

MAKING SUBJECTS AND VERBS AGREE

Subjects and verbs should AGREE with one another in number (singular or plural). Thus, if a subject is singular, its verb must also be singular and if a subject is plural, its verb must also be plural. (Benner, 2000)

Guidelines to help your subjects and verbs agree.

1. When the subject of a sentence consists of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by and, use a plural verb.

She and her family are at the Windhoek Show.

2. When two or more singular nouns or pronouns are linked by or or nor, use a singular verb.

The dog or the cat was locked in the pantry.

3. When a compound subject contains both a singular and a plural noun or pronoun joined by or or nor, the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is nearer the verb.

Selma or her sisters clean the kitchen every day.

Her sisters or Selma cleans the kitchen every day

4. Doesn't is a contraction of does not and is used only with a singular subject. Don't is a contraction of do not and is used only with a plural subject. The exception to this rule appears in the case of the first person and second person pronouns I and you. With these pronouns, the contraction don't should be used.

He doesn't like it.

They don't like it.

5. Do not be deceived by a phrase that comes between the subject and the verb. The verb agrees with the subject, not with a noun or pronoun in the phrase.

One of the windows of the offices was left open.

The students who prefer that type of music are few.

The soccer team captain, as well as his players, is excited.

The prescribed book, especially the first, is extremely boring.

The old man with all his dogs walks down my street regularly.

6. The words each, each one, either, neither, everyone, everybody, anybody, anyone, nobody, somebody, someone, and no one are singular and require a singular verb.

Each of these peaches is juicy.

Everybody knows who committed the crime.

Either answer is acceptable.

7. Nouns such as civics, mathematics, dollars, measles, and news are uncountable and require singular verbs.

The news is on at six.

Note: The word dollars is a special case. When talking about an amount of money, it requires a singular verb, but when referring to the dollars themselves, a plural verb is required.

Five dollars is not a lot of money.
Euros are used in all European countries

8. Nouns such as scissors, tweezers, trousers, and shears require plural verbs. (They are made of paired items and generally treated as plural - they are often used with the word pair.)

These scissors are very sharp.
Those trousers are made of cotton.

9. In sentences beginning with "there is" or "there are," the subject follows the verb. Since "there" is not the subject, the verb agrees with what follows.

There are so many questions that need to be answered.
There is a question that I need to ask my lecturer.

10. Collective nouns are words that imply more than one, but that are considered singular and take a singular verb, such as group, team, committee, class, and family.

The netball team runs during practice.
The parents' committee decides on these procedures.
My family has never been able to see eye to eye.
The cabin crew is preparing to serve the passengers lunch.

11. Expressions such as with, together with, including, accompanied by, in addition to, or as well do not change the number of the subject. If the subject is singular, the verb is too.

The President, accompanied by his wife, is traveling to Britain.
All of the test papers, including yours, are in that file.

HOW WELL DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

If you want to test yourself, there are online exercises available at
<https://webapps.towson.edu/ows/moduleSVAGR.htm>

