

Subject-Verb Agreement

WHAT IS SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT?

Subject-verb agreement is the relation of the subject of a sentence to the verb in terms of its number, such that singular subjects go with singular verbs, and plural subjects go with plural verbs.

The computer *is* black. (singular)

The computers *are* pink. (plural)

Present Tense Verbs

- When the subject is in third-person singular, present tense verbs end in -s or -es. Third-person singular subjects include singular nouns and third-person singular pronouns (*he, she, it*).

She *has* the pictures from our reunion.

Eric *sings* many original songs.

- For other subjects, such as plural nouns, first-person pronouns (*I, we*), second-person pronouns (*you*), or third-person plural pronouns (*they*), present tense verbs do not end in -s or -es.

Teachers *recommend* setting aside plenty of time to study.

In the morning, I *always tell* my sister that we need to hurry.

Indefinite Pronouns

- Some indefinite pronouns can be considered singular and therefore take singular verbs. These pronouns include: *another, anyone, everyone, one, each, either, neither, anything, everything, something, nothing, nobody, and somebody*.

Everyone *is* urged to apply for this scholarship.

Each of us *feels* prepared to participate in the discussion.

Somebody *uses* this computer each day at noon.

- Some indefinite pronouns can be considered plural and therefore take plural verbs. These pronouns include: *some, all, any, more, most, none, both, few, many, others, and several*.

All of the children *are* attending the class trip.

Both of us *keep* our work space organized.

Many species *migrate* over long distances.

Compound Subjects

- When two subjects are joined by *and*, the resulting compound subject usually requires a plural verb.

The monitor and the tower *are* included in the package deal.

The décor and the music *go* nicely together.

- Here are two exceptions to this rule:

First, when the subjects (joined by *and*) form a single thing...

Peanut butter and jelly *is* my favorite sandwich.

Second, when *each* or *every* precedes a compound subject joined by *and*, the subject takes a singular verb.

Every table and computer *was* labeled before we moved.

- When compound subjects are joined by *or* or by *either...or* or *neither...nor*, the verb agrees with the subject to which it is nearest.

Either water bottles or a water fountain *is* always available for the thirsty campers.

Either a water fountain or water bottles *are* always available for the thirsty campers.

Collective Nouns

- Sometimes, collective nouns serve as subjects. When a collective noun refers to a group as a unit, it takes a singular verb; when it refers to the individuals or things that make up the group, it takes a plural verb.

The town's successful soccer team *is* considered to be a great asset to the town's image.

The soccer team *all have* their own special talents.

- Note that phrases starting with a portion of a unit such as *three-quarters*, *the majority*, or *ten cents* are treated as collective nouns. Likewise, when the amount represents a portion of a unit, it takes a singular verb. In the case of *dollars* as single units, use a plural verb form; when it describes an overall amount of money, it takes the singular.

The majority of the class *is* working diligently.

Three-quarters of his salary *is* used to pay bills.

Forty dollars *is* too much to pay for that game

Eight dollars *were* placed on the table.

Special Situations

- When words come between subjects and verbs, the verb should agree with the subject, not with a word in the phrase in between.

The games won by this pitcher *are* rare.

- When the phrase in the sentence (the words in between the subject and the verb) is introduced by *along with*, *as well as*, *in addition to*, *including*, and *together with*, the subject's number does not change.

Heavy snow *along with* freezing temperatures *causes* hazardous driving conditions.

- Sometimes singular subjects have plural forms. When this happens, the singular subject takes a singular verb, regardless of its plural form.

The news *comes* on at ten o'clock.
Mathematics *is* Andrea's best subject.

- When subject-verb order is reversed so that the verb comes before the subject, the subject and the verb must agree. Reverse the order to check the agreement.

There *are* currently ten students in the class.
Reverse: Ten students *are* currently in the class.

- Linking verbs should agree with their subject, not with the subject complement.

The problem *was* termites.

- Some collective nouns do not always follow the generally accepted procedure for verb agreement. Since *media* is the plural form of the noun *medium*, we would normally use a plural verb. (*However, some sources generally refer to the media as a unit and therefore argue that a singular verb should be used.)

The media *have* a reputation for making sensational statements.
The media *has* a reputation for making sensational statements.