



Subject-Verb Agreement

Subjects and verbs must agree in number – singular subjects must have singular verbs and plural subjects must have plural verbs. Certain types of subjects, however, merit special attention:

- Compound subjects
 - Two or more subjects joined by “and” require a plural or base form of the verb
 - **Example:** John and Sally are best friends
 - A compound subject connected by “or” or “nor,” the closest subject to the verb must agree
 - **Example:** Neither John nor his children buy tickets
 - **Example:** Either John or his son usually buys the tickets
 - If two subjects are preceded by “each” and “every” and joined by “and” *or* if two or more singular nouns are connected by “or” or “nor,” use a singular verb form
 - **Example:** Each student and instructor bought one *or* Every male and female bought one
 - **Example:** Neither he nor she bought one *or* Either he or she bought one
- Collective nouns as subjects
 - Collective nouns represent a group of people – audience, group, jury, faculty, family team, committee – and take a singular verb when referred to as a single unit; when the members of the group are referred to, collective nouns take a plural verb
 - **Example:** The audience is seated
 - The writer refers to the audience as a group, hence the singular form
 - **Example:** The audience are beginning to seem restless
 - The writer refers to the audience members’ restlessness, hence the plural form
- Irregular noun forms – fractions, monetary values, defective nouns, or mass nouns
 - Fractions’ verb form depends on whether the noun they describe is singular or plural
 - **Example:** Two-fifths of the pizza was eaten (pizza is singular, so the verb is as well)
 - **Example:** Two-fifths of the items were eaten (items are plural, so the verb is as well)
 - Monetary values can take either a singular or plural verb. If referring to a specific amount of money, use a singular verb; if referring to the money itself, use a plural verb
 - **Example:** Twenty dollars is my share of the gas money
 - **Example:** Old dollars are easily torn, so be careful with them.
 - Defective nouns that end in “s” almost always take a plural verb: pants, trousers, tweezers, scissors, glasses, or tongs. However, defective nouns preceded by “pair of” take a singular verb:
 - **Example:** My grey trousers need cleaning (defective noun, plural verb)
 - **Example:** My pair of grey trousers needs cleaning (pair is the singular subject – trousers is the object of the preposition “of” – hence the singular verb)
 - Mass nouns always take a singular verb form: civics, mathematics, measles, news, robotics.
 - **Example:** Civics should be taught to high school seniors
- Indefinite pronouns as subjects
 - Singular indefinite pronouns take a singular verb: anyone, anybody, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, one, no one, nobody, nothing, someone, somebody, something
 - Plural indefinite pronouns take a plural verb: both, few, many, several
 - Some indefinite pronouns – all, any, most, none, some – may be either singular or plural
 - **Example:** Some of the money is here (money is not a count noun, hence the singular verb)
 - **Example:** Some of the dimes are missing (dimes is a plural noun, hence the plural verb)