

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

RULES TO REMEMBER

1. A subject must agree with its verb in *number* and *person*.

The boy sings in the choir with his friends.

Number: “The boy” – the subject “boy” is singular

Person: “sings” – the verb must match the subject “boy.” Since boy is the person being spoken about (third person singular), the matching verb form requires the “s” marker to make it singular.

2. A singular verb in third person ends with the ‘s’ marker.

Present tense forms of the verb “to learn”:

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
I learn	We learn
You learn	You learn
He, She, It learns	They learn

Notice the pattern in the verb forms. All are spelled the same way **except** the third person singular form. The addition of the ‘s’ marker makes the third person form singular.

3. A plural verb does **NOT** end in an ‘s.’

Plural subject and matching plural verb form:

We plan	We dream	We learn
You plan	You dream	You learn
They plan	They dream	They learn

4. Do not be confused by intervening prepositional phrases which follow the subject; agreement is determined by the number of the subject.

The box of wafers belongs to Mary.

The house, including the furnishings, was badly damaged.

5. “And” between two subjects makes a *compound subject*; compound subjects require a plural verb. (Think “addition.”)

Tom and I are unhappy.

Dogs and cats have four legs.

EXCEPTION:

- ❖ If the multiple elements of a compound subject are considered as a single thing, the verb should be singular.

Being positive and working hard is my key to success.

6. Some words and phrases are typically considered singular. Take note of the following “singular” words and phrases:

“One” Words:	Anyone	Each (as in each one)	Either (as in either one)	Everyone
	Neither (as in neither one)		One	Someone

“Body” Words:	Anybody	Everybody	NOTE: These words take singular verbs.
	Nobody	Somebody	

One of the boys sings.

Neither car is here.

Nobody is home.

Similarly, some words, such as “both” and “some” take plural verbs.

Both of the men are sad.

Some of the children are happy.

7. When a complete subject has “either-or” or “neither-nor” in it, use the simple subject closest to the verb.

Either the boys or Nancy has to go.

Neither Nancy nor the boys have to go.

IDENTIFYING THE SUBJECT

1. To study a sentence, first find the verb, and then ask “who?” or “what?” The answer to that question is the subject.

Waythorn waited for his wife.

Who waited? Waythorn; he is the subject.

2. The subject will not immediately follow a preposition (ex: across, of, with, in, on, to, etc.).

One of the apples is ripe.

The pictures across the room were beautiful.

The girls with the hats on hurried past.

In the bottom desk drawer under the writing pad, you will find my keys.

3. Even though they don’t show any action, *is*, *are*, *was*, and *were* are forms of the verb “to be.”

The hills were long and white.

What was? The hills; they are the subject.

4. If a sentence gives a command, the subject is “you” (understood).

Find the verb first.

Who finds? You (understood); you is the subject.

5. In a sentence which begins with the word “there” and also in questions, the subject may come after the verb.

There goes Bill.

There is the man who stole the car.

Where is Bill?

Where is the man who stole the car?

IDENTIFYING THE VERB

1. The verb tells what the subject does or is.

Sheila walks to school everyday. The rhythm of the waves is calming.

2. Sometimes the verb contains more than one word.

I should have gone to the store.

3. There may be more than one subject or more than one verb in a sentence.

Kimberly tripped on the step and stumbled into the room.

4. “Not” is not a verb, and “never” is never a verb; both words are adverbs.

I never jog alone.

5. An *-ing* word without a helping verb is not a verb; it is a gerund, which is used as a noun and can be the subject of the sentence.

Jogging is her favorite form of exercise. She is jogging on the beach.

6. An infinitive (*to go, to see, to be*) is never a verb. It can be a subject because it can be used as a noun.

To err is human. To know her is a pleasure.

7. The verb is never found in a prepositional phrase.

With great determination, Brian accomplished his goal.

PRACTICE ONE: For each of the following, circle the correct form of the verb to complete the sentence.

1. My counselor and my English instructor (has , have) agreed to write recommendations for me.
2. Businesses around the country (continue , continues) to experiment with telecommuting as an option for their employees.
3. The questions on this test (seem , seems) unfair to me.
4. Each of us (study , studies) hard, but I think that I work the hardest.
5. This blizzard (has , have) to be the worst that I can remember.
6. I (am , is , are) pretty sure school will be canceled tomorrow, too.
7. Gender discrimination in hiring practices (is , are) often hard to prove.
8. Neither of those mattresses (feel , feels) comfortable.
9. Here (is , are) the first two pages of the essay that you promised to look over for me.
10. Sunflower seeds and peanuts (is , are) the main ingredients in this bird-food mix.
11. The jokes in that movie (is , are) not at all funny.
12. Collaboration and feedback (happen , happens) electronically through employee e-mail accounts and networking technology.
13. The cat and the dog (sleep , sleeps) curled up together.

14. Gwen Stefani, who is the lead singer of the band No Doubt, (wear , wears) a stick-on *bindi*.
15. Schools (is , are) closed everywhere because of the snow in the roads.
16. My family (has , have) a lot of shoveling to do.
17. Either Monday or Friday (seem , seems) like a good day for the meeting.
18. Everybody at my new school (is , are) friendly.
19. (Has , Have) you helped other students with their papers before?
20. A colorful assortment of toys (attract , attracts) shoppers to the store’s display window.
21. Ruby and her mother (bake , bakes) cakes and cookies for a local restaurant.
22. In your opinion, what (is , are) my paper’s biggest problems?
23. The ice cubes in the punchbowl (have , has) melted.
24. Traditionally, the red dot that Indian women wear on their foreheads (indicate , indicates) that they are married Hindus.
25. All my neighbors (is , are) outside shoveling or playing in the snow.

PRACTICE TWO: Find and correct any subject-verb agreement errors in the following paragraph. Note that some sentences may be correct.

¹The typical elementary-school teacher are a woman. ²More men are going into elementary teaching today, but the percentage of male teachers remain low. ³One of the reasons are financial. ⁴Men with college degrees often makes more money doing things other than teaching; ⁵however, the stereotypes about teaching is at least as important. ⁶Many young men in college never considers elementary teaching. ⁷They may assume that women are “just naturally better” at working with young children, ⁸but patience and kindness is qualities not found only in females. ⁹Men can be wonderful elementary teachers. ¹⁰Both the boys and girls in their classes grows up knowing that men can be both strong and caring. ¹¹Also, the boys in the class learns a lot about how to be a good father. ¹²The children and the community all wins when there are positive male role models in the classroom.

Practice exercises in this handout are taken from: Teaching Real Writing by Eddys S. Gallagher & Susan Anker pages 259-261, 263-265 and English Essentials by John Langan & Beth Johnson pages 50, 52, 54, 56, 238