

Grammar Practice: Verb Agreement

Subject-Verb Agreement

1. A verb must agree with its subject in number (singular or plural).
2. When the subject is a singular noun, the verb takes an s in the present tense.
 - i. The student studies.
3. When the subject is a plural noun, the verb does not take an s in the present tense.
 - i. The students study.

Pronouns can present a particular problem:

| | Singular | Plural |
|--------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Study | I study | We study |
| | You study | You study |
| | He, she, it studies | They study |
| Do | I do | We do |
| | You do | You do |
| | He, she, it does | They do |
| Be | I am | We are |
| | You are | You are |
| | He, she, it is | They are |

Hidden Subjects

Subjects do not always come in front of the verb. Remember these points:

1. Subjects are not found in prepositional phrases or appositive phrases.
2. Subjects can be found after the verb in sentences that are questions and in sentences that begin with here or there.

Group Nouns

1. A group noun takes a singular verb if the noun acts as a unit. To test this, substitute the pronoun *it* for the noun.
2. A group noun takes a plural verb if the members of the group act as individuals. To test this, substitute the pronoun *they* for the noun.

Indefinite Pronouns

- There are three kinds of indefinite pronouns: always singular, always plural, and sometimes singular/sometimes plural.
 - The singular ones are everyone, everybody, everything, each, someone, somebody, something, another, anyone, anybody, anything, either, no one, nobody, nothing, neither.
 - The plural ones are both, few, many, several.
 - The singular/plural ones are any, all, most, more, none, some.

Everyone is expecting a miracle.

Both were to blame.

The books are gone. All were very popular.

The sugar is gone. All of it was spilled.

Compound Subjects

- If the conjunction used to connect the compound subjects is *and*, the verb is usually plural.
 - Mary and Steve are my good friends.
 - The exception to this is if the subjects are considered one unit: Peanut butter and jelly is my favorite sandwich.
- If the conjunction used to connect the compound subjects is *or*, *nor*, *either*, *either/or*, *neither*, *neither/nor*, *not only/but also*, you need to be particularly careful. Use the subject closer to the verb to make agreement.
 - Mary or Steve is going to help me.
 - My friends or my two brothers are going to help me. My friends or my brother is going to help me.
 - My brother or my friends are going to help me.

Unusual Nouns

- Don't assume that every noun that ends in *s* is plural, or that all nouns that do not end in *s* are singular. There are some exceptions. Here are some of the most common.

Singular, but end in *s*:

mathematics
economics

diabetes
measles

United States
Kansas

Irregular plural form (not *s*):

people
children

feet
mice

men
women

data
alumni

Always plural nouns:

clothes
headquarters

scissors
tweezers

fireworks
pants

Practice

Correct the subject-verb agreement problem in these sentences. Some may be correct.

1. One of the students look bored.
2. Her shoes was so filthy that they tracked mud through the house.
3. In this neighborhood, there has been a few break-ins.
4. Neither the boys or the girl are going to be ready for the ballet.
5. Either the library or the lab classes are open for students on the weekend.
6. Out on the plains run a wild horse.
7. No one studies as hard as Janet do.
8. Either of the dancers is perfect to dance the ballet.
9. The keys or the thermos is always left behind.
10. All of the potato chip crumbs needs to be cleaned up from the floor.

Answers:

1. One of the students **looks** bored.
2. Her shoes **were** so filthy that they tracked mud through the house.
3. In this neighborhood, there **have** been a few break-ins.
4. Neither the boys or the girl **is** going to be ready for the ballet.
5. Correct
6. Out on the plains **runs** a wild horse.
7. No one studies as hard as Janet **does**.
8. Correct
9. Correct
10. All of the potato chip crumbs **need** to be cleaned up from the floor.