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. Subject and verb 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.
- The **weather** in mountainous regions >>>>>>> is treacherous during the winter.
- Storms that occur during winter >>>>>>>> cause deep snow drifts.

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.
- The miner **and** the union official >>>>>>> agree on pay conditions.

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.
- Here are >>>>>>> the national park camping **facilities**.
4. Subject is connected by 'or', 'nor', 'either . . . or', 'neither . . . nor' 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.

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.

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.
✓ Neither the woman nor the children are out of danger.

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.

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.

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

Examples
✓ 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 noun 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.

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.