

# Subject-Verb Agreement

In grammar, subject-verb agreement refers to the correspondence in form between a verb and its subject. Every verb in a clause or sentence must agree in *number* and *person* with its subject. That is, make a verb singular if its subject is singular; make a verb plural if its subject is plural. Also, make a verb agree in person (i.e., the doer of the action –first person, second person, third person) with its grammatical subject.

**The Basics:** Subjects in the first and second person take plural verbs, as does the third person plural. The third person singular takes a singular verb, as illustrated in the chart below.

<u>Person</u>	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
First	I eat.	We eat.
Second	You eat.	You eat.
Third	He/She/it eats.	They eat.
	The bird eats.	Birds eat.

To make a verb singular, add an -s or -es ending to your verb. To make a verb plural, leave off the -s or -es ending.

S V

**Example (singular subject):** The cat lives on Lake Street.

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**Example (plural subject):** The cats live on Lake Street.

**Exceptions:** Sometimes singular subjects may appear to be plural. Other words may look plural even though they are singular. Follow these rules for subject-verb agreement.

**Rule 1:** The following indefinite pronouns are singular and take singular verbs.

<b>anyone</b>	<b>everyone</b>	<b>someone</b>	<b>either</b>	<b>one</b>
<b>anybody</b>	<b>everybody</b>	<b>somebody</b>	<b>neither</b>	<b>no one</b>
<b>anything</b>	<b>everything</b>	<b>something</b>	<b>another</b>	<b>each</b>

Example: Everyone is anxious to meet the new boss.

**Rule 2:** The following pronouns are plural and take a plural verb.

<b>both</b>	<b>few</b>	<b>many</b>	<b>several</b>
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Example: Several were encouraged to continue the discussion.

**Rule 3:** The following pronouns may be either singular or plural depending on the prepositional phrase that follows.

<b>some</b>	<b>most</b>	<b>any</b>	<b>all</b>	<b>none</b>
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Example: Some of the cookie was eaten already. (some refers to *cookie* which is singular)  
Some of the windows have screens. (some refers to *windows* which is plural)

**Rule 4:** Don't be confused by prepositional phrases which come between the subject and verb. The subject of the sentence is never part of a prepositional phrase

S                      Prepositional Phrase                      V

Example: Any history of rock and roll festivals is sure to begin with the concert at Woodstock.

**Rule 5:** The following nouns can be either singular or plural. When they refer to a group of people or things as one unit, they take a singular verb. When they refer to the individuals within a group, they take a plural verb.

<b>audience</b>	<b>family</b>	<b>orchestra</b>	<b>band</b>	<b>team</b>
<b>class</b>	<b>group</b>	<b>crowd</b>	<b>jury</b>	

Example: The jury was reentering the courtroom. (**acting as one unit**)

The jury were discussing their opinions of the trial. (**acting as individuals within a group**)

**Rule 6:** The following nouns are singular, although they appear to be plural. As the subject of a sentence, they take a singular verb.

<b>civics</b>	<b>athletics</b>	<b>genetics</b>	<b>news</b>
<b>mumps</b>	<b>physics</b>	<b>politics</b>	<b>series</b>
<b>measles</b>	<b>United States</b>	<b>economics</b>	<b>mathematics</b>

Example: Mumps is a disease of the salivary glands.

**Rule 7:** The following nouns do not take singular forms. They are plural in meaning and always take a plural verb.

<b>trousers</b>	<b>pants</b>	<b>jeans</b>
<b>shears</b>	<b>scissors</b>	<b>pliers</b>

Example: The pliers are in the toolbox.

Note: If the word "**pair**" precedes the noun, use the singular verb.

Example: The pair of pliers is in the toolbox.

**Rule 8:** You probably already know that two singular words joined with "**and**" form a plural subject. But you should know that when two subjects are joined with "**or**," the verb agrees in number with subject that is closer to the verb.

Example: A magazine subscription **and** a book club membership make good gifts for the person who has everything.

Magazine subscriptions **or** a book club membership makes a good gift for the person who has everything.

**Strategy:** When you edit sentences for subject-verb agreement, use this 5-step test.

1. Find the subject by asking whom or what the sentence is about.
2. Determine whether the subject is singular or plural.
3. Locate the verb.
4. Determine whether the verb is singular or plural.
5. If the subject and verb are both singular or both plural, they agree. If they do not agree, make the needed adjustment.