

Making Subjects and Verbs Agree

When writing a sentence, the subjects and verbs must agree; therefore, singular subjects require singular verbs and plural subjects require plural verbs. This handout provides tips for recognizing when subjects and verbs agree in a sentence.

- 1.) Use a plural verb when the subject of a sentence is comprised of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by *and*.



The pen and the pencil are on the table.

- 2.) When two or more singular nouns or pronouns are connected by *or* or *nor*, use a singular verb.



Either Mary or Bill is working today.

- 3.) When a compound subject has both a singular and a plural noun or pronoun that is joined by *or* or *nor*, the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is closest to the verb.



The cat or the dogs jump on the kitchen counter.



The dogs or the cat jumps on the kitchen counter.

- 4.) *Does not* and its contraction form *doesn't* should only be used with a singular subject. *Don't*, a contraction of *do not*, should only be used with a plural subject; however, when using the first and second person pronouns *I* and *you*, *don't* should be used.



She doesn't know where the dog went.



They don't know where the dog went.

- 5.) The verb will always agree with the subject, even if a phrase separates the subject and the verb.


One of the cats is outside.


The people in the store are pretty angry.


The manager, as well as her staff, is nice.


The paragraph, including the final sentences, is compelling.


The woman with all the grocery bags lives in my neighborhood.

- 6.) Indefinite pronouns such as *each*, *either*, *neither*, *everyone*, *everybody*, *anybody*, *anyone*, *nobody*, *somebody*, *someone*, and *no one* are singular and require a singular verb.


Everyone needs a friend.


No one has a book yet.


Neither dog is inside the house.

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


The news is on at eight.

Note: When talking about an amount of money, dollars requires a singular verb; however, when referring to dollars generically, use a plural verb.


Twenty dollars buys a pizza.


Dollars are worth more in some countries than others.

- 8.) Plural verbs are required for nouns such as *scissors*, *tweezers*, *trousers*, and *shears*.


The scissors are sharp.


The tweezers are in the drawer.

- 9.) The subject will follow the verb in a sentence beginning with *there is* or *there are*, and the verb will agree with the subject that follows it.


There are many pencils on the desk.


There is a pencil on the desk.

- 10.) Collective nouns such as *family*, *group*, *team*, and *committee*, as well as collective nouns that do not describe people such as *ice cream*, *forest*, and *money* are considered singular nouns. Therefore, these nouns require a singular verb.


All of the money is on the table.


The team wins every game.


The committee meets on Fridays.

- 11.) Expressions such as *with*, *together with*, *including*, *in addition*, or *as well* do not change a subject from singular to plural. If the subject is singular, it will require a singular verb.


The little girl, together with her dog, sells homemade lemonade for five cents.


The book, including the appendix, is over four hundred pages long.