

## SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

**Agreement is a basic rule of grammar. Subjects and verbs must agree in person and number. The rules below will help you avoid subject-verb agreement errors.**

1. In the present tense, third person, use verbs ending in –s with singular subjects.

	<u>singular</u>	<u>plural</u>
1 <sup>st</sup> person	I walk	we walk
2 <sup>nd</sup> person	you walk	you walk
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	he/she/it walks	they walk

I require attention. (1<sup>st</sup> person, singular, no –s is needed.)

A dog requires attention. (3<sup>rd</sup> person singular, an –s is needed.)

Dogs require attention. (–s indicates a plural subject, but the verb does not need an –s.)

2. The verb must agree with its simple subject even though modifying phrases or clauses come between the simple subject and its verb.

WRONG: The recommendation of two policemen, a judge, and three lawyers were accepted.

CORRECT: The recommendation of two policemen, a judge, and three lawyers was accepted.

3. Words such as “including,” “together with,” and “as well as” introduce modifying elements that are generally set off by commas. Since these elements are not part of the subject, they do not influence the choice of singular or plural verbs—ignore them!

WRONG: The delinquent, as well as his mom and dad, were in the detention hall.

CORRECT: The delinquent, as well as his mom and dad, was in the detention hall.

4. When two nouns are connected by some form of the verb **to be**, the first noun is the grammatical subject, and the verb agrees with it.

WRONG: The first [thing] we noticed were the [shoes].

CORRECT: The first [thing] we noticed was the [shoes].

CORRECT: The shoes were the first thing we noticed.

5. If the verb precedes the subject, determine the subject and make the verb agree with it.

WRONG: Above a cluster of convents rise the Cathedral of St. John.

CORRECT: Above a cluster of convents rises the Cathedral of St. John.

6. In sentences beginning with **here is/are** or **there is/are**, look for the subject after the verb.

WRONG: There is a hundred jokes in this comedy.

CORRECT: There are a hundred jokes in this comedy.

7. Subjects connected by **and** are generally plural.

WRONG: San Marcos **and** San Antonio is in Texas.

CORRECT: San Marcos **and** San Antonio are in Texas.

8. A plural verb is used when a compound subject follows it.

WRONG: In the room, there is a boy, a girl, and a box.

CORRECT: In the room, there are a boy, a girl, and a box.

9. When two or more singular subjects are joined by **or** or **nor**, use a singular verb. If one subject is singular and one is plural, the verb agrees with the subject nearer to it.

WRONG: A gas station attendant or a map are a valuable source of information.

CORRECT: A gas station attendant or a map is a valuable source of information.

WRONG: John or the girls is bringing the volleyball and net.

CORRECT: John or the girls are bringing the volleyball and net.

10. The relative pronouns **who**, **which**, and **that** use a singular verb for a singular antecedent and a plural verb for a plural antecedent.

WRONG: John is one of those men <sup>↖</sup> who prefers Lone Star beer.

CORRECT: John is one of those men <sup>↖</sup> who prefer Lone Star beer. (The plural noun **men** is the antecedent of **who** and requires the plural verb form, **prefer**.)

11. Words (indefinite pronouns) such as **another**, **anyone**, **anybody**, **anything**, **each**, **either**, **everyone**, **everybody**, **everything**, **neither**, **no one**, **nobody**, **nothing**, **someone**, **somebody**, **something** are singular.

WRONG: Everybody on the team are expected to be there.

CORRECT: Everybody on the team is expected to be there.

WRONG: Neither of the flowers smell good.

CORRECT: Neither of the flowers smells good.

The indefinite pronouns **several**, **both**, and **many** are plural when used as subjects.

WRONG: Several of the team is ready.

CORRECT: Several of the team are ready.

Indefinite pronouns such as **none** and **some** can be either singular or plural, depending on meaning.

CORRECT: Some of the gold was pure. (**Some** is used in the singular to indicate one portion of the gold and takes the singular verb.)

CORRECT: Some of the students were exhausted after finals. (**Some** clearly means more than one of the students, so the plural verb is used.)

12. Nouns such as **family**, **jury**, **council**, **group**, **committee**, **board**, and **faculty** may be considered singular or plural, depending on meaning.

