



Subject-Verb Agreement

Verbs must agree with their subjects in number (singular or plural) and in person (first, second, or third). Usually, subject-verb agreement is fairly simple; only a few subject-verb constructions cause confusion.

Verbs with third-person singular subjects

- A vegetarian diet *lowers* the risk of heart disease.

To make a verb in the present tense agree with any other subject, use the base form of the verb.

- I *miss* my family.
- They *live* in another state.

Have and *be* do not follow the *-s* or *-es* pattern with third-person singular subjects. *Have* changes to *has*; *be* has irregular forms in both present and past tenses and in the first person as well as the third person.

- War *is* hell.
- The soldier *was* brave beyond the call of duty.

Subjects and verbs separated by other words

Make sure the verb agrees with the subject and not with another noun that falls in between.

- A vase of flowers *makes* a room more attractive.
- Many books on the best-seller list *has* little literary value. (*have*)
(The simple subject is 'books', not 'list')
- The instructor, along with many students, *opposes* the idea.
- A passenger, as well as the driver, *were* injured in the accident. (*was*)

Verbs with compound subjects

Two or more subjects joined by *and* generally require the plural verb form.

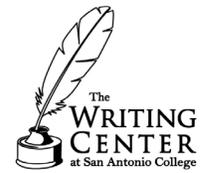
- Tony and his friend *commute* from Louisville.
- A dictionary, a coffee cup, and a bag *was* issued to each student. (*were*)
- George W. Bush's older brother and political ally *was* the governor of Florida.
- 'Drinking and driving' ~~*remain*~~ a major cause of highway deaths. (*remains*)
- Each boy and girl *chooses* one gift to take home.
- Neither my roommate nor my neighbors *like* my loud music.
- Either the witness or the defendant ~~*are*~~ lying. (*is*)

Verbs with collective nouns

Collective nouns – such as family, team, audience, group, jury, crowd, band, class, and committee – refer to a group. These can take either singular or plural verb forms, depending on whether they refer to the group as a single unit or to the multiple members of the group.

- After deliberating, the jury *reports* its verdict.
The jury acts as a single unit.
- The jury still *disagree* on a number of issues.
The members of the jury act as multiple individuals.

Verbs with fractions



Treat fractions that refer to singular nouns as singular, and those which refer to plural nouns as plural.

- Two-thirds of the park *has* burned.
- Two-thirds of the students *were* commuters.

Verbs with indefinite-pronoun subjects

Indefinite pronouns do not refer to specific persons or things. Most take singular forms. Common indefinite pronouns:

Another	Each	Much	One
Any	Either	Neither	Other
Anybody	Everybody	Nobody	Somebody
Anyone	Everyone	No one	Someone
Anything	Everything	Nothing	Something

- Of the two jobs, neither *holds* much appeal.
- Each of the plays *depicts* a hero undone by a tragic flaw.

Verbs with antecedents of *who*, *which* and *that*

When the relative pronouns *who*, *which*, and *that* are used as a subject, the verb agrees with the antecedent of the pronoun.

- Fear is an ingredient that *goes* into creating stereotypes.
- Guilt and fear are ingredients that *go* into creating stereotypes.
- Carla is one of the employees who always *work* overtime.
- Ming is the only one of the employees who always *works* overtime.

Linking verbs and their subjects

A linking verb should agree with its subject, which usually precedes the verb, not with the subject complement, which follows it.

- Three key treaties *are* the topic of my talk.
- Nero Wolfe's passion *was* orchids.

Verbs with singular subjects ending in -s

Some words that end in *-s* appear plural but are singular and thus take singular verb forms.

- Measles still *strikes* many Americans.

Verbs that appear before subjects

Verbs usually follow subjects. When this order is reversed, make the verb agree with the subject, not with a noun that happens to precede it.

Beside the barn stand silos filled with grain.