



Making Subjects and Verbs Agree

Brought to you by the Purdue University Online Writing Lab.
Graphics for this handout were produced by Michelle Hansard.

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 fair.

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 compound subject 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.

The boy *or his friends* run every day.

His friends *or the boy* runs every day.

4. *Doesn't* is a contraction of *does not* and should be 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 appears in the case of the first person and second person pronouns *I* and *you*. With these pronouns, the contraction *don't* should be used.

He *doesn't* like it.

They *don't* like it.

5. Do not be misled by a phrase that comes between the subject and the verb. The verb agrees with the subject,

not with a noun or pronoun in the phrase.

One of the boxes **is** open.

The people who listen to that music **are** few.

The team captain, as well as his players, **is** anxious.

The book, including all the chapters in the first section, **is** boring.

The woman with all the dogs **walks** down my street.

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.

Each of these hot dogs **is** juicy.

Everybody **knows** Mr. Jones.

Either **is** correct.

7. Nouns such as *civics*, *mathematics*, *dollars*, *measles*, and *news* require singular verbs.

The news **is** on at six.

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.

Five dollars **is** a lot of money.

Dollars **are** often used instead of rubles in Russia.

8. Nouns such as *scissors*, *tweezers*, *trousers*, and *shears* require plural verbs. (There are two parts to these things.)

These scissors **are** dull.

Those trousers **are** made of wool.

9. In sentences beginning with *there is* or *there are*, the subject follows the verb. Since *there* is not the subject, the verb agrees with what follows.

There **are** many questions.

There **is** a question.

10. Collective nouns are words that imply more than one person but that are considered singular and take a singular verb, such as: *group, team, committee, class, and family*.

In very few cases, the plural verb is used if the individuals in the group are thought of and specifically referred to.

The team **runs** during practice.

The committee **decides** how to proceed.

The family **has** a long history.

My family **have** never been able to agree.

11. Expressions such as *with, together with, including, accompanied by, in addition to, or as well* do not change the number of the subject. If the subject is singular, the verb is too.

The President, accompanied by his wife, **is** travelling to India.

All of the books, including yours, **are** in that box.

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