

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

RULES FOR SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

RULE 1 – A verb agrees with its subject in number.

Singular subjects take singular verbs:

The car stays in the garage.

The flower smells good.

There is an old saying: “Opposites attract.” The rule for singular and plural verbs is just the opposite of the rule for singular and plural nouns. Remember this when you match subjects and verbs. You might guess that stays and smells are plural verbs because they end in s. They aren’t. Both stays and smells are singular verbs.

RULE 2 – The number of the subject (singular or plural) is not changed by words that come between the subject and the verb.

One of the eggs is broken. Of the eggs is a prepositional phrase. The subject one and the verb is are both singular. Mentally omit the prepositional phrase to make the subject verb-agreement easier to make.

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT EXERCISE 1

Direction: Circle the correct verb in each of the sentences below. Check your answers on the following page.

1. Your friend (talk-talks) too much.
2. The man with the roses (look-looks) like your brother.
3. The women in the pool (swim-swims) well.
4. Bill (drive-drives) a cab.
5. The football players (run-runs) five miles every day.
6. That red-haired lady in the fur hat (live-lives) across the street.
7. He (cook-cooks) dinner for his family.
8. The boys (walk-walks) to school every day.
9. The weather on the coast (appear-appears) to be good this weekend.
10. The center on the basketball team (bounce-bounces) the ball too high.

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RULE 3 – Some subjects always take a singular verb even though the meaning may seem plural.

These subjects always take singular verbs:

each	someone
either	anyone
neither	nobody
one	somebody
no one	anybody
everyone	everybody

Someone in the game was (not were) hurt.
Neither of the men is (not are) working.

RULE 4 – The following words may be singular or plural, depending upon their use in a sentence, some, any, all, most.

Most of the news is good. (singular)
Most of the flowers were yellow. (plural)
All of the pizza was gone. (singular)
All of the children were late. (plural)

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT EXERCISE II

Directions: Circle the correct verb in the sentences below. Check your answers on the bottom of this page.

1. Each of the girls (look-looks) good on skis.
2. Everybody (was-were) asked to remain quiet.
3. Neither of the men (is-are) here yet.
4. (Is-Are) each of the girls ready to leave?
5. Several of the sheep (is-are) sick.
6. Some members of the faculty (is-are) present.
7. Nobody in the class (has-have) the answer.
8. Each of the girls (observe-observes) all the regulations.
9. All of the milk (is-are) gone.
10. Most of the seats (was-were) taken.

RULE 5 – Subjects joined by and are plural. Subjects joined by or or Nor take a verb that agrees with the last subject.

Bob and George are leaving.

Neither Bob nor George is leaving.

Neither Bob nor his friends are leaving.

RULE 6 – There and here are never subjects. In sentences that begin with these words, the subject is usually found later on in the sentence.

There were five books on the shelf. (were, agrees with the subject book)

Here is the report you wanted. (Is agrees with subject report)

RULE 7 – Collective nouns may be singular or plural, depending on their use in the sentence.

A collective noun is a noun used to name a whole group. Following are some common examples:

army	crowd	orchestra
audience	flock	public
class	group	swarm
club	herd	team
committee	jury	troop
		United States

The orchestra is playing a hit song. (Orchestra is considered as one unit—singular.)

The orchestra were asked to give their musical backgrounds. (Orchestra is considered as separate individuals—plural)

1. Margo and her parents (visit-visits) each other often.
2. Either the cups or the glasses (are-is) in the dishwasher.
3. Vern and Fred (need-needs) a ride to work.
4. There (is-are) a dog, a cat, and a bird in the garage.
5. Neither Matt nor his brothers (was-were) at the party.
6. Here into the main ring of the circus (come-comes) the trained elephants.
7. Either the workers or the boss (deliver-delivers) the merchandise.
8. The committee (work-works) hard for better schools.
9. There (is-are) many things to do before the holidays.
10. The jury (was-were) polled for their verdicts.
11. Here (is-are) the nails you need for the projects.
12. Either Joyce or Ellen (was-were) here.

RULE 8 – Expressions of time, money, measurement, and weight are usually singular when the amount is considered one unit.

Five dollars is (not are) too much to ask.

Ten days is (not are) not nearly enough time.

On occasion, however these terms are used in the plural sense:

There were thirty minutes to countdown.

RULE 9 – Some nouns, while plural in form, are actually singular in meaning.

Mathematics is (not are) an easy subject for some people.

SUBJECT-VERB EXERCISE IV

Directions: Circle the correct verb in each of the sentences below.

1. Mumps (is-are) one of the most uncomfortable diseases.
2. One hundred dollars (is-are) not a lot of money to some people.
3. She (doesn't-don't) look very well today.
4. Twenty minutes (is-are) the amount of time it takes me to get home from work.
5. It (doesn't-don't) seem so cold today.
6. Gymnastics (is-are) easy for Angela.
7. Interesting news (is-are) what sells our paper.
8. A pound of cookies (cost-costs) about a dollar.
9. They (doesn't-don't) think they'll win the game tonight.
10. He (don't-doesn't) speak very well.