

## SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

In English sentences, subjects and verbs must agree in number (singular or plural). Being able to find the subject of the sentence will help you identify and correct subject-verb agreement errors.

Typically, first person singular and plural (I, we) and second person singular and plural (you) take plural verbs: **I go** to the gym. **We study** at the library. **You write** very well.

Third person singular subject takes a singular verb and a plural subject takes a plural verb:

Third person singular and singular verb		Third person plural and plural verb	
He	<b>He runs</b> to his school.	They	<b>They run</b> to school.
Maryam	<b>Maryam eats</b> apples.	Maryam and Omar	<b>Maryam and Omar eat</b> apples.
The bus	The <b>bus is</b> new.	The buses	The <b>buses are</b> new.

### SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT RULES

Below are the most common subject-verb agreement errors we see at the Writing Center. For each, we state the rule with an example, with the subject and verbs in **bold**, and an explanation.

1. Even if phrases and words come between a subject and a verb, they still need to agree in number.

Ex: The **students** who are working together on the project **meet** in the library.

In this example, “who are working together on the project” is a phrase describing the plural subject, “students,” and the plural verb “meet” agrees with “students.”

2. All questions and any sentences beginning with “here” or “there” place the subject after the verb, and the verb must still agree with its subject.

Ex: What **is** the Wi-Fi **password**?

Ex: Here **are** my new **shoes**.

In both examples, verbs agree with their subjects (“is” and “password”; “are” and “shoes”).

3. Collective nouns (group, team, crowd, jury, etc.) can take a singular or plural verb depending on its meaning in the sentence.

Ex: The **jury awards** custody to the father.

Ex: The **jury members argue** for a long time.

In the first example, the jury is acting as one unit, so the verb is singular. In the second example, the jury members are acting as multiple individuals, so the verb is plural.

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4. Plural subjects with a singular meaning (Mumps, measles, news, physics, etc.) take singular verbs.  
**Mumps is** a contagious disease.

Even though Mumps ends with an “s,” is considered singular, so it takes a singular verb.

5. Some plural nouns (glasses, scissors, trousers, pliers, etc.) take a singular verb when preceded by words such as pair, flock, and group.

The **pair** of scissors **is** on the table.

In this example, the subject is “pair” (singular), so the verb is singular. The noun in the prepositional phrase “of scissors” doesn’t determine the verb’s number.

6. Titles of singular entities (books, organizations, countries) are always singular.

Ex: **Netherlands is** a beautiful country.

Ex: **The United Nations operates** in many countries.

As with the examples above, Netherlands is a single country and the U.N. is a single organization, so they take singular verbs.

7. A noun clause (functioning as a noun) can act as the subject of a sentence, taking a singular verb. A noun clause usually begins with words like how, that, what, whether, whom, why, whichever, etc.

Ex: **What Alex has said at the party makes** no sense.

Ex: **Where the car was found still remains** a mystery.

In these examples, “What Alex has said at the party” and “Where the car was found” are noun clauses that take singular verbs.

8. Singular indefinite pronouns (each, neither, no one, nothing, anyone, somebody, everything, etc.) take a singular verb. Plural indefinite pronouns (several, few, both, many, etc.) take plural verbs.

Ex: **Each does** a good deal of work in office.

Ex: **Both do** a good deal of work in office.

**Exception:** The indefinite pronouns all, any, more, most, none, and some can be singular or plural, depending on whether the word they refer to is singular or plural.

Ex: **All** of the cupcake **batter gets** poured into a greased pan.

Ex: **All** of the **cupcakes are topped** with whipped cream frosting.

In these examples, “all” refers to “batter,” (singular) and to “cupcakes,” (plural).

9. With compound subjects joined by or/nor, the verb agrees with the subject nearest to it.

Ex: Neither the **director** nor the **actors are following** the lines closely.

Ex: Neither **the actors** nor the **director is following** the line closely.

In the first example, the plural verb “are” agrees with the nearest subject “actors,” and in the second, the singular verb “is” agrees with the nearest subject “director.”

10. Some Greek-origin nouns can be used as either singular or plural (media, data, etc.).

Ex: The patient **data are** sorted in Table 1.

Ex: The patient **data is** sorted in Table 1.