

Subject and Verb Agreement

-Subject – In a sentence, the subject can be a person, place, thing, or idea. It can be a single word or a unit of words. It is what does the action of the sentence or what is being described by the sentence. The subject is the main concern of the sentence.

-Verb – In a sentence, the verb is generally thought of as the action, what the subject is doing. The form of the verb is always determined by the subject.

When the subject is singular, the verb must be singular.

A singular **subject** usually does not end in an “s,” but a singular verb often **ends** in “s.”

When the subject is plural, the verb must be plural.

Plural **subjects** often end in “s,” but plural verbs usually **end** *without* an “s.”

Examples:

The **student tries** to understand the concepts. (singular subject)

The **friends run** toward the lake. (plural subject)

NOTE: There are always exceptions to this “rule.”

-When there is more information about the subject between the subject and the verb, the verb agrees with the subject, not with a noun or pronoun in the extra information.

The **cats** on the floor **were** napping.

(The verb agrees with “cats” not “floor.”)

One of the cats **was** stretching.

(The verb agrees with “one” not “cats.”)

The **boss**, as well as his workers, **takes** a break every couple of hours.

(**Note:** This is a particularly common error, so watch out for it! Ask yourself who or what is the main concern of the sentence. Here you know the subject is the boss because of the “as well as” and “his” before workers.)

-When there are two subjects joined by “and,” use a plural verb.

The **cat and the dog are** playing.

The **man and the woman work** together.

-When there are two subjects joined by “or” or “nor,” the verb will agree with the subject closest to it.

The dog **or** the **cat is** the culprit. (both subjects singular)

The child **or** the **adults were** responsible for mess. (subjects mixed)

Neither the men **nor** the **women work** for that company. (both subjects plural)

-When using the indefinite pronouns, it is especially easy to make mistakes.

When you are using the singular indefinite pronouns (another, anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, little, much, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one, other, somebody, someone, something), the verb should be singular.

Nobody works harder than Julie.

When using the plural indefinite pronouns (both, few, many, others, several), the verb should be plural.

Both are good choices.

There are some indefinite pronouns that can be either singular or plural. When using these indefinite pronouns (all, any, more, most, none, some), you must see what the pronoun refers to in order to determine whether to use a singular or plural verb.

All of the people **want** the team to win.

(Use the plural “want” because “all” refers to the plural “people”)

All of my lunch **was** delicious.

(Use the singular “was” because “all” refers to the singular “lunch”)

- When there are **collective nouns** (nouns that name a class or group), the verb must be singular.
- The **class works** on a project.
 - The **team runs** during practice.
 - My **family needs** a bigger house.

Practice Exercises:

Select the appropriate verb.

1. The exercise (requires, require) stamina.
2. These geographic formations (was, were) carved millions of years ago.
3. Both of the students (realizes, realize) the importance of doing well this semester.
4. Some of the procedures (is, are) different from the previous year.
5. Everyone (does, do) the best he can.
6. The team (grinds, grind) its way to the one- yard line.
7. One of the suggestions (was, were) workable.
8. A system with multiple tool bars (is, are) a bonus to a sophisticated computer user.
9. Ice tea and lemonade (vitalizes, vitalize) a summer menu.
10. A short story or poems (is, are) easier options than a persuasive essay.

Answers: 1) requires 2) were 3) realize 4) are 5) does 6) grinds 7) was 8) is 9) vitalize 10) are