CORRECT: The jury [a collective unit, therefore singular] is returning to the courtroom.

CORRECT: The jury [refers to twelve people as individuals, therefore plural] are arguing among themselves.

13. Generally **the** number, **the** family [meaning one particular number or one particular family] is considered singular.

A number, a family [meaning some] is considered plural.

CORRECT: The number of chemistry students is small.

CORRECT: A number of chemistry students are in the lab.

**NOTE: Nouns that are regularly treated as singular include economics, electronics, measles, mumps, news, and physics.**

**Some nouns ending in -ics (politics, athletics, statistics) are considered singular when referring to an organized body of knowledge and plural when referring to activities, qualities, or individual facts.**

14. Gerund subjects (-ing verb form without an auxiliary verb) take singular verbs.

CORRECT: Seeing is believing.

CORRECT: Swimming helps build muscle tone.

### SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT EXERCISE

**DIRECTIONS. In the following sentences, underline the subject(s) once and the verb(s) twice. If an agreement error exists, correct the error. If there is no error(s), mark the sentence as correct.**

1. Phasing out the procedures used in the 1930's, many proponents of scientific data was included in the development of new and better methods of pasteurizing milk.
2. The process by which the majority diagnoses the problems of developing a corporate charter allow would-be executives to voice their opinions openly.
3. By taking emphasis off the play instincts of the human race, new vigor and effectiveness is lost because recreation for the body and for the mind is almost nonexistent.
4. Rhonda Holmes is one of the scientists' aides who have been so helpful to the committee staff.
5. The high standard of the judge, the jury, and four lawyers was effectively upheld.
6. Physics in my classes at Sul Ross University were very difficult for me to learn and understand.
7. Neither foreign language nor an advanced English literature course are required for business school graduates at the university.
8. The first movie my twin sisters remember was a take-off on The Brady Bunch.
9. The student who conducted the research for the last three months have determined that the amount of sales generated will decrease by five percent.
10. The gorilla, along with two monkeys, a kangaroo, and a white bird, were seen on the deck of an old, weathered boat yesterday during a cloud-break.
11. A box of cigarettes made from imported tobacco leaves were sitting on the desk near the gold-plated lighter.
12. The city and the state have adopted restrictions involving water consumption between the hours of 7 a.m. and 8 p.m.
13. Either the yellow bulletin board or the blue cork boards is suitable for your class project.
14. The academic committee were undivided in their decision to hire the new faculty member.
15. This class of students are more intelligent.

16. The principles of science is difficult to understand.
17. There is four thousand students in the university.
18. A poll that was conducted by Lou Harris almost three weeks ago indicate that voters are outraged by the decision.
19. Reactions to the annual play have been favorable.
20. Fearlessness in the face of overwhelming odds often results in an unexpected success.
21. We are hoping to attract the type of customer who have never thought of opening a layaway account.
22. Either of the alternatives seem to present major difficulties.
23. The biggest problem our department faces is keeping up with expenses.

**ANSWERS:**

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|---|--|
| 1. <u>proponents were included</u>                  | 14. <u>committee was undivided</u>                       |
| 2. <u>process allows</u>                            | 15. <u>class is</u>                                      |
| 3. <u>vigor and effectiveness are</u>               | 16. <u>principles are</u>                                |
| 4. Correct: <u>Rhonda Holmes is; who have been</u>  | 17. <u>students are</u>                                  |
| 5. Correct: <u>standard was</u>                     | 18. <u>poll indicates</u>                                |
| 6. <u>Physics was</u>                               | <u>that was conducted</u>                                |
| 7. <u>Neither is required</u>                       | <u>voters are outraged</u>                               |
| 8. Correct: <u>movie was; sisters remember</u>      | 19. Correct: <u>Reactions have been</u>                  |
| 9. <u>student has determined; amount generated</u>  | 20. Correct: <u>Fearlessness results</u>                 |
| 10. <u>gorilla was seen</u>                         | 21. <u>We are hoping, who has thought</u>                |
| 11. <u>box was sitting</u>                          | 22. <u>either seems</u>                                  |
| 12. Correct: <u>city and the state have adopted</u> | 23. Correct: <u>problem is keeping, department faces</u> |
| 13. <u>boards are</u>                               |  |

Revised: Spring 2005  
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