The team are preparing the lab notes. (This sentence is referring to the individual efforts of each team member.)</p>
<p>11. Expressions such as 'with', 'together', 'with', 'including', 'accompanied by', 'in</p>	<p>a. The President, accompanied by his wife, is traveling to India.</p>

<p>addition to', or 'as well' do not change the number of the subject. If the subject is singular, the verb is too.</p>	<p>b. All of the books, including yours, are in that box.</p>
<p>12. With words that indicate portions—percent, fraction, part, majority, some, all, none, remainder, etc.—look at the noun in your of phrase (object of the preposition) to determine whether to use a singular or plural verb.</p>	<p>a. Fifty percent of the liquid has evaporated. ('liquid' is the object of the preposition 'of'). b. Fifty percent of the substances have evaporated. ('substances' is the object of the preposition.) c. One-third of the liquid is red. (One-third of the experiments are finished.) d. All of the university is closed. e. Some of the universities have closed. f. None of the garbage was picked up. g. None of the sentences were punctuated correctly. h. Of all her answers, none were as good as the first one.</p>

Text adapted from **Purdue OWL** by Tom Robles, Writing Instructor, The Writing Centre, UTSC. Taken from: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/printable/599/>