Subject-Verb Agreement

Subject-Verb agreement refers to the fact that the subject and verb in a sentence must agree in number. In other words, they both must be singular or they both must be plural. You can’t have a singular subject with a plural verb or vice versa.

Sentence:

A sentence is made up of three parts:

- **Subject** - What or whom the sentence is about.
- **Verb** - What the subject did or is.
- **The rest** - Everything else in the sentence.

Examples:

1. Rachel talks on the phone during the break.
2. Iris types on her computer every day.
3. The private investigator is below average.

Subjects and verbs must agree in the following ways:

- SINGULAR subjects require SINGULAR verbs.
- PLURAL subjects require PLURAL verbs.

### Rule 1:

(510) 885-3674  
www.csueastbay.edu/sca  
sca@csueastbay.edu
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In the present tense, verbs agree with their subjects in NUMBER (singular/plural) and in PERSON (first, second, or third). The present tense ending –s is used on a verb if the subject is THIRD PERSON SINGULAR. Otherwise, the verb takes NO ENDING.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Person</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>We</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love</td>
<td>love</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Person</td>
<td>You</td>
<td>You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love</td>
<td>love</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Person</td>
<td>He/She/It</td>
<td>They</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loves</td>
<td>love</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples:

- I require attention. (1st person, singular, no –s is needed.)
- A dog requires attention. (3rd person singular, an –s is needed.)
- Dogs require attention. (–s indicates a plural subject, but the verb does not need an –s.)

**Rule 2:**

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

Examples:

- 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.
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Rule 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!

Examples:
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.

Rule 4:

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

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

Rule 5

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

Examples:
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.

Rule 6

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.

Examples:
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.
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Rule 7:
The relative pronouns who, which, and that use a singular verb for a singular antecedent and a plural verb for a plural antecedent.

Examples:
WRONG: John is one of those men who prefers Lone Star beer.
CORRECT: John is one of those men who prefer Lone Star beer. (The plural noun men is the antecedent of who and requires the plural verb form, prefer.)

The relative pronoun is SINGULAR or PLURAL depending upon the word it modifies.

Rule 8:
Words (indefinite pronouns) such as another, anyone, anybody, anything, each, either, everyone, everybody, everything, neither, no one, nobody, nothing, someone, somebody, something are singular.

Examples:
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 few, other, several, both, and many are plural when used as subjects.

WRONG: Several of the team is ready.
CORRECT: Several of the team are ready.
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- Indefinite pronouns such as none, all, most 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 student, so the plural verb is used.)

Rule 9:
Gerund subjects (-ing verb form without an auxiliary verb) take singular verbs.

Examples
CORRECT: Seeing is believing.
CORRECT: Swimming helps build muscle tone.

Question of the Day:
Can you figure out the error in Timbaland’s 2007 hit song, “The Way I are?”

References: The following works were referred during the creation of this handout:
1. http://www.cgu.edu/PDFFiles/Writing%20Center/Writing%20Center%20Resources/Subject-Verb%20Agreement.pdf

(510) 385-3674
www.csueastbay.edu/scaasca@csueastbay.edu
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY EAST BAY