



AGREEMENT

This resource discusses subject/verb agreement as well as pronoun/antecedent agreement.

The subjects in your sentences must match the verb in number. If your subject is singular (one person, place, or object), your verb must be singular also. Likewise, if you use a plural subject (more than one person, place, or object), this should be paired with a plural verb. One basic rule to follow in making subjects and verbs agree is to add an *s* to the present tense of a singular verb if the subject is *he*, *she*, or *it* or if the subject can be replaced by one of these personal pronouns.

Singular Subject and Verb

Dad never **drives** in snow.
He **is** ready to leave.

Plural Subject and Verb

My parents never **drive** in snow.
They **are** ready to leave.

- A phrase or clause that interrupts a subject and its verb does not affect subject-verb agreement.

The **teacher** most admired by the students *is* taking a sabbatical next year.
The **mice** that were being chased by our cat *were* clever enough to escape into a hole.
A **carton** of bananas from Florida *was* delivered.

- A compound subject joined by *and* is generally plural and must have a plural verb.

Three **women** *and one man* *were* elected to the committee.
Fruits and vegetables *provide* many essential vitamins.

- If both parts of a compound subject joined by *or* or *nor* are singular, use a singular verb.

My **brother** *or* my **sister** *is* likely to be at the concert.
Neither the **teacher** *nor* the **student** *wants* to cancel the tutorial.

- If both parts of a compound subject joined by *or* or *nor* are plural, use a plural verb.

Either the **bank tellers** *or* the **computers** *are* making the errors.
The **softball players** *or* the **soccer players** *have* the right to decorate the locker room.

- If one part of a compound subject is singular and the other plural, the verb agrees with the subject closest to it.

Bus 87 *or* several **taxis** *are* available after midnight.
Neither the **trucks** *nor* the **convertible** *is* ready to be sold.

- A subject that comes after its verb must still agree with it in number.

At the top of the street **are** two red **houses**.

There **is** the **sweater** I misplaced last winter!

- A collective noun takes a singular verb when the group it names acts as a single unit.

The basketball **team** **is** playing Friday night.
The **orchestra** **is** ranked number one in the state.
- A predicate nominative (a noun or a pronoun that is the same as the subject of the sentence) always follows a *linking verb* and must agree in number with the subject. (The predicate nominative tells something about the subject.)

Mr. Jackson **is** our **professor**.
As the story unfolded, **Dan and Molly** *became* **suspects**.
- A collective noun takes a plural verb when the group it names acts as separate individuals with different points of view.

The **faculty** *have debated* this issue for a year.
The **panel** *disagree* about the qualifications of the professor and **have told** the Dean that **they** are at an impasse.
- Nouns that are plural in form but singular in meaning agree with singular verbs.

World **economics** *affects* world peace.
The **news** **is** on in an hour.
- Indefinite pronouns such as *anybody*, *each*, and *everyone* are singular; the pronouns *both*, *few*, and *many* are plural.

Each student **has** her own book.
Everyone **needs** more time to finish the test.
- *All*, *any*, *more*, *most*, *none*, and *some* take a singular verb only if the antecedent (the noun or noun phrase to which the verb refers) is singular.

Some of the books **are** missing.
Some of the money **is** missing.
- When a compound subject is considered a single unit, use a singular verb.

Stars and Stripes **is** my grandfather's favorite song.
Franks and beans **is** on the menu tonight.

Note that when words such as *ethics* and *politics* refer to characteristics, not disciplines, plural verbs are required. Although words such as *pliers* and *scissors* are singular, they generally take plural verbs.

Pronoun - Antecedent Agreement

(An antecedent is the noun or noun phrase to which the pronoun refers.)

- A personal pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number, person, and gender.

Charles earned **his** blue ribbon in the final event.

(*Charles* is the antecedent; *his* is the pronoun; both are singular, third person, and male.)

If a **person** wants to succeed in business, **he or she** has to work hard.

The **teachers** want to ensure **they** have appropriate resources to teach the required curriculum.

- When two or more singular antecedents are joined by *or* or *nor*, use a singular personal pronoun.

Neither **Blake** nor **Robert** enjoys **his** work.

(Because *Blake* and *Robert* are separated with *nor*, they are singular antecedents; *his* is a singular pronoun.)

- When two or more singular antecedents are joined by *and*, use a plural personal pronoun.

Carol and Mary will star in **their** own show next season.

Traci and Maria will surely **know** the answer.

- Do not shift in person or gender within your sentence.

Incorrect: **Tulani** is studying **his** English, the language **you** speak in most parts of Ireland.

Correct: **Tulani** is studying **his** English, the language **he** will speak in most parts of Ireland.

- When the antecedent is a singular noun or indefinite pronoun, use a singular personal or reflexive pronoun.

A **person** is responsible for **his** or **her** choices.

One of the boys injured **his** ankle.

After **someone** retires, **he** or **she** usually finds hobbies to occupy the time.

Everyone needs a few moments to **herself**.

Reminders

- The following words are singular: *each, either, neither, one, no one, everyone, anyone, someone, anybody, somebody*.
- The following words are plural: *several, few, both, many*.
- The following words may be singular or plural, depending on the rest of the sentence: *some, any, none, all, most*.