Grammar: subject-verb agreement

Subjects and verbs MUST agree in NUMBER. **Singular subjects** use verbs with singular endings (e.g. the **dog** barks; the **teacher** says). **Plural subjects** use verbs with plural endings (e.g. the **dogs** bark; the **teachers** say). The verb usually follows immediately after the subject; however, extra care should be taken in the following cases:

1. subject and verb are **separated**
2. subject has two or more parts (**compound subject**)
3. subject comes **after the verb**
4. subject is connected by **'or', 'nor', 'either … or', 'neither … nor'** words
5. subject is a special type of **pronoun**
6. subject is a **collective noun** or **non-count noun**

GRAMMAR CHECKERS will TRY to help you with subject-verb agreement, BUT it is a hit-or-miss hint (i.e. makes mistakes or misses errors you make). You need to know all of the rules for subject-verb agreement and check your sentences as you write and when you proofread your work.

1. Subjects and verbs are separated

Sometimes, the subject of the sentence is **separated** from the verb by a word group. You need to find the verb and ask 'who' or 'what' is doing the action. The noun closest to the verb can sometimes look like the subject, but it's not.

Examples

- Heavy **snow**, together with high winds, >>>>>> **makes** skiing conditions dangerous.
  SINGLE SUBJECT — SINGLE VERB
- The **weather** in mountainous regions >>>>>> **is** treacherous during the winter.
  SINGLE SUBJECT — SINGLE VERB
- **Storms**, which occur during winter, >>>>>> **cause** deep snow drifts.
  PLURAL SUBJECT — PLURAL VERB

2. Subject has two or more parts (compound subject)

If the subject is joined by 'and', use a plural verb.

Examples

- Silver, gold **and** other metals >>>>>> **are mined** in Western Australia.
  PLURAL SUBJECT — PLURAL VERB
- The miner **and** the union official >>>>>> **agree** on pay conditions.
  PLURAL SUBJECT — PLURAL VERB

3. Subject comes after the verb

The same rules apply when the subject **follows** the verb, especially when the sentence starts with 'there' or 'here'.

Examples

- There **is** >>>>>> a **campsite** in the national park.
  SINGLE VERB — SINGLE SUBJECT
- Here **are** >>>>>> the national park camping **facilities**.
  PLURAL VERB — PLURAL SUBJECT

4. Subject connected by 'or' 'nor' 'n/either words'

4.1 If singular subjects are joined by 'or', 'nor', 'either…or', 'neither...nor', use a **singular verb**.

Example

- **Neither** the woman **nor** the child >>>>>> **is** out of danger.
  COMBINED SINGULAR SUBJECT — SINGULAR VERB

4.2 If plural subjects are joined by 'or', 'nor', 'either…or', 'neither...nor', use **a plural verb**.

Example

- **Neither** the women **nor** the children >>>>>> **are** out of danger.
  COMBINED PLURAL SUBJECT — PLURAL VERB

4.3 If one subject is singular and one is plural, the verb agrees with the **subject nearest to it**.

Examples

- **Neither** the women **nor** the child >>>>>> **is** out of danger.
  MIX OF PLURAL & SINGULAR SUBJECT — SINGULAR VERB
- **Neither** the woman **nor** the children >>>>>> **are** out of danger.
  MIX OF SINGULAR & PLURAL SUBJECT — PLURAL VERB

5. Subject is a special type of pronoun

5.1 When you use the pronouns 'each', 'either', 'neither', 'another', 'anyone', 'anybody', 'anything', 'someone', 'somebody', 'something', 'one', 'everyone', 'everybody', 'everything', 'no one', 'nobody', 'nothing', use a **singular verb.**

Example

- **Everyone** in the group >>>>>> **has** a job to do.
  SINGULAR SUBJECT — SINGULAR VERB

5.2 When you use the pronouns 'both', 'many', 'few', 'several', 'other', use a **plural verb**.

Example

- **Many** of the people in the group >>>>>> **work** consistently.
  PLURAL SUBJECT — PLURAL VERB

5.3 Words like 'none', 'any', 'all', 'more', 'most', 'some' use **singular or plural verbs**, depending on the context.

Example

- **All** of the cake **was** eaten by the children. (singular)
- **All** of the cakes **were** eaten by the children. (plural)

6. Subject is a collective or non-count noun

6.1 A **collective noun** is a word used to refer to a group of people/things (e.g., team, committee, family, crowd, audience, government). If the noun is considered as a single unit, use a **singular verb**.

Example

- The **government** of the day >>>>>> **was** responsible for regulating petrol prices.
  COLLECTIVE NOUN/SINGULAR SUBJECT — SINGULAR VERB

6.2 A **non-count noun** (e.g. statistics, furniture, sugar, water, news) uses a **singular verb**.

Example

- **Statistics**, for most students, >>>>>> **is** a difficult subject.
  NON-COUNT/SINGULAR SUBJECT — SINGULAR VERB