

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

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In order for the subject and verb to agree in a sentence, you must first be able to pick out the two in a sentence:

-verb- words that show state of being (am, is, are, was, been, have, etc.) or action (run, jump, spoke)

-subject- the noun or pronoun that performs the verb (girl, dogs, men, frog)

When finding the subject and the verb, find the verb first. Then ask who or what did that action

-ex: The dog jumped over the fence.

-verb= jumped. What jumped over the fence? The dog.

The Major Rule: A singular verb is paired with a singular subject. A plural verb goes with a plural subject.

-ex: The package is in the mail.

The packages are in the mail.

Tip #1: Subjects and “of”

Many times, the subject will be modified by a phrase beginning with the word *of*.

Writers will sometimes make the mistake of having the verb agree with the noun in the phrase containing “of.”

-Incorrect: A group of kids run down the street.

-Correct: A group of kids runs down the street.

Tip #2: “Or,” “either/or,” “neither/nor”

The verb in a sentence containing *or*, *either/or*, *neither/nor* agrees with the noun or pronoun closest to it.

-ex: Neither the dog nor the cat wants to go outside.

Either steak or chicken fingers are being served for dinner.

Tip #3: Subjects connected by “and”

When two or more subjects are connected by *and*, use a plural verb. However, you must check to see if the subject is a compound noun (ex: housewife, office manager)!

-ex: Softball and tennis are my favorite sports.

Tip #4: “Along with,” “as well as,” “not, besides”

These phrases are sometimes found in between the subject and the verb; ignore them and use a singular verb if your subject is singular.

-ex: Rain, along with snow showers, is expected this afternoon.

Tip #5: Portions

Words such as *some*, *all*, *percent*, *fraction*, *majority*, etc. indicate portions and are usually followed by “of.” In this case, the noun following “of” determines the verb.

-ex: A percent of the winnings are donated to charity.

Tip #6: Distances, sums, periods of time

Singular verbs are used when these nouns are considered a unit (measurement, amount, etc.).

-ex: Twenty dollars is a good bargain for that shirt.

Tip #7: “Here” and “there”

When sentences begin with “there is/there are” or “here is/here are,” the grammatical subject comes after the verb.

-ex: Here are the directions to New York City.

Exercises:

Choose the sentences that have correct subject-verb agreement:

1. The dog and the cat is taking a nap.

The dog and the cat are taking a nap.

2. Neither the rain nor the snow are going to stop the parade.

Neither the rain nor the snow is going to stop the parade.

3. The pitcher, as well as the other players, is taking the field.

The pitcher, as well as the other players, are taking the field.

4. Here is the plan for the experiment.

Here are the plan for the experiment.

5. The bag of chips are going in the lunchbox.

The bag of chips is going in the lunchbox.

Adapted from The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation