

Writing Center

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## 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.

**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.

Point-of-View	Singular	Plural
First-Person	I talk.	We talk.
Second-Person	You talk.	You talk.
Third-Person	He/she/it talks.	They talk.
	The woman talks.	Women talk.

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

## Example (singular subject): The $\frac{S}{S}$ $\frac{V}{V}$ on East South Street. $\frac{S}{V}$

**Example (plural subject):** The <u>students live</u> on East South 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.

anyone everyone	someone	either	one	
anybody	everybody	somebody	neither	no one
anything	everything	something	another	each

**Example:** Everyone <u>is</u> anxious to start the new school year.

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

**Example:** Several <u>were encouraged</u> to continue the discussion.

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

some most any all none

**Example:** Some of the cookie <u>was eaten</u> already. (some refers to *cookie* which is singular) Some of the windows <u>have</u> screens. (some refers to *windows* which is plural)

**Rule 4:** Do not 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 <u>history of rock and roll festivals is</u> sure to begin with the concert at Woodstock.

**Rule 5:** The following collective 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. Most of the time, these nouns are singular.

audience	family	orchestra	band	team
class	group	crowd	jury	

**Example:** The team <u>was reentering</u> the arena. (acting as one unit) The team <u>were arguing</u> among themselves. (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.

civics	mumps	measles
athletics	physics	United States
genetics	politics	economics
news	series	mathematics

Example: Athletics is a popular department on Shaw University's campus.

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

trousers	pants	jeans
shears	scissors	pliers

**Example:** The pants <u>are</u> in the drawer.

Note: If the word **"pair"** precedes the noun, use the singular verb. **Example:** The pair of pants  $\underline{is}$  in the drawer.

**Rule 8:** Two singular words joined with "and" form a plural subject. When two subjects are joined with "or," the verb agrees in number with subject that is closer to the verb.

**Example:** A magazine <u>subscription</u> and a book club <u>membership make</u> good gifts. **Example:** Magazine <u>subscriptions</u> or a book club <u>membership makes</u> a good gift for a friendship.

**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.