SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Subject-verb agreement refers to using forms of characters and actions that match each other grammatically. Once you understand *verb conjugation*, you can see how these two pieces need to fall into place with one another. In English, subject-verb agreement usually comes down to whether the nouns and verbs are *singular* or *plural*.

Check out the "To Be Verbs" resource for more information on verb conjugation, including a visual aid for the connection between tense, number, and person.

TYPES AND EXAMPLES

Basics: A singular subject must match a singular verb, just as a plural verb must match a plural subject. You may change either as long as the two correspond to one another; however, be sure that the meaning of the sentence remains accurate.

- ✖ Due to hard work, the <u>student</u> <u>write</u> a strong paper.
- ✔ Due to hard work, the <u>student</u> <u>writes</u> a strong paper.
- ✔ Due to hard work, <u>students</u> <u>write</u> strong paper<u>s</u>.

- ✖ This particular <u>tutor</u> <u>develop</u> the resource.
- ✖ These <u>tutors</u> <u>develop</u> the resource.
  While the sentence above becomes *grammatically* correct, now it is *factually* incorrect.

And/Or: Any two subjects combined with *and* serve as a joint, plural subject because multiple subjects act together. Any two *singular* subjects combined with *or* remain singular, since only one truly performs the action. Two *plural* subjects combined with *or* remain plural.

- ✖ The <u>supervisor and her assistant</u> <u>works</u> hard.
- ✔ The <u>supervisor and her assistant</u> <u>work</u> hard.

- ✖ <u>Nikki</u> or her <u>boss</u> <u>review</u> the paperwork.
- ✔ <u>Nikki</u> or her <u>boss</u> <u>reviews</u> the paperwork.

- ✖ The <u>tutors</u> or the <u>coaches</u> <u>holds</u> a meeting.
- ✔ The <u>tutors</u> or the <u>coaches</u> <u>hold</u> a meeting.

Singular and Plural Together: When a sentence using 'or' (or 'nor') contains both a plural subject and a singular subject, match the verb to the subject closest to it.

- ✖ The professor or the <u>tutors</u> <u>gives</u> the student feedback.
- ✔ The professor or the <u>tutors</u> <u>give</u> the student feedback.
- ✖ The tutors or the <u>professor</u> <u>give</u> the student feedback.
- ✔ The tutors or the <u>professor</u> <u>gives</u> the student feedback.

Collective Nouns: Some subjects refer to multiple people, which sounds plural, but remain as singular nouns themselves. These are nouns describing groups, such as 'class,' 'family,' 'crowd,' and 'flock.'

- ✖ The <u>swarm</u> of bees <u>pollinate</u> the flowers.
- ✓ The <u>swarm</u> of bees <u>pollinates</u> the flowers.

Notice that even though the word 'bees' is plural, the actual subject of the verb is the singular, collective subject 'swarm.'

Words that Imply Number: Some subjects, such as those that end in 'one' or 'body' (nobody, everyone, etc.) imply singular. Other words, such as 'all,' and 'many,' imply plural.

- ✖ <u>Everybody</u> <u>want</u> good grades.
- ✓ <u>Everybody</u> <u>wants</u> good grades.
- ✖ <u>Is</u> <u>both</u> of them going to the party?
- ✓ <u>Are</u> <u>both</u> of them going to the party?

Note that the same rules apply even if the verb comes before the subject, such as in a question.

Special Cases: Every so often, you will encounter a subject that appears plural in structure but really refers to a singular idea. A good example of this is 'the news.' It is somewhat similar to collective nouns.

- ✖ The <u>measles</u> <u>are</u> a dangerous disease.
- ✓ The <u>measles</u> <u>is</u> a dangerous disease.

THE SUBJECT-VERB CONNECTION

The previous sentences were simpler fixes because the verb immediately followed the subject. **However, writers often make agreement errors when they place the subject and verb far apart**.

- ✖ Our <u>tutors</u> at the Writing Lab <u>is</u> interested in students' concerns about their writing.
- ✓ Our <u>tutors</u> at the Writing Lab <u>are</u> interested in students' concerns about their writing.
- ✖ The <u>students</u> of the university that worship God, after each completing his or her degree program, whether Law, Government, or Divinity, <u>receives</u> their diplomas.
- ✓ The <u>students</u> of the university that worship God, after each completing his or her degree program, whether Law, Government, or Divinity, <u>receive</u> their diplomas.

While it is correct to simply fix the error, consider revising for clarity and concision as well. The same confusion that caused the error may also confuse the reader. You have many options for revising, such as breaking the sentence into multiple sentences, moving phrases that interrupt the subject-verb connection to the beginning or end of the sentence, or changing the wording itself.

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